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INTRODUCTION: NARRATIVES OF IDENTITY AND NATIONHOOD IN THE OCCUPATION OF GERMANY

LARA FEIGEL AND EMILY OLIVER

‘Frieden, das ist nur Schlamperei, erst der Krieg schafft Ordnung.’[1] These words from Brecht’s *Mutter Courage* may not have sounded as ironic to its first Berlin audiences in January 1949 as they do now. After four years of Allied occupation, with Soviets and Western Allies increasingly at odds and West Berlin completely cut off from its surroundings and supported by airlift, peacetime may have seemed more of a mess than the war had. Since the beginning of the Allied occupation, those lucky enough to survive the war had faced hunger, homelessness, clothing and fuel shortages, and the coldest winter in living memory. The chaos following unconditional surrender in 1945 opened up a space for competing narratives – about Germany’s future, about its recent and more distant past, about political systems and ideologies, and not least, about art and culture’s role in re-shaping Germany.

This issue of *German Life and Letters* examines some of the narratives circulating during the years immediately following the unconditional surrender of 1945. It focuses particularly on cultural life in the American and British zones of occupied Germany, covering film (Fay, Wolpert), literature (Oliver, Sollors), and journalism (Knowles and Vossen). Arising from a conference hosted by the European Research Council-funded ‘Beyond Enemy Lines’ research project at King’s College London in 2015, the contributions here should be read in conjunction with two other volumes. The first is a special issue of *Comparative Critical Studies* also arising from the conference, which specifically tackles the question of culture’s transformative power during the occupation period.[2] The second is Lara Feigel's book, *The Bitter Taste of Victory,* which maps the cultural landscape of the western zones of Germany in this period by tracing the experiences of twenty of the British and American figures who were involved either in witnessing German cultural life or in making an effort to change German culture. These included the British writers Stephen Spender, W.H. Auden, George Orwell and Rebecca West, the American writers Martha Gellhorn, and returning exiles Klaus and Erika Mann, Carl Zuckmayer and Billy Wilder.

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[1] Bertolt Brecht, *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder: Eine Chronik aus dem Dreißigjährigen Krieg*, ed. H. F. Brookeds and C. E. Fränkel, London 1960, p. 21.

In contrast to those volumes, which were focused on cultural transformation or exchange led by the western occupiers, the essays here are more concerned with the narratives of Germany and German life circulating in occupied Germany. Collectively, the contributors are interested in exploring the relationship between narratives constructed by the British or American occupiers and the responses to these narratives by their German recipients, who often mediated or subverted the narratives they were offered and in doing so sometimes found a way to own them for themselves.

Thus, in Werner Sollors' account, the absurdities of the Allied 'Fragebogen' became the subject for satirical narratives by German writers, while in Emily Oliver's account that archetypal narrative of the American South, *Gone with the Wind*, became a tale well-suited for German women in need of stories to help them survive the struggles of daily life in occupied Germany. Daniel Wolpert's article contrasts two German filmmakers working within the confines of the eastern and western zones of occupation, who both turned back to cultural landmarks of Germany's past to create a new narrative of identity for Germany's present. In the process they were taking on the narrative of anti-fascist democracy being inculcated by both sets of occupiers and trying to find a way to reclaim this as specifically German. For Jennifer Fay, the narrative of democracy offered by the occupiers proved more fraught for the German filmmakers. She shows them subverting the very narratives they were offered. Turning to journalism, Christopher Knowles and Julia Vossen show that the Allies attempted to create a new vision of democratic journalism through the introduction of the new publication, *Der Spiegel,* modelled on publications in Britain and America. This, more than any of the other case studies examined here, was a success story. In the hands of their German writers, the British and American models took on a new, Germanic form, which does seem to have proved satisfactory for German writers and readers.

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[2] *Comparative Critical Studies*, Special Issue: 'The Transformative Power of Culture in Occupied Germany', 13:2 (2016), ed. Lara Feigel and Elaine Morley.

This special issue builds on existing work on culture in postwar Germany, not just by our team but by a wider network of scholars. Although the culture of the occupation remains less explored than other periods of German cultural history, there are excellent studies of literature and film in Germany in this period by Stephen Brockmann and Werner Sollors, of culture in the western zones in the immediate postwar period by Wolfgang Schivelbusch and of film (including the relationship between film policy and film production) by Jennifer Fay.[3] A comprehensive survey of the U.S. occupation of Germany was provided by Detlef Junker, Phillip Gassert, Wilfried Mausbach, and David B. Morris in 2004, with articles covering politics, security, economics, society, and culture.[4] And for the British Zone, Gabriele

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[3] Stephen Brockmann, *German Literary Culture at the Zero Hour*, Columbia, S.C. 2004; Werner Sollors, *The Temptation of Despair: Tales of the 1940s*, Cambridge, Mass. 2014; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *In a Cold Crater: Cultural and Intellectual Life in Berlin*, trans. Kelly Barry, Berkeley 1998; Jennifer Fay, *Theaters of Occupation: Hollywood and the Reeducation of Postwar Germany*, Minneapolis 2008. See also Hansjörg Gehring, *Amerikanische Literaturpolitik in Deutschland 1945-1953: Ein Aspekt des Re-Education Programms*, Stuttgart 1976; Heide Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany*, Chapel Hill 1995; Wilfried Wilms and William Rasch, *German Postwar Films: Life and Love in the Ruins*, London 2008. On fine art, see John-Paul Stonard, *Fault Lines: Art in Germany 1945-55*, London 2007.

4 Detlef Junker, Philipp Gassert, Wilfried Mausbach, and David B. Morris (eds.), *The United States and Germany in the Era of Cold War, 1945-1990, A Handbook, vol. 1: 1945-1968*, Cambridge 2004.

Clemens's work still provides an invaluable overview of culture at the level of policy and planning.[5]

Our contribution is specifically to nuance and explore some of the narratives of German identity and nationhood in the postwar period that recur both at the time and in subsequent scholarship. The best-known narrative of the immediate postwar period is without doubt the notion of a 'Stunde Null', or zero hour, in German culture. Following the Third Reich's unconditional surrender, the perennial 'German question' was once again wide open, and it was by no means clear what geographical or socio-political form a future Germany might assume. However, this did not automatically bring about radical discontinuity in German culture. Several critics have shown that the idea of a 'Stunde Null' in German politics and culture in 1945 was just that: an idea. Examining German postwar literature, Stephen Brockmann writes that 'the "zero hour" is more a literary historical myth than a reality', since 'the year 1945 was characterized at least as much by literary continuity as by a tabula rasa'.[6]

Although the Allies' aim in denazifying the country was at least initially to achieve a radical break with the past (see Sollors' essay on the 'Fragebogen'), German attitudes and tastes did not change overnight. As a disillusioned Hannah Arendt remarked after visiting the country in 1950, 'while Germany has changed beyond recognition – physically and psychologically – people talk and behave superficially as though absolutely nothing had happened since 1932'.[7] Several contributions to this volume examine the troubling continuities in the things Germans enjoyed reading, watching, or contemplating in the immediate postwar period, and in the things they continued to reject. For instance, Emily Oliver's contribution examines the continued enormous popularity of the pre-war bestseller *Gone with the Wind* among German readers. Such continuities in cultural consumption suggest that it took more than a military defeat to change German patterns of thought and behaviour during the occupation.

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[5] Gabriele Clemens, *Britische Kulturpolitik in Deutschland 1945-1949: Literatur, Film, Musik und Theater*, Stuttgart 1997. See also regional studies including Ulrich M. Bausch, *Die Kulturpolitik der US-amerikanischen Information Control Division in Württemberg-Baden von 1945 bis 1949*, Stuttgart 1992; Rüdiger Bolz, *Rundfunk und Literatur unter amerikanischer Kontrolle: Das Programmangebot von Radio München 1945-1949*, Wiesbaden 1991.

[6] Stephen Brockmann, 'German Literature, Year Zero: Writers and Politics, 1945-1953', in *Stunde Null: The End and the Beginning Fifty Years Ago*, ed. Geoffrey J. Giles, Washington, D.C. 1997, pp. 59-74 (72-73).

[7] Hannah Arendt, "The Aftermath of Nazi Rule: Report from Germany," *Commentary*, 10 October 1950, 342-53 (344).

In the realm of cultural policy, the primary narrative of postwar Germany encouraged by the western occupiers was the narrative of democracy, of choice, and of the possibility both for cultural products to be inherently democratic and for artists to create a genre of specifically democratic art. Having won the war, the Western Allies' primary mission was to introduce democracy to Germany after twelve years of Nazi dictatorship. General Robert McClure's criteria for film selection in occupied Germany can serve as a neat summary of the occupation's cultural aims as 'the fixing of German war guilt, demonstrating the values of democratic living, and indicating that the United States is a strong democratic society striving for the realization of full freedom'.[8] The British had similarly defined goals, mixing national interest with political idealism in an attempt to promote 'British methods […] British products and […] British political and moral values'.[9]

Although the ultimate goal of cultural policy – a peaceful and democratic Germany – was clear, the question of how this was to be achieved was decidedly less so. All Allied forces issued policy directives, but those tasked with implementing these policies on the ground were often left to figure out the concrete details on a case-by-case basis. Allied Information Control officials frequently found themselves

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8 'History: Information Control Division, Office of Military Government for Germany (U.S.), 8 May 1945-30 June 1946', p. 55, memo, Box 454, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

9 British Information Services to Germany, Foreign Office, September 1945, PRO/FO 898/401, National Archives, Kew.

in the position of censoring cultural and journalistic outputs, and thus paradoxically attempting to promote democracy through undemocratic means. A key question at the heart of this matter was: what makes art or culture 'democratic'? Was it simply a question of selecting the appropriate content to present to the Germans? Did it matter how this content was presented? Or was it rather a question of the socio-political context framing cultural products which would ultimately determine their reception and interpretation? The essays in this volume all tackle different aspects of 'democratic' context (Sollors), content (Wolpert, Oliver), and form (Fay, Knowles and Vossen).

Could the new democratic Germany be forged through eliminating those seen as undemocratic? This was the hope behind the Americans' enormous bureaucratic effort to determine who was and was not to play a significant role in Germany's future by means of the 'Fragebogen'. The volume begins with Werner Sollors' essay examining responses to the Allies' hopeful narrative of denazification through questionnaire. The assumption behind the 'Fragebogen' was that democratic culture could be achieved in Germany by removing from a position of influence anyone previously involved with Nazi organisations (and also, perhaps more dubiously, that Germans would tell the truth about their past on this questionnaire). Through many different examples of writers and artists who were surveyed, Sollors probes the logic of determining an individual's level of involvement with the Nazi regime through membership in Party organisations rather than through their specific actions prior to 1945. Originally developed by the exiled German Marxists Herbert Marcuse and Franz Neumann as a first step towards revolutionary change in Germany, the 'Fragebogen' soon turned into a bureaucratic nightmare for Americans and Germans alike. Arendt criticised American efforts at denazification, saying that '[f]rom the beginning, the whole system, based upon length of party membership, ranks and offices held, date of first entrance, etc., was very complicated, and involved almost everyone'.[10] Sollors examines the difficulties encountered by American cultural officers navigating a bureaucratic maze of their own making. The questionnaire's ludicrousness was not lost on contemporaries. Sollors shows its satirical deployment in fiction by German writers such as Erich Kästner and Ernst von Salomon, as well as by the American writers Gordon Gaskill and John Dos Passos. Given that the 'Fragebogen' was the most widely distributed text in occupied Germany, Sollors considers it a German 'Erinnerungsort', suggesting that much work remains to be done in locating questionnaires submitted by culturally significant individuals and evaluating these in relation to their published and private writings.

The articles that follow consider the premise that a cultural product is 'democratic' if its subject matter deals with democratic ideas, such as freedom, choice, the rule of law, active political participation by all citizens, and universal human rights. Even though in 1945 Germany had just emerged from twelve years of 'Gleichschaltung' and indoctrination, these essential democratic values were not altogether new to the nation, since they could all be found in German cultural achievements of the 18th and 19th centuries. Germany may have been poor in democracy, but it was rich in 'Kultur'. While democracy (however ambivalently defined) was something relatively new and controversial to Germans, 'Kultur' constituted an important pillar of German national identity, and was held in high esteem by Germans and Allied Information Control officers alike.

Thus, Daniel Wolpert's article explores the way that German filmmakers on both sides of the cold war divide invoked classical German culture as a source of

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10 Arendt, 'The Aftermath of Nazi Rule,' 346.

legitimacy for democratic ideals. By analysing Georg Klaren's 1947 Soviet Zone adaptation of Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck* and Karl-Heinz Stroux's 1949 film of Goethe's *Werther* for the Western Trizone, the essay compares interpretations of the relationship between German culture and politics immediately after the war, examining how film directors hoped to overcome the previous opposition of 'Geist' and 'Macht' in German history. In their attempts to reconnect with and reclaim an apparently untarnished national past, both directors employ the classical authors themselves (Goethe and Büchner) as mediators within their films and as a kind of moral compass for the viewer. This is all the more remarkable given that Klaren and Stroux were working on opposite sides of the emerging East-West divide, in which both new German states would claim to be the only rightful heir to Germany's cultural heritage. By employing the same device (i.e. the author's presence on screen), both directors used Germany's remote past to interpret its recent descent into Nazism as the downfall of an essentially 'good', cultured nation through militarism and the distortion of ideals. However, the differences in approach are also telling. It seems significant that the author chosen in the East is the radical Büchner, perhaps reflecting an attempt to expand the notion of what a classical author is, raising Büchner to the level of Goethe. Within the films, the authors serve different functions. Klaren's *Wozzeck* deploys the trope to stress obstacles such as a rigid class structure, which must be overcome in paving the way for a socialist future, while Stroux's film can be seen as supporting the return to conservatism in the West, emphasising Goethe's genius and bourgeois humanism.

Is there such a thing as democratic form? Could the way of telling a story or communicating with a viewer or reader pave the way for a more democratic Germany? These questions are tackled by Jennifer Fay's essay. Fay considers choice as the bedrock of democracy by contrasting one German and one American film's treatment of this issue in the occupation period. Departing from the habitual sleight of hand which equated democracy with American culture, Fay carefully distinguishes between form and content in order to ask whether there is such a thing as 'democratic style' in cinema. She argues that the most successful U.S. film to be released in the Trizone, *The Best Years of Our Lives* (U.S. 1946; Germany 1948), not only tells a triumphant story of good U.S. soldiers returning home after doing their duty, but also promotes an aesthetics of choice for the viewer through the way in which shots are framed. Through a tension between foreground and background action, the viewer is empowered to choose an object of focus. Fay's other example, Helmut Käutner's unsuccessful musical satire *Der Apfel ist ab* (1948), dramatises the problem of choice itself as a kind of hell in which Germany found itself during the occupation. The protagonist's refusal to choose between a bewildering and paralysing array of options can be seen as a starting point for audience emancipation: perhaps the refusal to choose is itself a democratic act. Thus this German filmmaker at once subverted the American notion of the new democratic Germany and owned it, in a new and complex form.

The Germans, left to choose for themselves, proved receptive to the culture of their new democratic occupiers. But the narrative they chose was not one that had been selected for them. Indeed, in its depiction of a society oiled by slavery and rigid in its hierarchies, *Gone with the Wind* is in many ways an awkward representative of western democratic life. Yet this was one of the American cultural products that enjoyed the most popularity in wartime and postwar Germany. In her essay, Emily Oliver argues that Margaret Mitchell's tale of a woman's struggles through chaos and hunger offered opportunities for identification to German women in a multitude of ways, but also potentially encouraged them to view themselves and their country as victims of an unjust occupation, since the novel is written from the perspective of the losing side, and idealises the antebellum regime. The story's inherent racism proved too embarrassing for the American occupiers to allow David O'Selznick's hugely successful film adaptation to be released in West Germany until 1953 – thus somewhat undermining the fiction of the U.S. as a democratic, tolerant, and pluralistic society in the late 1940s. It is in cases such as these that a distinction between democratic and popular becomes important, since *Gone with the Wind* was without doubt popular in postwar Germany, but a closer look at some of the reasons for its popularity suggests that this was at best a problematic medium for promoting democracy in a formerly fascist society.

The final essay examines one of the great occupation-era success stories in the field of journalism: the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*. First published as *Diese Woche* in the British Zone in late 1946, the magazine was premised on British officer John Chaloner's idea of presenting news to Germans in a different fashion. By importing the popular format of news magazines such as the American *Time* and the British *News Review* and encouraging a young German editorial staff to imitate their styles, Chaloner and his colleagues created a new and highly successful news medium for the German market. British and American efforts to reform the press in their zones focused on promoting the separation of news and opinion as a uniquely Anglo-American feature, claiming that this distinction had never been present in German news media.[11] While Christopher Knowles and Julia Vossen show that this premise was somewhat questionable, they also argue that *Der Spiegel* did not in fact adhere to this strict separation. On the contrary, Vossen's stylistic analysis demonstrates that the

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[11] Paper on 'Information Control in the British Zone of Germany,' Foreign Office, FO 945/848, National Archives, Kew.

German language proved very well suited to imitating '*Time*-style' prose, which obscures its sources of information, and subtly blurs the boundaries between report and commentary. This example of cultural transfer was in fact so successful that *Der Spiegel* came to be regarded as one of the cornerstones of West German democracy in the second half of the twentieth century.

As many of the articles in this issue demonstrate, the legacy of the Allied occupation is still relevant today. In order to avoid retrospectively reading the history of the Western occupation zones as an inevitable progression towards an economically stable, democratic German state, it is worth paying attention to the various competing narratives about Germany's future and its past circulating in the immediate postwar period, when it was by no means inevitable that Germany would become the democratic cornerstone of Europe that it's seen as today, and by no means inevitable either that Europe as a whole would become either democratic or stable. By unpacking what narratives were constructed, and who constructed, modified, and sometimes undermined and reconstructed them, the articles in this issue open up crucial questions about when and how the new Germany was forged. At a moment when the future of the European Union is in doubt, it seems important to go back to that moment of difficult transition from war and fascism to peace and democracy and to remember how complex a moment it was, for both the Germans and their occupiers.