

INTRODUCTION

Twentieth-Century Germany: Rethinking a Shattered Past

The electoral defeat of Communist rule in Poland (1989), the unification of the two Germanys (1990), the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991), and the civil war in Yugoslavia (1992/95) have pushed Europe into a new age. These events had their origins in the particular circumstances of eastern Europe, but they affected the entire continent and reflected a general European condition.¹ They may not have been quite the revolutions that they were meant to be, but they were moments of transition—rites of passage with all the carnivals and risks that accompany them.² As far as Europe is concerned, the twentieth century has thereby become history.

In the most immediate sense, these four events have brought to an end a long postwar truce that had provided a semblance of order after a devastating period of war—stability by default, put into place in the wake of the unconditional surrender of a twice-defeated Germany.

¹ Charles S. Maier, "The Collapse of Communism: Approaches for a Future History," *History Workshop* 31 (Spring, 1991): 34–59. Cf. Konrad H. Jarausch and Martin Sabrow, eds., *Weg in den Untergang. Der innere Zerfall der DDR* (Göttingen, 1999).

² Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague* (New York, 1990).

This provisional armistice incrementally grew amidst recriminations and an arms race that pitted two hostile intercontinental blocks against each other and cut the continent in half. The Cold War could hardly be called “peace,” but it was a kind of stability that had eluded Europe since the turn of the last century. Also, this period of uneasy deterrence shared with both the early years of the century and the restoration of order in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, an unequal, but altogether dizzying spread of industry and prosperity and an efflorescence of civil life. The postwar history was both expression and consequence of Europe’s tumultuous modernity.

Thus, the turn of 1989/92 may well be said to have completed a long cycle of one hundred or even two hundred years. But Europe is no longer what it once was, since the notion of a “catch-up revolution” for Eastern Europe is as deceptive as it is deficient.³ The nineteenth century is long gone, notwithstanding its bourgeois attractions, which historians in Europe and the United States had come to portray ever more lovingly.⁴ No amount of enlightening ardor can skip a century or even half a century as if it were an interregnum, a fact to which eastern Europeans will attest after initial hopes to the contrary. Although imagining the revolutions of 1989/90 as a “springtime of people” made sense, it was but a metaphor, perhaps even hyperbole.⁵ This was neither 1848 nor 1918. It was 1990.

More importantly, the *res gestae* of the twentieth century have left their indelible traces. As the twentieth century recedes, it cannot be repeated, not even with the intent of getting it right a second time. To be sure, the artifacts and ideas of this century can be reproduced, lived in, and put on display, but they are ornaments of a different age—bitter-sweet memories, perhaps, of how good the twentieth century was or could have been. Yet the continent and its people have been transformed, not only by the revolutions at the end of the century, but also by the very regimes against which these upheavals were directed. National Socialism and Fascism have been defeated. Bolshevism has collapsed. While the consequences of their deeds and of the utopias that have informed them remain deeply imbricated in what Europe has become, Europe is moving on. The past, we rediscover, as did the histori-

³ Jürgen Habermas, *Die nachholende Revolution. Kleine politische Schriften VII* (Frankfurt/Main, 1990).

⁴ Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1860–1866. Bürgerwelt und starker Staat* (Munich, 1987), and *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918. Arbeitswelt und Bürgergeist* (Munich, 1990); and Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud*, vol. 2: *The Tender Passion* (New York, 1986).

⁵ Timothy Garton Ash, “Eastern Europe: Apres le deluge, nous,” *New York Review of Books* 37, no. 13 (1990).

ans in the aftermath of the French Revolution, cannot be recaptured, let alone be reenacted.⁶ It can only be written down as history. That is, it can be rethought and retold in a critical assessment of where Europe has come from in order to ascertain where it might go.

Such a stock-taking is all the more important since the pieces are not falling neatly into place. Instead of establishing a “new world order,” the 1990s have exhibited, if anything, a distressing kind of chaos, for instance, in the ethnic cleansing of the Balkans. Saddled with a highly ambivalent legacy, Europe is once again confronted with the task that it had failed to accomplish the first time: to constitute from within and on its own an order that provides security and a modicum of well being for all; to establish relations with the rest of the world based on tolerance and exchange rather than a presumption of superiority. The events of 1989/92 have left Europe in an awkward position because they have undone the postwar order without replacing it with a discernable design. The challenge is immense in view of the past. Under changed and changing circumstances Europe is reconstituting itself from the effects of a shattered past that outlasted the removal of physical ruins by several decades. For better or worse, Europeans are poised to give themselves a new constitution—not necessarily as a single document, but as a set of arrangements that give shape and meaning to their manifold interactions.

Ironically, the very old and the very new meet in this condition. In 1795 Immanuel Kant had used the satirical inscription “To Eternal Peace” to wager that peace would come to Europe (and he thought of Europe as a universal condition) if constitutional government ruled supreme. He feared ridicule and, worse, persecution if this prediction were not taken as a “sweet dream,” or so he said.⁷ Two hundred years later Europe must decide whether to follow his vision. The debates over the future of Europe, the disenchantment over technocratic integration (*Maastricht*), and the quandaries of including eastern Europe are indications of the obstacles that lie ahead. Kant was well aware of the difficulties of practical politics. He insisted that peace is not a natural state, a *status naturalis*, but rather is to be constituted; *stiften*, to build foundations, is the venerable German term he used. But he also maintained that “eternal peace” is not an “empty idea.” Even if always only approximated, a semblance of it might be made to work.⁸

⁶ Peter Fritzsche, “Chateaubriand’s Ruins: Loss and Memory after the French Revolution,” *History and Memory* 10 (1998): 102–17.

⁷ Immanuel Kant, “Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf [1795],” in *Werke in zehn Bänden*, vol. 9: *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Darmstadt, 1964), 191–251.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 203, 251.

The success of creating a peaceful order depends on the ability to “think” Europe, and, given the continent’s contentious development, this means to rethink and retell what it has become. This is what the phrase “the past is being constructed” as history means—not as a brazen act of invention, but as a deliberate venture to capture on the basis of the evidence what only a short while ago was an unselfconscious event and its effects in the flow of present time.⁹ In this wider reconsideration, German developments occupy a central place, not only because of their geographical location, but also because of their powerful effects on the entire continent.

The Shattering of the German Past

The caesura of 1989/92 reveals how profoundly academic history and popular memory have been shaped by the effects of two disastrous wars that many Germans so desperately tried to leave behind. This tug-of-war between the impulses to forget and to remember, the popular memoirs and the academic analyses of the past, continues into the present.¹⁰ Although a “western” liberalism and an “eastern” socialism put themselves forth as alternatives, much recollection remained centered on German traditions of thought that were not easily shaken off, even if they had evidently been tarnished by the Third Reich.¹¹ This past has now begun to recede, but the events of 1989/90 offer no escape, no guarantee that we do any better with history and memory. Rather it seems that unification might serve as an invitation to do worse—or nothing at all.¹² Proclamations of an “end of history” are not just premature, they are wrong-headed. Germany may be a “normal” country again, as the political mantra goes, but its twentieth-century history is not. The twentieth-century German past can be transformed into history, but it cannot be “normalized.”

A judicious approach to the vicissitudes of the twentieth century entails, as a first step, an inquiry into the message of those overarching narratives of the past that suggest a pattern of historical development for the public as well as the scholar. This is not exactly what French

⁹ Joan Scott, “Nach der Geschichte?” *GeschichtsWerkstatt* 17 (1997): 5–23.

¹⁰ Dan Diner, *Kreislaufe: Nationalsozialismus und Gedächtnis* (Berlin, 1995).

¹¹ Gotz Aly, *Macht, Geist, Wahn. Kontinuitäten deutschen Denkens* (Berlin, 1997); and Aleida Assmann and Ute Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit, Geschichtsversessenheit. Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart, 1999).

¹² Konrad H. Jarausch, “Normalisierung oder Re-Nationalisierung: Zur Umdeutung der deutschen Vergangenheit,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 21 (1995): 571–84.

intellectuals had in mind when they coined the notion of “master narratives;” they thought quite literally of the tales of colonial masters that silenced the stories of their slaves. But as the concept has assumed a metaphorical meaning, referring to any large-scale interpretative account, it might be useful in the German context to think of them in this way.¹³ Historiographic self-questioning is inevitable because the various German masters of the twentieth century—such as nationalists, Marxists, and liberals—have developed profoundly different ways of telling the story of German past, selecting alternative incidents, emphasizing distinctive patterns of development, and drawing contrasting conclusions from them. Moreover, popular memory, or, in fact, memories, had their own dictates and did not necessarily follow those of their masters, as the East German case shows quite clearly.¹⁴ Much like the German past itself, the representation of this past in historiography and memory is fractured.

Until 1945 the dominant version of presenting German development was the national master narrative, which sought to legitimize the existence of the nation state. Created by liberal leaders of the drive to unification, such as Heinrich von Treitschke, it was appropriated by advocates of imperialism during the Wilhelminian era, modified by defenders of a defeated nationality after Versailles, and pushed beyond recognition by Nazi zealots of racial hegemony over Europe.¹⁵ Because of its undeniable complicity in the genocidal war and Holocaust, this nationalist story-line lost much of its intellectual credibility as well as its moral authority with the second defeat.¹⁶ In the West, such neo-conservative scholars as Gerhard Ritter sought to rescue the chastened remnants of this legacy by purging it of its militarist and authoritarian excesses.¹⁷ They argued that Prussian and national traditions had been debased by a populist nationalism and a plebiscitary politics unknown to conservatism and bourgeois patriotism alike—a claim theoretically

¹³ Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, 1984). See also Konrad H. Jarausch and Martin Sabrow, eds., *Die historische Meistererzählung. Deutungslinien deutscher Nationalgeschichte nach 1945* (Göttingen, 2002).

¹⁴ Lutz Niethammer, Alexander von Plato, and Dorothee Wierling, *Die volkseigene Erfahrung. Eine Archäologie des Lebens in der Industrieprovinz der DDR: 30 biografische Eröffnungen* (Berlin, 1991).

¹⁵ For a critical synopsis, see Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present*, rev. ed. (Middletown, 1983).

¹⁶ Peter Schottler, ed., *Geschichtsschreibung als Legitimationswissenschaft 1918–1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 1997). Winfried Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945* (Munich, 1993). Rudiger Hohls and Konrad Jarausch, eds. *Versaumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart, 2000).

¹⁷ Winfried Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945* (Munich, 1993).

amplified in the notion of a “totalitarian democracy.”¹⁸ Some echoes of this kind of thinking can be found in the apologetic writings of an Ernst Nolte¹⁹ or in the neo-liberal work of Francois Furet.²⁰ What unites the range of these conservative perspectives is their deep suspicion of a mass-democratic age, which they associate with tyranny and violence—and the end of German and, for that matter, European ascendancy.

In the East, humanist antifascist scholars, as well as Communist historians, tried to substitute a Marxist counter-narrative focused not on the state but on the working class. This critique attacked nationalist rationalizations and pointed to the material bases of historical development to justify the building of a better Germany. Yet after an impressive intermezzo of discordant voices that reflected older left-liberal and Marxist traditions, a heavy-handed Stalinism put down these promising departures and, despite various thaws, never released East German historians from its grip. In its denunciation of pluralism, this official Marxism appeared authoritarian and anti-Western, paradoxically even resurrecting the anti-Socialist Bismarck as a Prussian culture-hero.²¹ Even if younger GDR scholars broke the Stalinist mold, their writings remained part of an authoritarian “ruling discourse” that propped up the SED-dictatorship and thereby largely squandered the emancipatory and radical-democratic potential inherent in the Marxist tradition. In spite of some attention by intellectuals abroad, the Marxist counter-narrative had only a limited impact beyond East Germany.²²

Beginning in the 1960s, a younger generation of West German historians revived the progressive-liberal tradition anchored in the Weimar Republic. They took up a liberal critique of nationalism and Marxism, preserved and passed on by German emigres, that set German authoritarianism and aggression against the promise of liberty and prosperity. This analysis suggested as the main cause for the descent into repression and murder the fierce opposition against the democratic project by an illiberal Prussian elite that fought hard to hang on to its pre-modern privileges and defended its antidemocratic, authoritarian hab-

¹⁸ Jacob L. Talmon, *The History of Totalitarian Democracy* (London, 1952).

¹⁹ Ernst Nolte, *Das Vergehen der Vergangenheit: Antwort an meine Kritiker im sogenannten Historikerstreit* (Berlin, 1989).

²⁰ Francois Furet, *Le passe d'une illusion: essai sur l'idee communiste au XXe siecle* (Paris, 1995).

²¹ Ernst Engelberg, *Bismarck: Urpreusse und Reichsgrunder* (Berlin, 1985).

²² Georg G. Iggers, Konrad H. Jarausch, Matthias Middell, and Martin Sabrow, eds., *Die DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft als Forschungsproblem*, *Historische Zeitschrift* special issue 27 (1998). Cf. Alf Ludtke, ed., *Was bleibt von marxistischen Perspektiven in der Geschichtsforschung?* (Göttingen, 1997).

its and mentalities at all costs. In particular, Fritz Fischer's taboo-breaking study of the war aims movement, which asserted German responsibility for the outbreak of World War I, prompted a wholesale reassessment of the course of German history.²³ Partisans of a new and more social-scientific approach to history, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, argued that the inadvertent rise of democratic forces, a reflection of the ascent of society over the state, was blocked by the authoritarian structures of the state and conservative forces, producing "structural" tensions that led from smaller catastrophes to bigger ones—from the threat of civil war to world war and on to genocide.²⁴ Politically, this approach promoted the westernization of Germany, the cause of social reform, and eventually an *Ostpolitik* of detente toward the eastern bloc.²⁵ Intellectually, it amounted to a vindication of a functional and rational technocratic modernity.

The communist and progressive strands of German historiography were anchored in competing Marxist or Weberian modernization narratives, respectively. By focusing on the formation of the working class or the emergence of the *Burgertum*, twentieth-century Germany became the site for the battles and unfulfilled promises of the preceding centuries.²⁶ They disagreed on the nature of the Third Reich, portraying it either as hypertrophy of corporate capitalism or as departure from western paths toward democracy, but otherwise left the study of a deviant, contemporary history to specialists whose main charge was to discover exactly what happened. Only when a then-youngish group of British historians challenged the entire notion of a German *Sonderweg*—they found nothing peculiarly German about the defense of class privilege and disliked the normative limitations of using Anglo-American benchmarks of modernity—this began to change.²⁷ Committed to a democratic history from below, their challenge triggered an avalanche of studies on such previously marginal subjects as women and minorities. But their critique solved none of the problems of catastrophe and recovery, thereby extending the scope of, but not really replacing the framing of earlier master narratives.

²³ Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht. Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/18* (Dusseldorf, 1961); and Gerhard A. Ritter, *The New Social History in the Federal Republic of Germany* (London, 1991).

²⁴ Jürgen Kocka, "Ursachen des Nationalsozialismus," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (1980), Nr. 25: 3–15.

²⁵ Georg Iggers, *The Social History of Politics: Critical Perspectives in West German Historical Writing since 1945* (Leamington Spa, 1985).

²⁶ Jürgen Kocka, ed., *Burgertum im 19. Jahrhundert. Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich* (Munich, 1988).

²⁷ David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York, 1984).

Largely irrespective of academic debates, the historical consciousness of the population followed a different trajectory that revolved around an embattled politics of memory. Initially, the public harbored rather positive images of the Third Reich as a time of order and prosperity, superior to the turn of the century because of the modern and popular nature of the regime. The war, particularly the attack against the Soviet Union, and the persecution of the Jews were considered a “mistake,” an unfortunate and disastrous flaw of the regime. Instead of speaking of Nazi crimes, Germans preferred to dwell on their own suffering at the front and during bombardment at home, and on their expulsion from the eastern parts of the Reich.²⁸ These experiences fed a widespread sentiment that saw ordinary people as a victim of politics, betrayed by outside forces beyond their control. Many people blamed Hitler and the Nazis for leading the nation into a war that they could not possibly win, or the Allied decision to fight to unconditional surrender, rendering pointless the heroism of common men and women.²⁹ This appeal to overwhelming calamity initially proved to be impervious to any kind of consciousness-raising, let alone scholarly argument.

It took until the 1960s for this numbness to give way to a searching encounter with the causes and consequences of the Nazi regime. The establishment of a central prosecutor’s office in Ludwigsburg, the media coverage of the Eichmann indictment in Jerusalem as well as the Auschwitz and other trials in Germany, and the debate about extending the deadline for persecutions in the Bundestag, insistently raised the question of legal responsibility. A group of exceptionally talented writers—Heinrich Boll, Gunter Grass, Rolf Hochhuth, and Peter Weiss, among them—not only portrayed the sufferings of the World War but also asked probing questions about the role of the ordinary Germans in supporting Hitler’s crimes. The East German government continued to release “brown books” with damning material on such leading West German politicians as Chancellor Kurt-Georg Kiesinger, and a restive younger generation was ready to accuse parental authority as fascist. Finally, a growing number of television documentaries and a series of impressive films dramatized complicity and made ordinary Germans visible as both perpetrators and victims reminding Ger-

²⁸ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, 2001).

²⁹ Robert Moeller, “War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany,” *American Historical Review* 101 (1996): 1008–48; and Mary Fullbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge, UK, 1999).

mans of their own presence in what was universally called “the past,” thereby initiating a more critical turn in memory culture.³⁰

By the 1970s, this growing historical self-awareness began to cross the boundaries of stereotypes about Jews, Poles, or Russians that lingered long after the romance of the Third Reich. The shift from self-victimization to empathy with Nazi victims entailed a difficult leap of imagination since it breached a cultural barrier of a deep-seated anti-Semitism and of a racial, anti-Slavic prejudice. For the older generation, it proved immensely difficult to re-encounter former Jewish neighbors and Polish and Russian coworkers, or to acknowledge their absence, while the younger generation rather awkwardly suffused past distress into their own adolescent angst. Still, by agonizing over the pain inflicted not only on “victims” but also on actual people—by giving them a voice, even if not always their own, and investing them with symbolic presence—many Germans began to extricate themselves from the armor that had hardened them against the pain they had inflicted.³¹ The consequences were far reaching and always remained embattled.³² Effectively, many Germans were undergoing something akin to a conversion, a remaking of a sense of themselves, of body and soul. Germany was becoming a different country.

Popular reactions to evidence of complicity, however, reveal how difficult it remained for Germans to encounter themselves in the past, prompting new strategies of distancing. The difference between the favorable reception of Daniel Goldhagen’s indictment of Germans as “willing executioners”³³ and the concurrent outcry over an exhibition concerning the crimes of the Wehrmacht is a striking example.³⁴ Though Goldhagen boldly indicted all “ordinary Germans” for the crimes of the Third Reich, his figures were so stereotypically Nazi, so grimly determined to do their job, so solidly part of a by-gone age, that they might as well have lived on a different planet. In contrast, the Wehrmacht exhibition showed grandfathers, fathers, and brothers who

³⁰ Konrad H. Jarausch, “Critical Memory and Civil Society: The Impact of the Sixties on German Debates about the Past” (MS, Berlin, 2001). See also Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933–2000* (Cambridge, 2001).

³¹ Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich, 2001); and Y. Michal Bodemann, *Gedächtnis-theater. Die jüdische Gemeinschaft und ihre deutsche Erfindung* (Hamburg, 1996).

³² Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory: Looking for Germany in the New Germany* (New York, 1996).

³³ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, 1996).

³⁴ Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann, eds., *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944* (Hamburg, 1995).

resembled present-day family members laughing and clowning while presenting themselves in pictures of abominable crimes. These images were troubling precisely because they were so familiar, especially for an MTV generation just encountering the genocide in Bosnia. The message, in any case, was clear. In distancing themselves from earlier crimes with great emotional effort, the Germans wanted to make sure that their past remained past. They could deal with stereotypical Germans of an earlier age but not with people like themselves being implicated in a past that looked like the present.

The opposing postwar positions on the politics of memory had in common a highly emotional relationship to the past. Many people desperately attempted to rescue a piece of tradition and developed a “salvage approach” to prove the relative innocence of a particular social group, political idea, or interest vis-a-vis the Third Reich. Still attached to the nation, the churches or their own sense of integrity, ordinary people went to great lengths to extricate themselves through sometimes quite elaborate operations. Even antifascist historians sought to show that workers and peasants had heroically resisted and that the fault lay elsewhere. In contrast, far fewer commentators called for collective acts of contrition, portraying all Germans as implicated in war and genocide, thereby evoking obdurate resentment. This “contrition approach” viewed the entire past as deeply flawed, pointing inevitably to the Nazi seizure of power and the subsequent war as well as the Holocaust.³⁵ Such self-incrimination called for a radical break between past and present, a rupture of identity, and the reconstruction of a new collective self. As Gunter Grass came to suggest, the division of Germany was the just price for the crime of Auschwitz.³⁶ But Grass spoke for a minority.

The caesura of 1989 facilitated a different reconciliation with the past by reinforcing the growing temporal distance from the Third Reich. Much ridicule has been heaped on ex-Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s claim of “the benefit of late birth,” but his rhetoric of admitting the potential guilt of many Germans in earlier times and of highlighting the “temptation” of Nazi rule has been a resounding success.³⁷ Instead of either salvage attempts or protestations of contrition, the solution of the 1990s consisted of separating an evil past from a better present. Ironically, the argument ran thus: the more evil the past, the more clearly distinct

³⁵ Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997).

³⁶ Dagmar Barnouw, “Time, Memory and the Uses of Remembrance,” *Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung Magazin* 73 (1999): 3–10.

³⁷ The notion of “temptation” hails from Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions: The Drama of German History* (New York, 1987).

a humdrum present. By extension, the “two dictatorships” of the Third Reich and of the communist GDR are now quite routinely set apart as the abject history of Germany in contradistinction to the paradigmatic success of West Germany, regardless of whether the latter is interpreted as a national or post-national entity.³⁸ By the end of the 1990s, Germans had developed two twentieth-century histories, and public memory happily concurred in keeping them apart. Even some historians have started to step out of their postwar narratives’ degeneration into catastrophe, and to think of the past century as split.

Both history and memory reflect the fundamental shattering of a past, evident in the difficulty of reconciling in a single record the indelible stigma of earlier murder and genocide with later recovery and rehabilitation. As a result, there is a surfeit of memories as well as of histories but little sense of the shape and structure of the twentieth century.³⁹ Each in its own way, history and memory appear fractured along the seams of destruction on one hand and the good life on the other. An emerging consensus sets apart an earlier period of abjection from a later time of vindication at the risk of ignoring their vital interrelationship. Instead, a more convincing and altogether more compelling interpretation would acknowledge both the extent of these ruptures and the fracturing of the nation into incommensurate parts to then comprehend the frantic efforts to restore continuity and community—not as “before” (1945) and “after” (1945/89) snap-shots, but as simultaneous processes of the making and unmaking of the German nation.

Is this a sensible way to look at the course of twentieth-century German history? Surely many advances in science, technology, or consumption incrementally continued irrespective of all catastrophes. Social structures and milieus also changed piecemeal, and people lived on through the upheavals, whether scandalously hiding their past or picking up the pieces to start anew. If international peace, material prosperity, and western-style democracy prevailed in the long run, should one not stress the successful march of progress rather than its temporal interruptions and ugly failures? Nonetheless, there are good reasons not to proceed in this fashion. First, ignoring the ruptures and fracturing would write out of history the widespread absences that are not just an intrinsic but also an essential aspect of the twentieth-cen-

³⁸ Gunther Heydemann and Christopher Beckmann, “Zwei Diktaturen in Deutschland. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen des historischen Diktaturvergleichs,” *Deutschland Archiv* 30 (1997): 12–40; and Gunther Heydemann and Eckart Jesse, eds, *Diktaturvergleich als Herausforderung. Theorie und Praxis* (Berlin, 1998)

³⁹ Jürgen Habermas, “Learning By Disaster? A Diagnostic Look Back on the Short 20th Century,” *Constellations* 5 (1998): 307–320.

tury German past. Without accounting for the human and cultural loss, Germans and, for that matter, Europeans will never be able to reconcile with one another and their troubling memories. Second, focusing on the long run average does not account for the intense fluctuations that mattered at a given time—the extraordinary upheavals that ripped apart a nation, and all the exertions required to allow a people to pull itself back together. These immense labors of undoing and belonging disappear when leveling out the extremes. For good and bad, these labors made history.

The manifold contradictions between ruptures and continuities, fracturing and restoring community, are therefore a central feature of German history in the twentieth century. The frightening truth of the matter is that the extremes cannot be separated from the mainstream since innocence and complicity are intertwined.⁴⁰ Neither at large nor *en detail* can German history be salvaged as if a redeeming feature could be defended and then recovered after defeat in a miraculous process of self-cleansing. There is no self-evident site of redemption. But the entirety of the German past does not just point to Hitler and cannot be subsumed as a pre-history of the Nazis. It is not just that there are other important lines of continuity and that many Germans lived on beyond the end of the Third Reich. Rather, what matters is the contentious nature of the process that got German history into one place and then into another.

The prevarications of historiography reflect disorientation in the face of a century that will remain known for its catastrophic violence as much as for its unprecedented prosperity and creativity. German and European history encompass both excruciating violence and pain and exquisite wealth and happiness. The incommensurability of simultaneous man-made life-worlds of utter privilege, wealth, and consumption and death-worlds of utter degradation, starvation, and brutal annihilation is the sign of twentieth-century German history. To think and retell both—and to reflect one in the other—is the challenge for scholarship. How could one happen along with the other? How could one happen after the other? How could one happen and be related to the other? The simultaneity of incommensurate worlds, of bonds of belonging having turned into deadly bondage and being forged anew, will have to concern historians as they look back at the twentieth century and begin to convert its passing present into history.

Perhaps the British gadfly A.J.P. Taylor was right after all when he scathingly claimed that this history was marked by an excess of contra-

⁴⁰ Theodore S. Hamerow, *On the Road to the Wolf's Lair: German Resistance to Hitler* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997).

dictions—a surplus that more conventional accounts try to gloss over.⁴¹ But this larger-than-life quality is the main reason why German history will continue to be told. Inextricably linked to the world wars and the Holocaust, the German experience has come to function as a negative exemplar, as the ultimate warning against aggression, domination, and racial extermination. At the same time, the postwar development of the Federal Republic is an extraordinary success story, an unexpected collective recovery that can also serve as a model.⁴² Neither of these contradictory images alone makes up twentieth-century German history, which holds both trajectories in a single lifetime. This paradox raises high the political, emotional, and intellectual stakes of interpreting the German past—it is an excessive past that escapes history or, in any case, conventional ways of retelling.

Sober recognition of the fractured character of this past can serve as a starting point for a reconstruction that puts squarely at the center what is memorable about twentieth-century Germany. In plain speech, the Germans got themselves into a murderous past and they got themselves out of it, not all by their own doing, but surely also a result of their thought and action. It is the history of a disastrous and wanton miscarriage of civility, of unprecedented destruction of bonds of human solidarity, of unspeakable collective acts that were thought impossible in a modern age. At the same time, it is also a record of the desperate effort to learn from the self-inflicted disaster and reconstruct a better polity based on a more equitable social order and the pursuit of a more peaceful foreign policy. It finds people and institutions straddling this divide, succumbing to hatred and prejudice, haughtily denying that it ever existed, and yet picking up the pieces, reforming themselves, and casting about for a livable present. If this was a “German century,” it is not so because the Germans have “made good,” as a certain hagiography suggests, but rather because this life-and-death struggle over what constitutes a humane community testifies to the fallibility and frailty of modern society. Perhaps this is a lesson that might have a wider resonance.

This basic ambivalence suggests the usefulness of a cultural approach to German history. Such a perspective does not primarily mean the study of culture as a discrete sphere or subsystem, such as the high *Kultur* of philosophy, literature, art, or music, or, for that matter, the popular culture of film, television, travel, and other kinds of leisure

⁴¹ Alan John Percival Taylor, *The Course of German History: A Survey of the Development of Germany since 1815* (New York, 1962).

⁴² Anthony J. Nicholls, *The Bonn Republic: West German Democracy, 1945–1990* (London, 1997).

activities. Nor can it just be subsumed under an ethnographic look at the customs, symbols, and behaviors of continental natives, be they peasant lifestyles in danger of extinction, working-class subcultures threatened by commercialization, or patterns of consumption promoted by the media. Such a perspective must also grapple with the implications of the linguistic turn, which suggest that action does not translate into social effects without the intercession of language or thought, that “society” and the “state” are not mechanically existing structures to be plucked from the past by historians. It draws attention to public discourse, symbolic representation, and personal experience to recover dimensions of reflection and meaning, to become more sensitive to exclusions and silences in historical accounts, and to understand the dialogic nature of reconstructions of the past. Though some critics, such as Richard Evans, are still warning against a wholesale abandonment of “reality,” which they identify with “deconstruction,” this debate has largely run its course.⁴³ After the passing of postmodernism, the importance of the historicity of language and symbols as its mediating part has been recognized even by its detractors.

The particular challenge of a cultural approach to German history consists in the exploration of how a sense of self and bonds of belonging are formed, and when and why they are torn. According to the turn-of-the-century sociologist Georg Simmel, “culture” involves the many and contentious ways that social fabrics are put together.⁴⁴ He greatly emphasized the creative, or for that matter destructive, nature of making and unmaking societies, an activity called *Vergesellschaftung* in German. While the constant flux may seem unnerving, this perspective sees society not as a container that holds individuals or as a structure that can be coaxed into action, but rather as a process of becoming without resorting to organic metaphors.⁴⁵ Gender, class, and ethnicity are now commonly invoked as the test cases, but they only make historical sense as markings in networking or disintegrating communities. That this is a mediated and public process, in which the stage played as much of a role as the electronic media do today, and that it

⁴³ For echoes, see Wolfgang Hardtwig and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, eds., *Kulturgeschichte heute* (Gottingen, 1996), as well as Richard Evans, *In Defense of History* (London, 1997).

⁴⁴ Georg Simmel, *Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1992). Less conclusive is David Frisby and Mike Featherstone, eds., *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings* (London, 1997).

⁴⁵ In a different register, but with the same thrust, see William Sewall, “Three Temporalities: Toward an Eventful Sociology,” in Terence J. McDonald, ed., *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 245–80, and “The Concept of Culture(s),” in Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley, 1999), 35–60.

is a performative and enacted event, which has as much to do with body-cultures as with establishing moral authorities—all that may still need to be pointed out, but it should not distract from what matters. Cultural history explores the ways and means by which individual and social bodies constitute themselves, how they interact with each other, and how they rip themselves apart.⁴⁶

This approach appears so suitable for an exploration of the twentieth-century German past because this past involves a society that broke apart in producing war and genocide. The networks of German society were torn, to the very core of personal existence, by the violence that they generated and suffered. Hence, their history cannot be reassembled as if brutality and savagery had not left any traces or could be separated out from the main course of long-term developments. By the same token, the assertion of life after genocide, in processes of leave-taking as much as in reconstituting bonds of civility and community, makes telling this history possible after all. It also makes for a permanently fractured history. As a record of the living generations, it is a history that cannot but be acutely cognizant of violent death and its effects.⁴⁷

This kind of history is none the worse for being indebted to German traditions of enlightenment, for this is what a Lessing surmised to be the struggles of the modern age. It is such an emplotment of German history that Hannah Arendt suggested when she spoke lovingly about the unruly heritage of this enlightenment and its quintessential task to “construct” society after the rupture of traditions.⁴⁸ She set the chance and the challenge of a “new beginning” squarely against the “politics of antiquarian attachment,”⁴⁹ which try to salvage a mythical past (be it the Middle Ages, Prussian glory, or the Bismarckian Empire) to root an uncertain present. Her injunction also suggests that historical reconstruction must become aware of the temporality of memory regimes, such as Cold-War Liberalism, in which it is embedded. Instead of being driven by the sources or by current concerns alone, this history must attempt to fashion a conscious dialogue between the past and the present by a process of constant self-reflection.

⁴⁶ This is a conception of cultural history that goes beyond the recent collection by Thomas Mergel and Thomas Welskopp, eds., *Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft* (Munich, 1997).

⁴⁷ Michael Geyer, “Germany, or, The Twentieth Century as History,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 96 (1997): 663–702.

⁴⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Von der Menschlichkeit in finsternen Zeiten. Gedanken zu Lessing* (Munich, 1960).

⁴⁹ Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton, 1997), 124.

Reconstructing German Histories

How can a historical narrative be forged from such disparate parts? This question invites philosophical answers. So much is at stake; so daunting is the challenge; so intimidating is the stretch from the utter destruction of the *shoah* to the surplus of well-being of the *Wirtschaftswunder*. But even grand answers hinge on a deceptively simple concern: What happens to the narratives of German history if we bring into stereoscopic view the first half of the twentieth century with the second half—neither diminishing the crimes of the first nor denying the good life of the second? While the immediate postwar period can still be understood as a working-out of the consequences of the world wars, the decades of development thereafter produced a very different and more hopeful pattern that cannot be subsumed any longer under the framework of a catastrophic history. The processes of conversion that helped bring about this reversal need to be more fully incorporated and will have to be viewed against the background of the initial and disastrous entry into the twentieth century.

There is surprisingly little debate on this issue, although there is a great deal of jockeying for a new narrative of German modernity.⁵⁰ The straightforward procedure of adding fifty years of a divided history—disregarding Austria and, thus, sealing the division of 1866—means, in effect, making room for a vast amount of new development. The tidal wave of German postwar historiography that emphasizes the successful transformation of the country has barely reached the American shores but is bound to submerge much of the older history. Whichever way one turns, the subject and the subjects of German history are bound to change with what seem to be altogether pragmatic adjustments.

Just adding the second half to the first will be of little help, since the *res gestae* of twentieth-century German history do not yield very easily to a chronological approach. While American and, for that matter, British historians may get away with adding yet another episode or administration to their long histories, this procedure does not work for continental Europe. In the German case, it makes little sense to say or imply that Adenauer and Ulbricht “followed” Hitler after a brief interregnum of occupation, and that Helmut Kohl followed both. It

⁵⁰ Detlev Peukert *Die Weimarer Republik. Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne* (Frankfurt/Main, 1987).

takes a tremendous amount of explanation to get from one end of the century to the other. The kind of linear continuity, typical of other national histories, falters in the face of the ruptures of German twentieth-century experience. In stark contrast to the myth of national stability, nothing was more transient than territorial, governmental, and social arrangements in central Europe. Joining the second half of the century to the first therefore requires more fundamental deconstructions and reconstructions.

A conventional way of telling this transient history would be to emphasize the alternating instances of rupture and periods of stability. From the perspective of politics, at least four major regime changes during the twentieth century, in 1918, 1933, 1945, and 1989, changed not just governments but entire constitutions, elites, and ideologies.⁵¹ An economic vantage point would emphasize different ruptures, such as 1923, 1929, 1948, and 1990, highlighting inflations, depressions, and currency reforms instead of system transformations. Yet between such moments of crisis, periods of normalcy allowed people to get on with the business of living, marrying, having children, and dying, as if nothing ever could or would change. Much of the history that is written uses the ruptures as bookends, focusing instead on the functioning of the different systems, such as the Second Empire or the Third Reich, as if they were eternal fixtures, monads in the flux of time.⁵²

An alternative approach, better suited to the shattered nature of this past, would start with the recognition of the very instability of the German condition and make it the pivotal concern of historical reconstruction. To reflect this point in the form of its presentation, such an approach needs to break through the crust of a single narrative to recover the multiple subjects that make up a national history. Dissolving the single overarching story of the nation into multiple histories permits the recovery of a sense of the nation's fractures and of the labors in joining and orchestrating them. Such a perspective means asking where Germany was (for the territory shifts), who the Germans were (for the people change), and what these diverse German subjects did in putting society together and breaking it apart (for this is the difference entailed in war and murder). The question about how these many subjects fared puts the nation back into the center, not as a self-evident fact or normative given, but as an embattled construct of forces contending for its

⁵¹ Dietrich Papenfuß and Wolfgang Schieder, eds., *Deutsche Umbrüche im 20. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, 2000), 3–29.

⁵² The periodization of major survey series, like the Siedler Verlag's volumes on *Die Deutschen und Ihre Nation* (Berlin, 1989–2002), follows this pattern.

control. It requires a history transformed by telling of the labors of belonging and contemplating with sadness when and where they failed.

Seven major themes that cut across politics, economy, society, and culture may serve as guideposts in deciphering the shifting map of territories and people that make up the twentieth-century German past. The chapters on dictatorship and democracy as well as on Germany's changing place in Europe address traditional definitions of "the German problem" in a somewhat different way.⁵³ Other chapters on the Holocaust, identity, migration, gendering, or consumption pick up more recent themes of discussion that are missing from the older pictures. Our selections do not imply that other topics, such as the development of the economy or technological innovation, are unimportant. Instead, they are meant to provide examples of how one might go about reassembling the fragments of a central European past into new patterns and intended to stimulate discussion on which themes ought to be considered crucial for shifting the narrative frame from a history of Germany as a state to the histories of Germans as a people.

While beginning with war and genocide raises a basic conundrum of twentieth-century German history, there is some doubt whether this history is currently being written in an appropriate way. Clearly, the savagery of German war and genocide reverberates in memory and will incite the imagination of generations to come, since World War II and its combination of savagery and genocide may well be Germany's world historical moment. But pulp fiction and film pay far too much attention to the virtuosity of the German killing machine, which has entered Anglo-American consciousness and exerts a lurid fascination far beyond the right-radical scene. A more significant hesitation concerns the reduction of German history to war, killing, and dying as the end-all of the past—as if it were a history of the dead and defeated. There was life after catastrophe, and German history exists only because it is written by the living, suggesting a process of overcoming, a process necessary to any history of war and genocide worth its name.

Historicizing war and genocide means squarely facing the history of a disastrous miscarriage of civility as well as of the faltering and desperate defense of decency. It requires an exploration both of the destruction of bonds of human solidarity that hold societies together and of the good life in search of a public culture and constitution to sustain it. It finds people and institutions straddling the divide, succumbing to hatred and prejudice, haughtily denying that it ever existed, and

⁵³ David Calleo, *The German Problem Reconsidered: Germany and World Politics, 1870 to the Present* (Cambridge, UK, 1979). Cf. also Dirk Verheyen, *The German Question: A Cultural, Historical and Geopolitical Exploration*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, 1999).

yet picking up the pieces, transforming and reforming themselves and casting about for a livable present. Such a history of catastrophe starts from the recognition that war and violence do not arise accidentally and do not simply disappear. Military historians (but also historians of genocide and the Holocaust) tend to point out that “their” violence follows a distinct and unique logic. Yet the physical reality of violence builds on social and cultural conditions that generate it and which need to be understood.

Mass murder leaves marks on people and societies that are only slowly and hesitantly, if ever, overcome. Wounds and traumas may be healed, but the destruction of entire societies and cultures is not easily, if ever, undone. Still, bonds of belonging begin to rupture long before the killing sets in, and, if the tear of violence is ever mended, it happens long after the fact. These labors of civility, lost and destroyed at a crucial juncture in German history and tentatively and hesitantly recovered after catastrophe, are the subject of a German history that give catastrophe—war, genocide, and the Holocaust—its proper and, one might say, rightful place as one of the grand caesurae of modern history and one of the significant and, indeed, signifying events of the twentieth century. But it is also a history that makes evident that, even in the face of deliberate murder, history does not end.

A second major theme of twentieth-century history is the contested nature of German governance, that is, the permutability both of the state and its institutions. The cliché of German authoritarianism misses the protracted struggles over participation and citizenship rights within the boundaries of the state. Not only in central Europe did turning subjects into citizens prove to be an immensely challenging task. Mass democracy was a provocation for autocrats as much as for the notables of liberal constitutionalism who gave way only reluctantly. Battles over empowering excluded and marginalized groups, a majority of citizens, over when and where they could vote, mark this century. The lines of conflict were redrawn time and again. Should women have the vote? Should equal rights extend beyond ethnic, religious, social, and sexual boundaries? Should rights entail entitlements? Even when these questions were resolved in principle, they led to persistent tensions and conflagrations in practice. The implementation of self-determination of citizens and the conversion of citizenship rights into personal or group entitlements were primary zones of a conflict which continues well into the present.

Far from catching up from backwardness to modernity, the German reconstruction of politics championed both the expansion of the state sphere and claims to citizenship rights. Universal suffrage for men and women was extended in 1871 and 1918, respectively, ahead of much

of Europe. The resulting struggles over participation and welfare provision mark the key turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. The contest over how mass politics could be instituted, what constraints and limits applied, runs through the entire course of the twentieth century, all the way from the Second Empire to the Federal Republic.⁵⁴ From Bismarck's *Sozialpolitik* on, the development of the welfare state was an attempt to respond to popular wishes, seeking to gain loyalty for such embattled regimes as the Weimar Republic. The Third Reich's bargain of social protection in exchange for hard work and political docility was repeated by the *Fursorgediktatur* of the SED under different ideological auspices, suggesting the need for more analytical comparisons of the question of legitimacy of both dictatorships.⁵⁵

The ultimate winner of the triangular ideological contest nonetheless turned out to be democracy. The negative experiences of war and persecution under Fascism, and of material deprivation as well as political repression under Communism, helped cure the population of normative utopias. But the phenomenal success of the social market economy, as a compromise between market capitalism and a "security state," also provided positive arguments for the superiority of representative government. Compared to the depth and sophistication of work on the dictatorships, the cultural process of conversion to democracy, the transformation of values or lifestyles, and the emotional attachment to human rights, remain under-researched and under-theorized. Conventional success stories are unable to explain why the Germans should, after such aggressiveness and authoritarianism, suddenly have turned into pacifist democrats.⁵⁶

A third significant theme concerns the classic question of fitting a German national state into the European order. Was it excess size and economic potential that made the Second Reich so restless? Was it the unsettled style of foreign policy that created exaggerated fears abroad, or was it the lack of experience among the elites that inspired attempts at outright domination?⁵⁷ Perhaps Ludwig Dehio was correct in seeing

⁵⁴ James Retallack and Larry E. Jones, eds., *Elections, Mass Politics and Social Change in Modern Germany* (Cambridge, UK, 1992).

⁵⁵ Konrad H. Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York, 1999); and Joachim Hirsch, *Der Sicherheitsstaat. Das 'Modell Deutschland', seine Krise und die neuen sozialen Bewegungen* (Frankfurt/Main, 1986).

⁵⁶ The leading account, by Dennis L. Bark and David R. Gress, *A History of West Germany* 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1993), is stronger on narrative exposition than on analysis.

⁵⁷ Gerhard Weinberg, "National Style in Diplomacy," in Erich Angermann and Marie-Louise Frings, eds., *Oceans Apart? Comparing Germany and the United States* (Stuttgart, 1981), 146–60.

the world wars as attempts at a forceful resolution of this dilemma through successive bids for German hegemony over the European continent.⁵⁸ While there may be some lingering disagreement about the share of the German guilt for the outbreak of the First World War, there is no such doubt about Nazi culpability for the Second.⁵⁹ The causes of these bids for control have much to do with an antiquated agrarian definition of power that required territory, instrumentalized its inhabitants, and failed to provide a European vision that might inspire non-Germans to follow it. The consequence of these wars was an extraordinary shifting of territories, increasing the size of the German state during victory and shrinking as well as partitioning it during defeat.

Since German power rested to a large degree upon the successful organization of the economy, this dimension needs to be integrated more clearly into twentieth-century histories. During the Wilhelmian Empire, the late but rapid industrialization, facilitated by state involvement, industrial banking, technological innovation, and large-scale concentration, has been called “organized capitalism.” Cooperation between the growing trade unions movement and employers’ association managed to weather even the hyperinflation until it foundered on the Great Depression. The Third Reich shifted the balance toward business, but its deficit financing required military conquest to balance the books, a process in which entrepreneurs collaborated with enthusiasm since they could dispossess racial and national victims. Only the GDR effort at state socialism foundered, whereas the corporatist consensus of the social market economy was one of the big reasons for the success of the western FRG.⁶⁰

Bonn’s postwar commitment to European integration is one of the most important indicators of a difficult process of learning from catastrophe. Pushed by the Marshall Plan and by cooperative neighbors such as Robert Schumann and Jean Monnet, the Federal Republic under Adenauer’s leadership understood that cooperation was the road to recovery. In the construction of the Common Market in 1957, German economic potential was used constructively as industrial locomotive to propel the process of European integration. Similarly, NATO membership anchored FRG defense forces in the western alliance and transformed occupation troops into friendly allies in the Cold War confrontation. The cultural dimension of this process was a westernization

⁵⁸ Ludwig Dehio, *Germany and World Politics in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1959).

⁵⁹ Konrad H. Jarausch, “From the Second to the Third Reich: The Problem of Continuity in Nazi Foreign Policy,” *Central European History* 12 (1979): 68–82.

⁶⁰ Karl Hardach, *The Political Economy of Germany in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, 1980).

that embraced Anglo-American popular culture and consumption patterns while affecting a political reconciliation with France.⁶¹ One of the great postwar surprises was therefore the taming of a German power that had once frightened the world.

The fourth theme of a twentieth-century German history is unsettlement and resettlement of Germans in a homogeneous homeland. This topic is rehearsed by an impressive literature, which suggests that throughout its modern existence Germany has been a nation of migrants.⁶² But German history continues to be told in textbooks as if it were entirely undisturbed and untouched by the spatial and social mobility of the people that constitute it. The societal and cultural consequences in severing, as well as reconstituting, bonds of belonging and engendering a heightened fear of both mobility and migrants (as well as those, like Jews, who were made in their image) have rarely been incorporated into the understanding of national history. Even the issue of mobility has been rather sidestepped, although it might be interpreted as breaking down national boundaries and creating, within limits, equality of opportunity.⁶³ Such migration, therefore, is an important constituent of twentieth century German and European society.

An optimistic history of European-wide mobility, however, elides the catastrophic experiences of population movements in the twentieth century, the unsettlement and extirpation produced by genocidal war. These widespread, ideologically induced uprootings reappear in the second half of the century as the global calamity of refugees and asylum-seekers.⁶⁴ The forced shifting of populations in Europe is now commonly understood as an effect of the dissolution of empires.⁶⁵ As a result of the recent Balkan wars, such policies have come to be seen as deliberate acts of ethnic cleansing in which newly constituted nation states purged themselves of all those whom they considered enemies. Beyond the history of war, they also should be related to the emergent welfare-state and its entitlement programs, which led to the search for cheap and un-entitled labor—not simply a second-class citizen, but a non-citizen and, indeed, a non-person.

⁶¹ Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Wie westlich sind die Deutschen? Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1999).

⁶² Klaus Bade, *Deutsche im Ausland—Fremde in Deutschland* (Munich, 1992).

⁶³ Hartmut Kaelble, *Auf dem Weg zu einer europäischen Gesellschaft. Eine Sozialgeschichte Westeuropas, 1880–1980* (Munich, 1987).

⁶⁴ Demetrios G. Papademetriou, *Coming Together or Pulling Apart? The European Union's Struggle with Immigration and Asylum* (Washington, D.C., 1996).

⁶⁵ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge, 1996); and Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen, eds., *After Em-*

These forced population movements might be conceptualized as part and parcel of a process of nation-building by expelling presumed deviants. They coincided and overlapped with the pursuit of intra-social mobility and cannot be separated from it. The former defined the body social, whereas the latter settled the body politic in what effectively became a homogeneous German *Volksstaat*, divided into two. They reinforced each other, constituting the kind of uniform nation state, which, in turn, was the prerequisite for the extraordinary mobilization of wealth and privilege that ensued in the second half of the twentieth century. Ethnic resettlers and GDR refugees fueled the economic miracle until the arrival of so-called “guest-workers,” the influx of “strangers who were to stay,” brought people from a variety of countries, cultures, and ethnic origin.⁶⁶ As a target for asylum seekers, Germany has become, once again, a multicultural society but has also begun to fortify itself against real and imagined “waves of migration” as the new site of a global “civil war.”⁶⁷

The fifth theme concerns the struggle over German identities among different groups that tried to shape the emergent nation in their own image as part of a process of “becoming national.”⁶⁸ The origins of German identity reach considerably back in time, whether one wants to see them in the constitution of a self-conscious language (the *Muttersprache*) or in the rise of an anti-French and anti-revolutionary nationalism of the early nineteenth century.⁶⁹ Captured in a distinctly bourgeois cultural memory, this identity was embedded in a rich associational life and entrenched in state institutions, particularly those of higher learning.⁷⁰ But having a national identity and building a nation—nationalization—are two quite different things. The notion of being German was, throughout the nineteenth century, linked to a local or, at best, regional conception of society that was highly particularist since the army was state-based and Protestantism consisted of state churches with jealously guarded autonomy. And this is to say nothing about the

pire: *Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building: The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires* (Boulder, 1997) ..

⁶⁶ Georg Simmel, *Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* (Frankfurt/Main, 1992), 764. ..

⁶⁷ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Aussichten auf den Bürgerkrieg* (Frankfurt/Main, 1993).

⁶⁸ Geoff Eley and Ronald G. Suny, eds., *Becoming National: A Reader* (New York, 1996).

⁶⁹ Michael Townson, *Mother-Tongue and Fatherland: Language and Politics in Germany* (Manchester, N.Y., 1992); and Michael Jeismann, *Das Vaterland der Feinde. Studien zum nationalen Feindbegriff und Selbstverständnis in Deutschland und Frankreich, 1792–1918* (Stuttgart, 1992). ..

⁷⁰ Aleida Assmann, *Arbeit am nationalen Gedächtnis. Eine kurze Geschichte der deutschen Bildungsidee* (Frankfurt/Main, 1993).

powers of ethnicity and their connotations with *Heimat*, which were amalgamated into a strong Lander tradition.⁷¹

The German process of nationalization was carried forward by competing mass-movements that sought to impose a minority vision upon the entire society. The initially cultural and then gradually political agenda of the nationalist movement was mostly promoted by educated middle-class men of the younger generation, searching to invent a wider, translocal community in the student movement of the *Burschenschaft*. It took several generations before their message, relayed in gymnastic clubs, singing societies, and literary groups, reached the business people as well as members of the working class. Ironically, Socialism and Catholicism also sought to transcend the particularist proclivities of local elites and to organize on a nationwide level, notwithstanding their internationalist or ultramontane stances. They took advantage of universal (male) suffrage in building transregional mass-political parties and associated social and cultural movements. All three movements propagated competing visions of community that overlapped in their national focus but clashed in terms of lifestyle and life-expectations.⁷²

The process of constructing a national identity was, therefore, a struggle over who would define the nation and which of the competing visions would control the state. With the failure of the authoritarian empire and the lack of popular bonding to the Weimar Republic as a pale copy of the Second Reich, the nationalist project radicalized into a racial dictatorship under Hitler. Because of the enormous suffering in war and genocide, this hypertrophic nationalism collapsed in total defeat in 1945, never to recover. The slow unmaking of the nationalists' hold on both postwar Germanys was by no means automatic, posing instead one of the major challenges for contemporary historians. Ironically, the discrediting of the nationalists allowed the Catholic and Socialist alternatives to define the destinies of the two postwar Germanys for the second half of the twentieth century, until unification created a single state in which both traditions must coexist.

The sixth theme, therefore, concerns the gendering of German history through competing definitions of womanhood and, by contradistinction, contrasting visions of manhood. In spite of the rapid development of women's history, the results of such research appear to be even less integrated into the existing master narratives than the work on

⁷¹ Alon Confino, "The Nation as a Local Metaphor: *Heimat*, National Memory and the German Empire, 1871–1918," *History and Memory* 5 (1993): 42–86.

⁷² See also the discussion of the historical background essay in Konrad H. Jarausch, ed., *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities* (Providence, 1997).

migration.⁷³ The German debate has focused on the seemingly self-evident notion of maternalism, since the women's movement used the rhetoric of "spiritual motherhood" to expand female rights to education and work. Yet during the Weimar Republic this notion was extended into "voluntary mothering," which combined greater emphasis on individual rights with an expansion of welfare provisions to ease the burdens of maternity. The negative connotations of the term, therefore, derive largely from the celebration of maternalism in the Third Reich—which was, however, limited to Aryan women, since Nazi racial policy was anything but motherly toward Jews, Gypsies, the handicapped, and so on.⁷⁴ Instead of condemning the language of motherhood by reflex, historians need to take a closer look at its actual uses at any given time.

Only in the postwar period did the values of egalitarianism and individualism gradually begin to dominate the debate on women's issues. In both successor states, the population disaster of World War II led to the reaffirmation of family priorities and a frantic search for normalcy of gender roles during the late 1940s. The East German state pushed women into the industrial workforce out of a mixture of ideological motives of Socialist equality and such practical concerns as meeting the labor shortage. In contrast, the Federal Republic, through legislation and propaganda, tried to restore the male-breadwinner model, although the burgeoning economy pulled women into service jobs.⁷⁵ As a result of lifestyle changes, the new feminism of the 1970s began to repudiate the maternalist legacy and insist upon individual equality in the West. After unification, the estranged sisters in East and West had much difficulty in finding common ground because of their different practical versus theoretical experiences with independence.⁷⁶

The attendant gendering of the German nation is a more complicated issue than western stereotypes of the "fatherland" as the home of unreconstructed patriarchy would suggest. No doubt, a strong element of male bonding in nationalist, militarist, and racist rhetoric lends cre-

⁷³ Kathleen Canning, "Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience," *Signs* (Winter 1994): 368–400.

⁷⁴ Ann Taylor Allen, "Feminism and Motherhood in Germany and in International Perspective, 1800–1914," in Patricia Herminghouse and Magda Mueller, eds., *Gender and Germanness: Cultural Productions of Nation* (Providence, 1997), 113 ff.

⁷⁵ Robert Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar Germany* (Berkeley, 1993); and Elizabeth Heineman, "The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's 'Crisis Years' and West German National Identity," *American Historical Review* 101 (1996): 354–95.

⁷⁶ Hanna Schissler, "Women in West Germany from 1945 to the Present," in Michael G. Huelshoff, Andrei S. Markovits, and Simon Reich, eds., *From Bundesrepublik to Deutschland: German Politics after Unification* (Ann Arbor, 1993), 117–36.

dence to indictments of a tradition of male chauvinism. But women were also heavily involved in the national project, both as objects of symbolic signification (as various Germanias) and as subjects of practical participation in patriotic societies or factory-labor during war time. Moreover, women possessed considerable rights of education and work and even achieved the vote a whole generation earlier than their French counterparts! Ultimately, the gradual transformation of gender roles, as a result of the New Social Movements of the 1970s, has produced a surprising degree of sexual freedom and more permissive post-material and post-national definitions of the family. In a remarkable reversal of Wilhelmian patterns, this shift, therefore, suggests a gradual feminization of the most recent incarnation of the German nation.

The final theme addresses the issue of mass consumption and popular culture, which is beginning to emerge as a new narrative of continuous progress across the caesuras of the twentieth century. While historians of consumer society may be right about the long-run advancement of prosperity, disruptions of living standards mattered intensely in the short run since successive regimes tried to base their legitimacy on ideologically colored versions of the good life, and experiences of material deprivation strongly influenced the later craving for ostentatious consumption. These linkages are especially evident in the often neglected but fundamental question of food provision, since the repeated crises of hunger and starvation during and after the two world wars have left deep scars on the collective psyche of the Germans. For the longest time, dreams of affluence and the striving to render it secure against market fluctuations were a product of the nightmares of intense want.⁷⁷

Another striking aspect of German development is the intense effort to shape consumption and culture according to ideological preconceptions so as to prove superior a particular system. During the hothouse climate of the Weimar Republic, theoretical debates about the problems of an emerging popular culture largely outstripped the modest advances in mass consumption since the uneven distribution of wealth actually created a crisis of underconsumption. In contrast, the Nazis made strenuous efforts to provide their own Aryanized variety of prosperity and entertainment based on full employment and state-organized leisure in the KdF to buttress their power by pacifying social strife. Even the unpopular SED-dictatorship sought to create an alter-

⁷⁷ Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, 2000); and Michael Wildt, *Am Beginn der 'Konsumgesellschaft'. Mangel-erfahrung, Lebenshaltung, Wohlstandshoffnung in Westdeutschland in den funfziger Jahren* (Hamburg, 1994).

native version of a modest socialist consumerism to fulfill working class aspirations for the good life and compete with the aggressively successful *Wohlstandsgesellschaft* of the West.⁷⁸ What mattered in an unstable political context was less how much was actually consumed or how people were diverted than how living conditions and dream-worlds could be presented to reinforce political claims.

The long delayed advent of high consumption in West Germany during the 1960s and 1970s proved both gratifying and unsettling because it could be seen as recompense for earlier suffering, but it also threatened established self-conceptions. The dominant interpretation of the *Wirtschaftswunder* credited the secondary virtues of hard work, a neo-corporate pattern of labor relations, and the compromises of a social market economy as roots of widespread prosperity, thereby associating democracy with the good life. But at the same time, the arrival of widespread prosperity also brought with it Americanized styles of popular culture that advanced a process of westernization, embraced by youth but viewed with much skepticism by their elders.⁷⁹ The ensuing cultural struggles between the generations and proponents of different value systems left many Germans unsure of who they actually were beyond affluent consumers and world-champion travelers, since memories of scarcity lingered and self-gratification remained suspect as an end in itself. Among the different political currents, the Green Party continues to exhibit this fundamental ambivalence particularly strongly, since it is itself a product of the shift to postmaterial values; at the same time it criticizes the excesses of consumer society.

By offering distinctive but complementary perspectives, these seven themes address some of the key issues of German history in the twentieth century. These partial chronological narratives intersect in the multiple contests over constituting a German nation in the domestic realm and in the international state system. Focusing on these contentions—both in public and in private—over what kind of community Germany might be, over who belonged and who did not, and over where in Europe or the world Germany might be located, helps to unlock the course of twentieth-century history. The contending efforts to put together a society from disparate parts, the disasters and successes of

⁷⁸ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995); Ronald Smelser, *Robert Ley: Hitler's Labor Front Leader* (Oxford, 1988); and Stephane Merl, "Sowjetisierung in der Welt des Konsums," in Konrad H. Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist, eds., *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland 1945–1970* (Frankfurt, 1997), 167–194.

⁷⁹ Anthony J. Nicholls, *Freedom with Responsibility: The Social Market Economy in Germany 1918–1963* (Oxford, 1994); and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Wie westlich sind die Deutschen? Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1999).

these labors, constitute the signature of the age. What is impressive is the deliberateness of the efforts to mold a society and inscribe different versions of Germanness on the nation's subjects and on Europe—a process that did not stop in 1945 or in 1990.

By going through cycles of de- and re-civilizing, the contentious process of constituting a German nation within Europe has challenged the very foundations of civility.⁸⁰ Pace Norbert Elias, it is not necessary to attach any particular teleology to this existential, life-and-death confrontation. In view of similar processes in central and eastern Europe and in terms of experiences in former Yugoslavia, the challenge of “civilizing” no longer appears as uniquely German but as the very key to the formation of national societies.⁸¹ Though in the German context this process seemed to end in disaster and moral depravity, it nonetheless had a surprisingly “happy ending.” The severity of the deviation and the nature of the ending are somewhat diminished if we think of them as predestined to end in the West.⁸² An unspecified reference to westernization is all too frequently used as a sleight of hand to efface what matters: the formation of a cultural code or, really, a succession of codes that put and hold together a texture of belonging in a deeply fractured society. Some aspects of this process might be captured in a sociological tradition that has the notion of societalization (*Vergesellschaftung*) at its center.

In the twentieth century, the constitution and severance of bonds of belonging were intimately tied to contestations over power, and these in turn were enmeshed in conflicts over worldviews. This was not at all a specialty of totalitarianism, although it gave these contestations a deadly turn.⁸³ The centrality of national or international power, and the quickness with which these contestations could turn to lethal violence, caution against a tendency to neutralize culture, be it in the spirit of anthropological inquiry or in the more recent pursuit of a history of consumerism. Indubitable merits mark both enterprises, but each one in its own way is oddly hesitant to acknowledge how much of a struggle was entailed in making and unmaking cultures and how closely involved cultural processes of societalization remained with life and death choices. As the nineteenth-century project of creating a national culture was beholden to its literature and music, its twentieth-century

⁸⁰ Georg Simmel, *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* (Frankfurt/Main, 1992), 764.

⁸¹ Isabel V. Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700–1815* (Ithaca, 1996), makes a convincing case.

⁸² Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (New York, 1978).

⁸³ Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (New York, 2000).

continuation was full of competing schemes in medicine or architecture, which were meant to better society and save the country. Each in its own way aimed to form a nation that remained constitutionally unstable, territorially unsettled, and socially fractured.

Narrating Nightmares and Reawakenings

More than their European neighbors, Germans of a certain age contend with troubled memories that, though put aside as a pop song has it in favor of “advancing the GNP,” resurface at unexpected moments.⁸⁴ Private conversations with people over fifty years old are replete with recollections from World War II or the immediate postwar era, telling tales of survival through catastrophe but largely evading the question of responsibility. Occasionally these stories do touch upon agency, but they offer incidents of imprisonment and persecution, scraps with the Gestapo, or stints in a penal division—altogether not as unusual an occurrence as one might think. Survivors of the Holocaust or former slave-laborers have become omnipresent on television but are rarely encountered in everyday situations as neighbors. Layered over these remembrances are public commemorations, which tend to be painful and sometimes embarrassing. Instead of being a source of pride, German history is treated as a burden. For the wartime and, surely, for the postwar generation, the German past has come to function as a negative foil for current definitions of identity.⁸⁵

What should historians do with these old men’s and women’s tales? Should they take them as authentic testimony for a past that must not return, put them into museums as mementos of a shipwreck, or ignore them in favor of more scholarly reconstructions? Instead of being dismissed as incomplete and unreliable, these stories need to be put squarely into a history of the twentieth century and made the outspoken record of the labors with which people pasted together their ruptured lives, of how they maintained and recreated social bonds and values, and of what kinds of passions moved them. For all their obvious inadequacies, such individual or collective recollections can serve as signposts along the crooked paths that the Germans—including those who have been German but no longer are and those who may yet become German but are still treated as foreigners who have

⁸⁴ This is unadulterated “deutsch rock” from the Ruhr, ca. 1984: “Jetzt wird wieder in die Hande gespuckt, wir steigern das Bruttosozialprodukt.”

⁸⁵ Marc Fischer, *Germany, the Germans and the Burdens of History* (New York, 1995).

stayed—took to get from one end of the century to the other.⁸⁶ Such a perspective takes seriously that the making and unmaking of nations is a process that is, indeed, thought about, talked through, and put down in symbols and images.

Personal anecdotes and collective stories are also a reminder of the powerful role of narration in turning recollections of the past into history. Though some skeptics, such as Richard Evans, still argue that historians ought to stick only to analysis, the public craves narratives, and many scholars, perhaps against their professional conscience, resort to stories as they search for truth and recover past reality.⁸⁷ In the German case the penchant for storytelling is a response to the psychological problem of dealing with an incomprehensible catastrophe, of exploring the human aspects of inexplicable suffering. When looking for the truth about the past, historians stare war and genocide in the face. But when they steer around war and genocide, they risk erasing a central part of German reality. If these nightmares have receded, it is not because of the innocence of historians who have never sought anything but the truth, but it is for the stories of all those who have faced the truth and have not despaired. With due acknowledgment of the subterfuges that such plots provide, German historiography and public memory could not have faced their ghosts without recourse to some very powerful narratives.

The genres suggested by the philosopher Hayden White offer interesting but somewhat inadequate emplotments of the course of twentieth-century German history. If “Romance is fundamentally a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero’s transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it,” the German story must be shorn of much of its self-inflicted terror to be read as a Dickensian triumph over adversity.⁸⁸ The related framing of the *Bildungsroman* as narrative of becoming, used by nationalists, seems hardly more appropriate for a nation or perpetrators.⁸⁹ Instead, critical historians prefer to turn to Tragedy as “intimation[s] of [terrible] states of division among men, . . . the fall of protagonists and the shaking of the world he inhabits” to tell a cautionary tale of the inevitable disaster of a misguided protagonist. Some optimistic scholars also resort to Comedy, seen as “reconciliations of men with men, of men with their

⁸⁶ Konrad H. Jarausch and Martin Sabrow, eds., *Verletztes Gedächtnis. Zeitgeschichte und Erinnerung im Konflikt* (Frankfurt, 2002).

⁸⁷ Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York, 1999).

⁸⁸ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973), 8–9.

⁸⁹ Aleida Assmann, *Arbeit am nationalen Gedächtnis. Eine kurze Geschichte der deutschen Bildungsidee* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993).

world and their society,” which result in a “purer, saner, and healthier” condition of society.⁹⁰ Though perhaps too stylized, these distinctions may help explain some of the conflict between the older national academics, middling social science scholars and younger everyday historians during the course of the Federal Republic. While apologists tend toward Romance, critics are habitually tragedians, whereas some radicals ironically believe in the possibility of reconciliation.

Since it holds out hope, a redemptive emplotment in a Christian or psychological version has become popular among politicians and the general public. In their impressive syntheses the historian Heinrich August Winkler and the political scientist Peter Graf Kielmansegg have produced democratic narratives that seek to link the descent into catastrophe to the recovery of civility.⁹¹ That emplotment reads like a tale with an initial stage of innocence (the pre-unification fragmentation of the nineteenth century), a twice repeated and each time more repulsive sin (the world wars and the Holocaust), a period of prolonged atonement (the postwar division), and an eventual redemption (the reunification of the FRG and GDR). The secular version of this narrative portrays the lifecycle of a nation as the arduous procession from youth to troubled adolescence, and on to maturity, which holds out the promise of an enlightened normalcy. Both versions are distinctly post-revolutionary, post-lapsarian tales, and if intellectuals still recoil from such a reading, it is for the most part because they do not trust human ability (or perhaps the Germans) to overcome catastrophe. Occasional missteps like Bitburg to the contrary, this redemptionist emplotment has also become the official self-representation of the Federal Republic as an answer to earlier disasters.⁹²

At first glance, the framing of descent into darkness, followed by surprising recovery as a result of individual and collective learning processes, has much to recommend it. In terms of the themes discussed above, this perspective interprets the first half of the twentieth century as a negative spiral in which the experience of killing and death in World War I helped undercut the unloved Republic; Hitler’s diatribes against the *Diktat* of Versailles promoted the Nazi cause; the expulsion from the East reinforced revanchist sentiment; the failure of authoritar-

⁹⁰ White, *Metahistory*, 9.

⁹¹ Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, “Eine politische Nationalgeschichte für die Berliner Republik. Überlegungen zu Heinrich August Winklers ‘Der lange Weg nach Westen’,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27 (2001): 446–462; and Konrad H. Jarausch, “Die Geschichte der Deutschen diesseits der Katastrophe. Anmerkungen zu einem ‘großen Werk’,” *Potsdamer Bulletin für Zeithistorische Studien* (23–24 October, 2001): 16–18.

⁹² Geoffrey Hartmann, ed., *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective* (Bloomington, 1986).

ian nationalism paved the way for a more radical, and racist, chauvinism; and population loss encouraged an instrumentalized and selective biopolitics.⁹³ In contrast, this view characterizes the second half of the century by the inverted image of a positive cycle in which negative experiences spurred benign developments that eventually reinforced one another: The murderous consequences of militarism engendered a deeply ingrained pacifism; the repression of dictatorship promoted a turn toward democratization; the double failure of hegemony encouraged an appreciation for the limitation of power; the suffering of mass flight spurred greater acceptance of immigration; and finally, the excesses of racist patriarchy encouraged more equality for women.⁹⁴ This reading sees the link between the two unequal halves of the century in the learning experiences that sought to prevent a repetition of the previous catastrophes.

For some intellectuals, this positive reading appears too pat a solution, smoothing out the jagged edges of the German past in a heart-warming story of transgression and redemption. They may feel more comfortable with the more ambiguous portrayals of such writers as Alfred Döblin, Uwe Johnson, or Christa Wolf and more recently Walter Kempowski, Alexander Kluge, or W. G. Sebald.⁹⁵ Their cunning fiction surely knows how to tell a tale, but their stories are made of the labors and the memories of their imaginary subjects in a multi-vocal and, indeed, discordant world in which German history stretches from New York to Stalingrad and Jerusalem and in which history is but the sum total of human endeavors. It is a fiction that tells both of the catastrophes and of the happinesses, and, as is so often the case, of the two being inextricably mixed. It also accounts for the ways that people come together and constitute themselves as community, as much as how they fight with and tear one another apart. And it jumps across the barrier of time, intermingling experiences in actual cataclysmic events with their later recollections. These are multi-layered and multi-

⁹³ Compare Henry Turner, *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power: January 1933* (Reading, Penn., 1996) to Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

⁹⁴ See Peter Graf Kielmannsegg, *Nach der Katastrophe. Eine Geschichte des geteilten Deutschland* (Berlin, 2000).

⁹⁵ Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: The Story of Franz Biberkopf*, trans. Eugen Jolas (New York, 1983); Uwe Johnson, *Anniversaries: From the life of Gesine Cresspahl*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York, 1975); Christa Wolf, *A Model Childhood*, trans. Ursula Molinaro and Hedwig Rappelt (New York, 1980); Walter Kempowski, *Echolot* (Munich, 1993–1999); Alexander Kluge, *Chronik der Gefühle* (Frankfurt am Main, 2000); and W. G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn* (New York, 1998).

focal epics of the making and unmaking of individuals and nations that do not resort to a comforting telos of redemption.⁹⁶

Finding appropriate modes of narrating the German nightmares and reawakenings of the twentieth century therefore remains a difficult challenge at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The master narratives of the postwar years sound curiously dated since the collapse of Communism has surprisingly reconstituted a shrunken and chastened German nation. Once again, their cautionary lessons—whether they were neo-national, Marxist, or liberal—were overtaken by the actual course of events from which they were drawn. If one so wishes, this is the “post-modern” moment in German history—not for any programmatic intent of replacing the modern, but for the actual working-through of a modern agenda, the fifty-year long effort at overcoming war and genocide and constituting a modern German society “after the fall.” Because the modernization and westernization project has itself become history, perhaps it is only now that historians can begin to comprehend the twentieth-century past—writing “histories” as the Greek neologism has it—so that the labor of human beings may not be forgotten in the future.⁹⁷ For some skeptics, it may not appear to be a good omen that this call to preserve memory comes from an irrepressively fabulating, anthropologizing historian. But whatever else may be said about Herodotus, he made his inquiries and wrote as truthfully as he could, without providing a preconceived meaning by way of telling the story.

⁹⁶ For this reason Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen and Other Stories* (New York, 1967), 180, also intended “to write a great, immortal epic” about his terrible experiences.

⁹⁷ Herodotus, *The Histories* (London, 1988), 7. The gently meliorating Penguin translation speaks of the goal “to preserve the memory of the past by putting down on record the astonishing achievements both of our own and of other people; and more particularly, to show how they came in conflict.”