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Weimar was Weimar. Politics, Culture and the Emplotment of the German Republic

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Weimar Radicals: Nazis and Communists between Authenticity and Performance. By Timothy Brown. New York. Oxford: Berghahn Books. 2009. 240 pp. $80/£50 (hardback).

Weimar: Die überforderte Republik 1918-1933. Leistung und Versagen in Staat, Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft und Kultur. By Ursula Büttner. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta. 2008. 864 pp. €45 (hardback).

Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic. By Bernhard Fulda. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2009. 342 pp. $110/£55 (hardback).

Die Zukunft der Weimarer Republik: Krisen und Zukunftsaneignungen in Deutschland 1918-1933. By Rüdiger Graf. 'Ordnungssysteme - Studien zur Ideengeschichte der Neuzeit'. 24. Munich: R. Oldenbourg. 2008. 460 pp. €64,80 (hardback).

Topographies of Class: Modern Architecture and Mass Society in Weimar Berlin. By Sabine Hake. Ann Arbor. Michigan: University of Michigan Press. 2008. 336 pp. $35/£ 31,50 (paperback).

Crime Stories: Criminalistic Fantasy and the Culture of Crisis in Weimar Germany. By Todd Herzog. 'Monographs in German History'. 22. New York. Oxford: Berghahn Books. 2009. 169 pp. $75/£45 (hardback).

Die „Krise" der Weimarer Republik. Zur Kritik eines Deutungsmusters. Edited by Moritz Föllmer and Rüdiger Graf. Frankfurt/Main. New York: Campus. 2005 367 pp. €39,90 (paperback).

Die Weimarer Republik. By Ulrich Kluge. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh/Uni-Taschenbücher. 2006. 502 pp. €24,90 (paperback).

Weimar Germany. Edited by Anthony McElligott. 'Short Oxford History of Germany'. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2009. 324 pp. £16,99 (paperback)

Parlamentarische Kultur in der Weimarer Republik: Politische Kommunikation, symbolische Politik und Öffentlichkeit im Reichstag. By Thomas Mergel. Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag. 2005. 544 pp. €24,80 (paperback, 2nd edition).

Political Violence in the Weimar Republic 1918-1933: Battles for the Streets and Fears of Civil War. By Dirk Schumann. New York. Oxford: Berghahn Books. 2009. 346 pp. $100/£60 (hardback).

Radikale Nationalistinnen: Agitation und Programmatik rechter Frauen in der Weimarer Republik. By Christiane Streubel. Frankfurt/New York: Campus. 2006. 444 pp. €45. (paperback)

Cultures of Abortion in Weimar Germany. By Cornelie Usborne. New York: Berghahn Books. 2007. 284 pp. $90/£45 (hardback).

Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy. By Eric Weitz. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2007. 448 pp. $29,95/£20,95 (hardback).

Integration und Ausgrenzung in der städtischen Gesellschaft. Eine jüdisch-nichtjüdische Beziehungsgeschichte Kölns 1918-1933. By Nicola Wenge. 'Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte', 206. Mainz: Philipp von Zabern. 2005. x+479 pp. €51 (hardback).

Vernunftrepublikanismus in der Weimarer Republik: Politik, Literatur, Wissenschaft. Edited by Andreas Wirsching and Jürgen Eder. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag. 2008. 330 pp. €33 (hardback).

In 1996, Peter Fritzsche published a piece that was provocatively entitled 'Did Weimar fail?'. Deliberately breaking with the conventional narrative which had focused on the reasons for the collapse of parliamentary democracy ('Why did Weimar fail?'), this densely written review article urged historians to envision a broader and more complex picture of the first German republic. Drawing on Detlev Peukert's at this point already canonical interpretation of Weimar as a laboratory of 'classical modernity'[1], Fritzsche highlighted the experimental nature of the manifold social and cultural departures in the 1920s and the participatory drive of both democratic and anti-democratic politics. Against the backdrop of older historiographical controversies on collective bargaining about the costs and effects of the inflation or welfare state policies in Weimar, Fritzsche stressed the importance of symbolic politics and mythological fantasies as tools to articulate and re-enact collective desires and traumas. Nationalist visions for a renewal of *Volk* and society in particular proved to be attractive beyond the core constituency of the nationalist camp, making inroads into the otherwise tightly-knit milieu of the Social-Democratic labour movement. All in all, this was a call to acknowledge the 'webs of contingency' that characterised the trajectory of German history from 1918 to 1933, and a both

[1] Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic. The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York, 1993) (first German edition in 1987). – For their helpful comments on earlier versions of this argument, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer, the participants of a 'German History in the North'-workshop at the University of Leeds, the students in my third-year module on Weimar Germany and, last but not least, Holger Nehring.

ambitious and welcome invitation to ponder the complex and ambivalent responses of Weimar contemporaries to the challenges posed by the modern condition.[2]

I. Surveys and their Problems

How have historians of Weimar dealt with these suggestions? Have they been successful in rewriting or perhaps even abandoning the established narrative of 'failed revolution', 'relative stabilization', 'crisis' and final 'collapse' of the Republic? As one would expect, there is little appetite to revise conventional approaches in general histories. The inertia of the textbook genre is most blatantly obvious in Ulrich Kluge's history of the Weimar Republic. It is explicitly meant to account for the factors that prevented the stabilization of the republic and threatened democracy (p. 15), and executes this task in the most conventional form imaginable. The text is broken down into short chapters which follow political caesuras, 1918/19, 1920-1923, 1924-1926, and so forth. Even worse, within these chapters information is presented in brief snippets of text, often interrupted by tables of graphs with statistical data. As Kluge admits, the book is effectively the result of a *Zettelkasten* turned upside down, presenting 'tiny and often tiniest pieces' which have been often taken from previous publications by the author (p. 16). This approach would be more tolerable if the information taken from the cards and excerpts did not contain a number of factual inaccuracies, grossly exaggerating, for instance, the membership figure for the nationalist *Stahlhelm*-association and the casualties of political street violence in the turbulent year of 1932 (p. 432).

Those readers who have German are on much more solid ground with Ursula Büttner's comprehensive account of an 'overburdened and abused democracy' (p. 498). In its structure somewhat resembling the fine general history published by Peter Longerich in 1995[3], Büttner places an extensive section on Weimar society and culture between the building blocks of politics until hyperinflation in 1923 and political stabilization since 1924, followed by an analysis of the 'long demise of the Republic' since 1930. The chapter on society contains a good overview on the various elements of cultural production, both high-brow and popular. Büttner is right in stressing the limited impact the mass cultural media of radio broadcasts and cinema

[2] Peter Fritzsche, 'Did Weimar Fail?', *Journal of Modern History* 68 (1996), pp. 629-656, here p. 632.
[3] Peter Longerich, *Deutschland 1918-1933. Die Weimarer Republik* (Hanover, 1995).

had on the levelling of social milieu. Their key effect was rather to polarize German society between those who used and embraced these new media and those who resented them in the name of a peculiar German *Kultur* (pp. 332ff.). A brief but informative chapter outlines the societal significance of and fragmentation within the confessional milieux of Protestants and Catholics, a theme which is often neglected in English-language accounts (pp. 268-282).

Büttner's nicely paced description offers a multi-faceted picture of political and social developments and surveys a large amount of recent research on empirical details mostly by German historians in a reliable and accessible fashion. But her overall narrative and the conclusion she draws are rather conventional. She stresses the handicaps presented by the failure of the revolution to tackle the power-bases of the military and East-Elbian agrarian elites, the immobility of the parties and the denial of the defeat in 1918. Ultimately, under the 'pressure' exerted by the Great Depression, a 'power vacuum' allowed the 'revisionist ambition' of a conservative leadership to sacrifice the democratic system (pp. 507, 509). These are not only firmly established interpretive points which would not have required the incorporation of recent research on society and culture. Büttner also falls back on a dated conceptual approach to politics, which – for instance – blames the backroom wire-pulling of individuals such as Kurt von Schleicher for Hindenburg's decision to withdraw his support for the government of Hermann Müller in 1930, but has little to say about the significance and the meaning of symbols and their crucial power to strengthen or realign political allegiances (pp. 394, 455).

While Büttner's account is couched in the metaphorical language of mechanistic causation, a metonymy is at the centre of the elegant but not entirely convincing interpretation of Weimar's 'promise and tragedy' by Eric Weitz. 'Weimar was Berlin, Berlin Weimar. The capital city was the symbol and pacesetter. For the rest of Germany it was too far in front.' (p. 79) As in every metonymy, a relation between elements is expressed in this formulation, and the 'diversity and excitement' (p. 78) of Berlin's culture in the 1920s can be seen as the driving force towards the future of a modern society. This metonymical formulation opens and ends a chapter on 'Walking the City' (pp. 41-79). Here, Weitz relies on Franz Hessel and Joseph Roth as key witnesses while he introduces the reader to the cityscape of the metropolis, explaining the landmarks of modernist architecture around the Potsdamer Platz, the New Synagogue in the Oranienburgerstrasse as the centre of the Jewish community, and

the AEG turbine factory designed by Peter Behrens as an appropriate expression of the modernity of rationalised industrial production.

In substantial chapters, Weitz describes the fragmentation of Weimar's political culture and the legitimacy crisis created by the economic turbulences of inflation and depression. He outlines the counterrevolutionary assault on the republic and the shared basis of a conservative rhetoric that was centered around keywords such as *Volkstum*, *Führer*, *Gemeinschaft*. In some of his rather sweeping generalizations, though, crucial differences are omitted. There was, for instance, a much greater potential for a semantics of participatory democracy among Catholics than Weitz is ready to admit (p. 340). Industrial workers in particular openly voiced their resentment against the 'Gemeinschaftsquatsch' (community nonsense) propagated by many theologians and some Catholic associations, as Otto Müller, the clerical head (*Präses*) of the Catholic worker's associations at Rhine and Ruhr noted already in 1921.[4] In his conclusion, Weitz highlights the lack of consensus in society and politics as one of the crucial reasons for Weimar's demise, a demise he encapsulates in terms of a 'Greek tragedy', where those who were 'striving for something new and wonderful' encountered 'absolute evil' and had to succumb to these higher powers (p. 361).

Every reader will enjoy the engaging style and the beautifully crafted narrative of this excellent general history of Weimar. But this cannot detract from the fact that the metonymical argument at the core of Weitz' book is flawed. It is flawed in conceptual terms, as a focus on Berlin does not allow to account for the dynamics within the national camp of the German electorate which were the key reason for the Nazi party success at the ballot box.[5] Across the *Reich* and starting in 1918, various Protestant-conservative milieux experienced massive social change and political upheaval. Without a closer look at these developments, such as the radicalization of the rural Landvolk-movement in Schleswig-Holstein, the workings of the counterrevolutionary *Ordnungszelle* Bavaria with its strongholds in Franconia, or the brutal crackdown against strikes and protests of rural labourers in Pomerania and other East-Elbian

[4] Cited in Gotthard Klein, *Der Volksverein für das katholische Deutschland 1890-1933. Geschichte, Bedeutung, Untergang* (Paderborn, 1996), p. 152; see also Raymond C. Sun, '"Hammer blows". Work, the Workplace, and the Culture of Masculinity among Catholic Workers in the Weimar Republic', *Central European History* 37 (2004), pp. 245-271.

[5] For the idea of three distinctive electoral camps in Weimar (Catholic, Socialist, and Nationalist), which saw little fluctuation across their boundaries but major internal realignment in the Nationalist camp, see Karl Rohe, *Wahlen und Wählertraditionen in Deutschland. Kulturelle Grundlagen deutscher Parteien und Parteiensysteme im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt/Main, 1992).

provinces of Prussia, no convincing picture of the realignment of voter preferences and political expectations can be drawn.[6] But the metonymy 'Berlin was Weimar' is not convincing in empirical terms either. Roughly one half of the book is devoted to chapters on artistic achievements in architecture, film, photography, literature and on high-brow intellectuals. While the selection of artists covered is somewhat predictable, all these cultural currents are treated with great diligence and expertise. Problematic, however, is the underlying notion that the modernist experiments of the Bauhaus architects or of directors such as Fritz Lang and Walter Ruttmann represent the gist of Weimar's high brow culture, and that the 'Berliner's love affair with the cinema' (p. 236) is indicative of a wider trend across the country.

To the contrary, the contexts for the production and consumption of mass culture were much more diverse and much less 'modern' than Weitz suggests. In a brilliant chapter in the 'Short Oxford History' of Weimar edited by Anthony McElligott, Karl Christian Führer sets the record straight and offers a welcome antidote against the trend in Anglo-American cultural studies to overestimate the modernity and cutting-edge experimental nature of cultural creativity in the 1920s.[7] Based on his own substantial research into both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of radio broadcasting and cinema-going[8], he points out that precisely those films which are usually mentioned as icons of 1920s modernity did not appeal to the wider public. Metropolis, for example, 'was a box office flop that proved costly to the Ufa', its production company. Meanwhile, sentimental films about Heidelberg as the 'epitome of romantic Germany', in an epidemic of cheesy plots set in medieval town centres attracted huge crowds even in the capital (p. 273f.). In 1927, the novelist Erich Kästner complained bitterly about this trend, stating that '[t]he Rhine and Neckar rivers flow through Berlin's cinemas as if it could not be otherwise, and the couples hold their hands in the dark and borrow each other's handkerchiefs and shed a tear.' (p. 274) Equally flawed is the point made by Weitz that Weimar 'cinema was the quintessential mass entertainment form' (p. 236), bringing together people from all

[6] Theological reasons for the appeal of the Nazi party in Protestant circles are discussed in the trailblazing book by Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich. Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945* (Cambridge, 2003). See also idem, 'Christianity and the Nazi-Movement: A Response', *Journal of Contemporary History* 42 (2007), pp. 185-211.

[7] For this trend see recently, based on misunderstood statistical figures, Anton Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema. Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton, 2009), p. 207.

[8] See Karl Christian Führer, 'A Medium of Modernity? Broadcasting in Weimar Germany, 1923-1932', *Journal of Modern History* 69 (1997), pp. 722-753; following on from this argument, compare Corey Ross, 'Mass Culture and Divided Audiences. Cinema and Social Change in Inter-War Germany', *Past and Present* 193 (2006), pp. 157-195.

strata of society and thus levelling deferential attitudes and the boundaries between social milieux. But as Führer explains, 'cinema audiences were marked by patterns of social difference and social exclusion' (p. 277). Even among the white-collar employees at a Siemens plant in Berlin surveyed in 1934, more than half did not at all attend film screenings, and only about 20 percent watched new films regularly. As Führer argues, it is time to bring the small Thuringian town of Weimar back into the equation. The key cultural hub in Weimar was the highly traditional and pompous National Theatre. Weimar was the town that saw the first attempts of the Bauhaus to create modernist design. But it also experienced 'the first cultural purge' carried out by Wilhelm Frick, the Nazi party cultural minister of Thuringia in 1930/31 (p. 278). Altogether, the town of Weimar was a far cry away from the metropolitan modernist culture which has come to dominate our mental map of the Weimar era. Hence, it can be concluded that Berlin was not Weimar. Rather, Weimar was still Weimar.

Karl Christian Führer's chapter is not the only contribution to the Short Oxford History-volume which brilliantly summarises key paradoxes of German politics and society in the 1920s and early 1930s. In a lucid and succinct interpretation, Harold James outlines the political economy of the era as a succession of problematic policy choices. The 'can do' approach of the inflationary period rested on 'policy making by bargaining'. After the hyperinflation had demonstrated that such an approach was dysfunctional and wrecked the currency and financial markets, politicians opted for the 'cannot do' approach (p. 124). From 1924 onwards, they tried to demonstrate that their hands were tied and applied fiscal restraint in order to restore the trust of international financial markets in the German economy. Their efforts, though, were in vain, as German economic performance was weak long before the Great Depression. Keynesian solutions were not applicable, as James explains in line with Knut Borchardt's arguments. They were out of range not for political reasons, but for lack of 'economic viability' (p. 121).

In an equally concise chapter, Young-Sun Hong explains the complicated details and ambivalences of welfare state provision. She also brings some closure to the heated debates about Peukert's interpretation of Weimar's social policy. Peukert had pointed to the authoritarian and exclusionary elements of social engineering through eugenics which unravelled during the Great Depression, and to the continuities from ideas about the 'selection' of the asocial until 1933 to those about their necessary

'eradication' after 1933.[9] These continuities mark, in his interpretation, the dark side of a typically modern form of state intervention. Young-Sun Hong's careful consideration of these arguments rests basically on two points. First, a large chunk of welfare state expenditure in Weimar was not related to inherent problems and pathologies of 'modernity', but rather to the remnants of total war in the guise of hundreds of thousands disabled veterans, war widows and orphans. The 1920 Reich Pension Law, which catered for these groups, had some peculiar characteristics such as the reintegration of disabled men into the workplace as a key imperative, and the notion that the possible contribution of the disabled individuals to national productivity was the benchmark for the amount of practical assistance and pension that was provided (and not their classification according to military or other status groupings). More crucial, though, was the fact that social policy for veterans was characterised by a 'systemic conflict' between a 'discourse of sacrifice and service, and the new social experts' who focused on the 'imperatives of national reconstruction' (p. 184). This was, in other words, a conflict between a nationalist and moralist language of entitlement and an equally nationalist discourse of collective renewal. Second, there are reasons to paint a more positive picture of programmes devoted to social hygiene, such as those against tuberculosis and infant mortality, two perennial plights of working-class livelihood. While much literature has interpreted these activities with the social discipline paradigm, i.e. as attempts to 'civilise' and control the labouring classes, Young-Sun Hong points out that workers actually 'valued these programmes'. She is also keen to emphasize that the positive eugenic measures implied in these programmes were meant to educate and not to eliminate the 'unfit' (p. 198).

Discontinuities between the welfare systems in Weimar and the Nazi state are, therefore, more important than continuities, even the 'kind of dialectical continuities identified by Peukert' (p. 203). Argued in the short space allotted to a handbook article, this is a substantial conclusion, as the exclusionary potentials of the welfare state and its eugenicist underpinnings were a crucial cornerstone of Peukert's argument about the ambivalences of 'classical modernity' and have attracted much attention ever since.[10] But, alas, not all chapters of the Short Oxford History offer such

[9] Peukert, *Weimar*, p. 140.
[10] See, for instance, Uwe Lohalm, 'Die Wohlfahrtskrise 1930-1933. Vom ökonomischen Notprogramm zur rassenhygienischen Neubestimmung', in: Frank Bajohr, Werner Johe and Uwe Lohalm (eds), *Zivilisation und Barbarei. Die widersprüchlichen Potentiale der Moderne. Detlev Peukert zum*

a focused and conclusive survey of key issues for an assessment of the first German republic. Less impressive, for instance, is a chapter by John Bingham on the 'urban republic'. Setting out to exemplify Peukert's 'crisis of classical modernity' in the context of urbanization and its concomitant problems of the provision of infrastructure and urban planning, most of the chapter details administrative structures and the policies of the *Deutscher Städtetag*, which represented municipal authorities across the country. Failed reform attempts shaped the policies of urban planning, but this was more based on a persistent funding crisis than on ambivalences which are inherent to the modern condition. The attractions, achievements and pitfalls of urban modernity are much more convincingly outlined in Adelheid von Saldern's chapter on architecture and housing reform in the same volume. This focus on the cities creates, on the other hand, a certain imbalance in the overall composition of this survey volume. While reforms and reform blockages in urban settings are described with some overlap in two chapters, the reform of labour relations in the agrarian economy, social changes and nationalist mobilization in the countryside are – again, as in Weitz' account – virtually absent from this survey of Weimar society.

II. Gender and Class, Class and Gender

'Gender' as an analytical category is another way of conceptualising the course of German history in the 1920s, and the broader reformulation of women's history as gender history in the 1980s marked in many ways the starting point for a fresh reconsideration of the politics of the body in Weimar as a history of the body politic or *Volkskörper*. The conceptual terms of the debate, however, still tend to be skewed or obscured. How else can it be explained that the title of Kathleen Canning's chapter in the 'Short Oxford History' is 'women and the politics of gender'? Any proper consideration of gender should flag up the fact that it only makes sense as a relational category. Images, perceptions and practices of femininity and masculinity do not exist as separate entities, but are related to each other, and only these often troublesome and

Gedenken (Hamburg, 1991), pp. 193-225; David Crew, 'The Ambiguities of Modernity. Welfare and the German State from Wilhelm to Hitler', in: Geoff Eley (ed.), *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany, 1870-1930* (Ann Arbor, 1996), pp. 319-344, and the critical discussion by Edward Ross Dickinson, 'Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy: Some Reflections on our Discourse about 'Modernity'', *Central European History* 37 (2004), pp. 1-48. As a fascinating attempt to reinterpret the crisis of the welfare state as a signifier for social disorder, see Alex Zukas, '"Lazy, Apathetic and Dangerous": The Social Construction of Unemployment in Germany during the late Weimar Republic', *Contemporary European History* 10 (2001), pp. 25-49.

conflict-ridden relations constitute 'gender' as a field of social configurations and political aspirations. But men are virtually absent from Canning's chapter, and where they are mentioned in passing, it is only in order to reaffirm the significance of 'gender and women' (pp. 167f.), but not in an attempt to analyse the gendering of masculinities.

These conceptual problems are accentuated by an implicit tendency to reintroduce a rather straightforward narrative of female emancipation in a story that begins with female activism and women's protests in the dying months of Imperial Germany and the early days of the republic and ends with the authoritarian backlash against the gainful employment of women in the debates about the 'double earners' during the Great Depression (pp. 167f.). There is no denying that many conservatives wanted to return to a traditional, paternalistic form of gender relations and to undo the progressive achievements the constitutional settlement in 1919 had granted to women even though it had not fulfilled hopes for full 'political and social equality' between women and men (p. 153). But the point that mobilization for total war ushered in a series of fundamental 'transformations of gender' (p. 146) is pushed too far by Canning, and cannot be sustained in the light of existing research. Canning suggests that involvement in wartime industries and encounters with the state in the realm of consumer policies provided German women with 'crucial lessons in citizenship', gave a boost to their civic agency and prepared them 'across political, social and religious divides' to see suffrage as a welcome reward for their 'contribution to the war efforts' (pp. 147f.). These are sweeping but unconvincing generalizations. Ute Daniel's magisterial analysis has demonstrated the widespread consensus among the state, employers and workers of both sexes that women's wartime employment should remain an interim measure without long-term social or political consequences. And the existing body of first-hand testimony suggests that women during World War I interpreted their own situation not in terms of agency or citizenship, but rather in a bleak language of despair caused by economic misery and personal bereavement, a language that indicates the utterly conservative consequences of the war in the field of gender relations.[11] Bereavement, to be sure, does not necessarily rule out female

[11] See Ute Daniel, *The War from Within. German Working Class Women in the First World War* (Oxford, 1997); Benjamin Ziemann, 'Geschlechterbeziehungen in deutschen Feldpostbriefen des Ersten Weltkrieges', in Christa Hämmerle and Edith Saurer (eds.), *Briefkulturen und ihr Geschlecht. Zur Geschichte der privaten Korrespondenz vom 16. Jahrhundert bis heute* (Vienna, 2003), pp. 261-282.

citizenship. But evidence for the latter is rather thin on the ground. While Canning states that 'emancipation is not an apt term to describe women's wartime experiences' (p. 147), it would be more appropriate to say that it is simply the wrong term.

Still, ideas and practices of feminism and emancipation provided an important part of the trajectory of women's lives in Weimar. But they did so in a much more complicated and contradictory manner than Canning assumes, and these departures were not necessarily best represented by the iconic images of the 'new woman' as a symbol of Weimar's modernity, as she suggests (pp. 163ff.). Some of these contradictions are explained in exemplary fashion in Cornelie Usborne's book on 'Cultures of Abortion in Weimar Germany'. Building on her earlier work on this topic, but expanding it through further substantial archival research and a sophisticated application of cultural history-approaches, Usborne is able to illuminate the full extent of competing and conflicting images, experiences and practices which marked abortion as a key battlefield of gender relations. Usborne first explores the narratives of abortion and abortion reform in popular drama, fiction and films. These representations were linked to 'male fears and fantasies', as many of them focused on the notion of the 'downtrodden' working class woman who sought an abortion after many earlier pregnancies (p. 57). The middle-class professionals who wrote and produced those films or books subscribed to a medicalized understanding of abortion, according to which only the expertise of academically trained (male) professionals could offer a rational and safe solution in case of unwanted pregnancies. Hence, perceptions of abortion as a 'bleak and dangerous experience' and 'wholly negative' images of lay practitioners pervaded these narratives (p. 62).

The reality, however, was different. With her painstaking research, Usborne is able to demonstrate that lay abortionists, the so-called 'wise women' or '*Engelmacherinnen*' dominated the field, despite an anti-quackery campaign driven by the vested interests of the medical profession. She can demonstrate that these mostly female practitioners, due to their often 'extensive abortion experience' were effectively 'a safer option than doctors' (p. 123). As for many other aspects of abortion in Weimar, class is a key factor to explain the preference of many pregnant women for lay practitioners. For women with a working-class background, they did not only offer better service for considerably lower fees, but also the comfort of a similar social background and of shared values, as opposed to the middle-class background of medical doctors (p. 125). But Usborne not only analyzes institutional

settings and discourses in popular culture. Reversing a trend among gender historians to focus on the body as a signifier, she also aims to reconstruct the lived bodily experiences of women who sought an abortion. Based on a careful reading of court-files, this investigation reveals a rich and often ambiguous repertoire of perceptions and descriptions. While well familiar with the 'rational' medical terminology used to describe pregnancy and termination, many women referred to traditional, unscientific notions such as 'blocked blood' to describe an illness for which they sought an appropriate remedy (p. 161). Usborne uses the records of the trial against a certain Mrs Kastner and her husband, who stood in the dock in 1924 for performing abortions in no less than 17 villages around Limburg in Hesse in the past five years. This criminal investigation allows Usborne to unearth a dense network of informal social relations that involved both pregnant women and the support of their partners or husbands, a network that blurs commonly held notions of abortion as a predominantly urban and Protestant practice.

'Cultures of Abortion' is not only the seminal study on one of the most contested and high-profile issues in Weimar politics. It is also a superb demonstration of how 'gender' can be used to complicate well-established historical narratives. This is not the meanwhile conventional tale of the emancipated metropolitan 'New Woman' who exercised abortion as part of her rationalized sexuality. The many lower-class women who figure in Usborne's account, as they resorted to or practised abortions, rather represent hidden and much more ambiguous attempts to reassert control over their bodies and to regain agency with regard to their life-course. And while this Weimar is certainly more than Berlin, spread out across the rural hills and valleys in Hesse and other places at the periphery of urban 'modernity', it was also present in Berlin. In the metropolis, a concierge who acted as both fortune-teller and abortionist embodies the 'cultural diversity' of a gendered culture where superstitious enchantment and rational control of the body could coexist and sometimes coalesce (pp. 22, 224).

Emancipation was part and parcel of the struggle for a safe and practicable abortion, but it had a wider meaning than the usual focus on the politicised debates about a reform of the notorious paragraph 218 of the penal code that regulated abortion law suggests. A similar caveat applies with regard to participatory citizenship, i.e. the entitlements and rights individuals and groups claim within the political arena or the state. Citizenship was quintessentially a gendered set of ideas and practices. But it was, especially in the Weimar republic, not necessarily a

politically progressive or 'leftist' endeavour, as one might assume given the fact that the revolutionary movement and its transformation into parliamentary practice mark the beginning of this period. As Christiane Streubel succinctly demonstrates in her monograph on female radical nationalists in the Weimar republic, citizenship can be equally understood as an acquisitive and aggressive set of ideas about the renewal of the nation through responsibility, the forming of a new elite and an overhaul of the existing democratic institutions.

Streubel's main object of study are a number of radical nationalist women who founded, in 1920, the *Ring Nationaler Frauen* (Ring of National Women, RNF) as an umbrella group for right-wing women's associations and as a platform for their representation in the nationalist camp. Most of these women had a Protestant middle-class background, were right-wing members of the German National People's Party (DNVP) and worked as writers, journalists or editors for nationalist periodicals, including the fortnightly *Die Deutsche Frau*, the journal of the RNF, and the dailies *Deutsche Zeitung* and *Der Tag*, which were affiliated with the DNVP and the Pan German League. Streubel outlines the political biographies of key protagonists such as Käthe Schirrmacher, and the mobilization of their political interest during the war. Here, they became involved in the struggle about the continuation of the war fought by the Fatherland Party, and learned to see the *Nationaler Frauendienst* of women's associations set up in 1914 as a role-model for female patriotic participation in public affairs.

Trying to drum up support for female participation in a conservative milieu with rather rigid and utterly traditional gender roles was never an easy task, as Streubel makes clear in painstaking detail. But she points to the relative success the women in the RNF had when they tried to change the terms of the nationalist discourse and present women's activism as a crucial prerequisite for a rejuvenation of the German nation amidst defeat, moral crisis and foreign hegemony as epitomised by Versailles. The women journalists vacillated with regard to the grounds for legitimate female citizenship. Sometimes they claimed that women's liberation and the liberation of the German people would serve each other and 'are one' (p. 379). On other occasions, they tapped into the notion of comradeship developed by veterans associations and described women as 'co-fighters' (*Mitkämpferinnen*) for the national cause (p. 390). Despite their anti-republican activism and their (rather subdued) anti-Semitism these right-wing journalists were feminists, as Streubel states, as they aimed for the

elimination of power differences between the sexes, if only within a nationalist framework (pp. 401f.). As female nationalists hoped, the crucial participatory contribution of women to the *Volksgemeinschaft* or people's community - their key political concept - could turn them into saviours of their *Volk* (pp. 327ff.). This service was not only the key lever to demand a more equal share for women in society and politics. It allowed at the same time to blame the 'current shambles' of democratic statesmanship and foreign policy powerlessness on the 'total collapse of the men's state Germany' since 1918 (Sophie Rogge-Börner in 1924), a formulation that added a crucial dimension to the gendering of this participatory citizenship (p. 313).

Gender is also an important conceptual category in Sabine Hake's study of 'Modern Architecture and Mass Society in Weimar Berlin'. Gender is brought to the fore in a chapter that summarises the key contemporary texts on white-collar employees by Erich Fromm, Siegfried Kracauer and Hans Speier and uses them as a springboard for a discussion of negative perceptions of mass society, which all pointed to the irrational and emotional – and thus by implication feminine – qualities of the masses that populated the streets of the metropolis during the 1920s (p. 88). Gender is also crucial for Hake's thoughtful interpretation of Walter Ruttmann's film 'Berlin. Symphony of a Big City' (1927). This movie presents key signifiers of white-collar workers and the visual codes of their consumerist culture in its five movements. Ruttmann used the organizing principles of classical music to show the rhythm and structure of a day in Berlin. Most other chapters of Hake's book are, however, disappointing.

This is partly a result of Hake's jargon-ridden prose. A chapter on 'walking in the metropolis' (pp. 134-169) that follows Franz Hessel and Siegfried Kracauer through the streets of Berlin turns into a dry academic exercise, where the elegant prose of Eric Weitz in his comparable chapter makes for compelling reading and is able to convey a clear sense of place. Another reason for disappointment is Hake's insistence on class as the main interpretive category for her metonymical reading of 'Weimar culture' and 'Weimar Berlin' as 'interchangeable terms' (p. 7). In her interpretation of the fragmentation of modern life and its representation in urban architecture, class is 'the dominant identity in crisis' (p. 17). But in her analysis of the New Building in Berlin during the 1920s, taking blueprints and actual buildings by Bruno Taut, Erich Mendelsohn and others as examples for the 'sociospatial dialectic of Weimar

modernity', there is indeed at best only a 'hidden discourse on class' (p. 107). None of the sources presented or the buildings put under scrutiny make the contours or implications of a crisis of class for an understanding of the cityscape really plausible. Only surprisingly and rather in passing, Hake introduces the transition to spatial patterns of 'functional differentiation' as the gist of the architectural programmes for a New Berlin (p. 171). But functional differentiation, which is here understood as the reorganization of urban space according to different industrial, consumerist, recreational and residential purposes, was anything but a Weimar-specific novelty in debates on architectural urbanism. It had already emerged in Imperial Germany, but not necessarily replaced class-based identities. The many references to class-specific urban spaces such as in Döblin's novel 'Berlin Alexanderplatz' indicate the persistence of class-based perceptions of urban spaces rather than a crisis of class identities.

Gender remains a crucial category for an understanding of Weimar, and perhaps more so than class. Gender should, however, be strictly employed as a relational category that allows to understand the ways in which gendered classifications of both men and women permeated and informed debates about identity, agency and the order of society more generally.[12] Gender, however, does not render itself easily for a straightforward narrative of emancipation through citizenship and a modernization of sexuality. Emancipation and gender equality were also pursued by proponents of the nationalist right, and emancipation was thus as much a project of national recovery as it was one of individual liberation. While it is impossible to overlook the emancipatory elements in Weimar's gender relations, they do not add up to a narrative of romance.

III. The Semantics of Future and 'Crisis'

Crisis – or rather 'crisis' – is also the keyword for another strand of research on Weimar. Peukert identified the 'crisis of classical modernity' as a structural feature of

[12] Recent substantial contributions from the perspective of masculinities include Sabine Kienitz, *Beschädigte Helden. Kriegsinvalidität und Körperbilder 1914-1923* (Paderborn, 2008); Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft. Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2006), pp. 27-67; Daniel Morat, 'Kalte Männlichkeit? Weimarer Verhaltenslehren im Spannungsfeld von Emotionen- und Geschlechtergeschichte', in Manuel Borutta and Nina Verheyen (eds.) *Die Präsenz der Gefühle. Männlichkeit und Emotion in der Moderne* (Bielefeld, 2010), pp. 153-177.

German society in the 1920s. More recent accounts, however, are interested in the idea that the crisis of Weimar was not simply an objective condition, but rather a cultural form which could be used to imagine and reflect upon possible scenarios for a renewal of society. The semantics of 'crisis', in other words, should not be mistaken as a simple expression for the dysfunctionality of a system in terminal disarray. The key theoretical reference point is Reinhart Koselleck with his *Begriffsgeschichte* or 'history of terms and concepts'. And as Koselleck has pointed out in his investigation of the semantics of the term 'crisis', it has to be understood as a signifier for a critical situation in which a decision can be made, leading to either a negative or a positive course of events.[13] Any historical investigation of the semantics of 'crisis' is an attempt to reconstruct the contingency and openness of a situation that has been flagged up as a 'crisis' by contemporary observers.

Trailblazer for this line of enquiry was the co-edited volume by Moritz Föllmer and Rüdiger Graf. The contributions to this book offer important steps towards the 'critique of a pattern of interpretation', as the subtitle indicates. In an investigation of nomenclature, for instance, Sebastian Ullrich asks how the Weimar Republic became to be known as such. During the debates of the National Assembly in Weimar in 1919, he reminds us, all deputies except those from the two Socialist parties agreed that continuity should prevail. The National Assembly did hence not ratify the 'Constitution of the German Republic', as a widely used source-collection falsely states in the document heading, but rather the *Verfassung des Deutschen Reiches* ('Constitution of the German Empire').[14] Liberal and Majority SPD politicians were at pains to stress that this did not imply a continuation of the vanished *Kaiserreich*, but rather a reference to the democratic traditions of 1848. As it turned out quickly, though, using the term *Reich* meant conjuring up memories of the authoritarian regime the revolution in 1918 had toppled. Those who supported the new state thus began to use the term 'German Republic'. This, on the other hand, allowed right-wing circles to re-appropriate and claim the name *Reich* for their own vested interests. Ultimately, it was Hitler who first spoke of a 'Republic of Weimar' in 1929 and thus introduced, along with Communist newspapers and Ultra-Conservatives, the derogatory connotations of this name for the 'system' he wanted to overthrow (p. 199).

[13] Reinhart Koselleck, 'Crisis', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67 (2006), pp. 357-400.
[14] Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg (eds), *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley, 1994), p. 46.

The collection by Föllmer and Graf offers many other insights into the semantics of crisis in 1920s Germany. The term crisis could be used in a rather positive fashion, as Florentine Fritzen shows in her chapter on the *Reformhausbewegung* which promoted health food stores. Healthy nutrition, sober lifestyles and functional forms of domesticity in the kitchen were advertised as means to overcome the many tangible forms of misery and alienation in modern society. Seen in this perspective, 'crisis' could have a cathartic and redemptive effect. In another field of debate, outlined by Daniel Siemens, liberal newspapers talked of a 'crisis of trust' into the judiciary in order to offer constructive criticism and highlight a reform agenda. Since 1930, however, proponents of the extreme right turned this usage around and portrayed the image of a judiciary that was 'tied up' by the attempts of republican politicians to bend its impartiality (p. 157). Experts in population statistics and demography, on the other hand, presented their extrapolations of population decline in charts and graphs, as Christiane Reinecke demonstrates. These tangible scientific demonstrations of an impending 'de-population' (p. 213) fed into a widespread debate about demographic crisis scenarios and various political attempts to remedy the situation.

Many historians of Weimar have tended to reify the notion of a society in 'crisis', whereas contemporaries used these semantics in a much more open, diverse and often contradictory fashion, as the essays collected by Föllmer and Graf convincingly demonstrate. This highlights the fact that talk of a 'crisis' must not necessarily signify demise, but can also imply an understanding that society is malleable and that there is a potential for change. Or, in other words, historians should not use the existence of a 'crisis' as a tool for the causal explanation of other phenomena. Rather, they should analyze how contemporary discourses of 'crisis' shaped expectations and informed programmes for political action. Seen in this perspective, the semantics of 'crisis' are not simply mere talk or chatter. As all repetitive patterns of communication, they entail a 'reality effect'.[15] And this has, as Föllmer and Graf point out, crucial consequences for our understanding of the Nazi seizure of power. During its final years, the enemies of the republic tapped into these semantics and further sharpened them, as they pretended to overcome precisely those deficiencies which were in the first place a reality effect of the crisis-discourse (p. 39).

[15] For a brief discussion, see Benjamin Ziemann and Miriam Dobson, 'Introduction', in Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann (eds), *Reading Primary Sources. The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth- and Twentieth Century-History* (London, 2008), pp. 1-18, here pp. 11f.

The reflections and empirical investigations gathered by Föllmer and Graf are part of ongoing attempts to reconsider the openness and contingency of possible developments in 1920s Germany, as historians try to avoid a teleological interpretation of a course of events which inevitably led to the events in January 1933. Another major contribution to this strand of debate is the award-winning book by Rüdiger Graf on the 'Future of the Weimar Republic'. Expanding the argument that discourses of 'crisis' indicate crucial situations of decision-making about the future, Graf investigates the meaning of the future for Weimar's contemporaries. Building – again – on categories developed by Reinhart Koselleck, but also by the sociologist Niklas Luhmann, his focus is not on 'future presents', i.e. on the world as it will look like for those who observe it in 15 or 20 years, but rather on the 'present future', i.e. the possible worlds in 15 or 20 years which can be envisaged in the present.[16] The present future, in other words, is not something that can be measured or determined with mere chronological means. It is rather an indeterminate state, a horizon of expectations which is constantly shifting and moving and only present in the vocabulary that is used to outline its possible contours.

Graf's historical investigation of these horizons of expectations is a brilliant piece of intellectual history. He has analysed a wealth of printed material, relying not only on a couple of famous high brow intellectuals, but putting a plethora of booklets and articles by middle brow journalists, writers and academics under scrutiny. An extensive reading of articles from newspapers across the political spectrum complements this source base. The core of his argument is presented in the extensive fourth chapter, an analysis of differing degrees of optimism and pessimism about the future (pp. 83-133). As Graf readily admits, these are not the most precise analytical categories. He is nonetheless keen to challenge the conventional wisdom that the carnage and devastation caused by the First World war had rang the death knell to the broad current of nineteenth century optimistic liberal belief in progress. Quite to the contrary, he identifies a broad consensus that challenged both optimism and pessimism as long as they led to a passive attitude with regard to the future. The right-wing journal *Die Tat* ('The Deed' – an important buzzword of Weimar political discourse) neatly summed up this line of thought in 1927 when it supported a positive 'approval of culture against prophecies of doom and progress optimism' (p. 102).

[16] Niklas Luhmann, 'The Future Cannot Begin. Temporal Structures in Modern Society', *Social Research* 43 (1976), pp. 130-152, p. 140; Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York, 2004).

Germans should take the future in their own hands and contribute actively to its formation, instead of contemplating reasons to be optimistic or pessimistic. Along the way, Graf debunks some myths about Oswald Spengler's powerfully argued treatise on the philosophy of history, 'The Demise of the West', in its first instalment published in 1918. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, the book was neither meant to be an exercise in the pessimistic politics of despair nor read as such by the contemporaries (pp. 104-111).

In subsequent chapters, Graf charts other dimensions of the appropriation of the present future in Weimar's intellectual discourse. He points out that most contemporary observers believed that they would stand at the threshold to a new era, although they differed in their assumptions about the speed with which radical change could be accomplished. In various attempts to make their expectations for the future more tangible, contemporaries tried to identify temporal and spatial parameters for its implementation. Most of these were of a rather short-term nature, and the identification of 'bearers of the future' such as the New Woman or a possible *Führer* aimed to represent the future in the present.[17] He presents additional material and a more coherent interpretation of the fact, already mentioned above, that *Krisis*, in the rather old-fashioned spelling preferred by authors in Weimar, denoted a moment of openness and decision-making about the future course of events. Radical-nationalist or Communist anticipations of a future beyond the republic were already consistently spelled out in the early twenties. They were hence not simply a reflection of the economic and social crisis of the years since 1928, as it has been often assumed. Any historian who sees Weimar society riddled by perennial crisis – without inverted commas – is running the danger of simply reiterating a narrative that was concocted precisely by those who wanted to replace a democratic with an authoritarian system (pp. 367-369).

These are crucial insights. Without doubt, they will fundamentally alter the terms of the scholarly debate about the course of German history in the 1920s and early 1930s. On firm conceptual grounds, Graf is able to revitalize the notion of Weimar culture as a powerhouse of both more pragmatic and of outright utopian visions and experiments with regard to new forms of sociability. For Weimar's contemporaries, 'crisis' was not an extended period of decline, but a moment of decision-making.

[17] See Rüdiger Graf, 'Anticipating the Future in the Present: "New Women" and Other Beings of the Future in Weimar Germany', *Central European History* 42 (2009), pp. 647-673, here pp. 649f.

Some empirical limits of his argument, however, shall be briefly mentioned. It is rather unclear to what extent broader segments of society could subscribe to the intellectual ideas analysed by Graf. One could argue that the résumé articles published in newspapers at the turn of the year, an important source for his study, are not really a genre that lends itself to a critical dissection of impending gloom, unless an editor had wanted to scare his readers and drive down the print-run of his publication. An investigation of diaries and other unpublished materials would surely expand our knowledge of future expectations held by individuals and social groups. Victor Klemperer for instance, professor of romance literature in Dresden, noted on 31 December 1928 in a résumé of the ending year in his diary: 'When it did similarly not go well with me during other times, then I was younger and could still hope for the future. This is now spoilt.'[18]

To be sure, Klemperer's pessimism was primarily a result of his almost hypochondriac obsession with minor and major ailments which had plagued him throughout the year. But reading through his diaries from the Weimar period, it is impossible to overlook the degree of despair created by his many failed attempts to gain a proper chair at a major university. This was mainly the result of Klemperer's Jewish descent, even though he had been baptised in 1912, and illustrates the fact that German Jews had many reasons to be much less optimistic about the future than their Gentile neighbours. As Anthony D. Kauders argues in his magnificent chapter on 'Weimar Jewry' in the 'Short Oxford History of Germany', the Jewish minority provides in many ways a litmus test for pertinent issues historians try to assess with regard to Weimar. Jews were 'unique' not least in the sense that they were 'overwhelmingly concerned with the survival of the republic' (p. 236), as they had many good reasons to see the republic as a safeguard against substantial threats to their religious freedom and emancipation.[19] For this reason, it would be crucial to know in more detail how Jews envisioned and conceptualised the future of the republic, and how their expectations were shaped by their encounters with Gentile Germans. Any such inquiry will need to focus on local or regional examples, as only case studies provide sufficient empirical depth and avoid unsuitable generalizations.

[18] Victor Klemperer, *Leben sammeln, nicht fragen wozu und warum. Tagebücher 1918-1932*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1996), p. 465.
[19] On Jewish conceptions of community and citizenship see Sharon Gillerman, *Germans into Jews: Remaking the Jewish Social Body in the Weimar Republic* (Stanford, 2009).

A highly commendable example of such a focus is provided by Nicola Wenge in her study on 'integration and exclusion in an urban society'. Carefully investigating a broad spectrum of Jewish-Gentile relations in Cologne, Wenge is able to add complexity and nuance to this complicated topic and to question the established theory of anti-Semitism as a 'cultural code' that divided homogenous camps in society.[20] In the context of the university for instance, opened in 1919 as a municipal reform university, Jewish scholars had much higher chances to be appointed as full professors than elsewhere, and they were firmly embedded in the sociability of local academia. But the exclusion of Jewish assistant professors and students from Eastern Europe was consensual already during the early years of the republic, and radical anti-Semitism was able to hold sway among students since the late 1920s. This is just one example for the fact that anti-Semitism was not structurally determined or embedded in certain milieux, as Wenge argues. Rather, it was dependent on the specifics of the situation in which Gentile Germans tolerated or pursued exclusionary tendencies and deeds, very often dealing with different Jewish groups in a different manner. Catholics, socially and politically the hegemonic group in Cologne, perceived the anomic tendencies of modernity as a dangerous potential in quite similar terms as many Jews did. These shared perceptions opened up opportunities for tactical alliances, for instances in coordinated attempts to reject the primacy of civil law with regard to interdenominational or 'mixed' marriages, a topic which had agitated local Catholics since the 'Cologne Troubles' in 1837 (p. 105).

Articles and books by middle and high brow intellectuals were not the only available forms for a self-reflection and self-description of Weimar as a society in which the 'normal state was crisis', according to a formulation by the historian Gordon Craig (cited in Herzog, p. 2). Mass media and popular culture were, in fact, equally if not more important to convey images and perceptions of a social order that was in disarray or in a state of anomy, to employ the sociological term for a situation in which legitimate aims cannot be pursued with legal means.[21] Weimar Germany's

[20] See Shulamit Volkov, 'Antisemitism as a Cultural Code. Reflections on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Imperial Germany', *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute* 23 (1978), pp. 25-45. For a discussion and critique, see Benjamin Ziemann, '"Linguistische Wende" und „kultureller Code" in der Geschichtsschreibung zum modernen Antisemitismus', *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 14 (2005), pp. 301-322.

[21] Since Durkheim, suicide is taken as a key indicator for an anomic situation, and it is not by chance that Peukert referred to comparative rates of suicide to stress the 'all-embracing crisis' in Weimar. See idem, *Weimar*, p. 380. Compare Moritz Föllmer, 'Suicide and Crisis in Weimar Berlin', *Central European History* 42 (2009), pp. 195-221.

obsessive interest in the connections between an anomic society and crime is the topic of the interesting but somewhat inconclusive study by Todd Herzog. Using a term coined by Bernhard Weiß, the Deputy President of the Berlin Police Force in 1927, Herzog turns his attention to the 'criminalistic fantasy' of large sections of the public in the 1920s (p. 3). With a focus on the perceptions and representations of crime, Herzog aims to demonstrate the blurring of the 'boundaries between fiction and reality, as well as between the aberration and the norm' (p. 3). In a series of essays, he analyzes a variety of popular genres such as modern versions of the Pitaval – narrative accounts of sensational criminal cases written by journalists and authors –, a book by Alfred Döblin about two young women who poisoned one of her husbands, and Fritz Lang's film 'M' (1931), which was partly based on the spectacular case of the serial killer Peter Kürten who had turned Düsseldorf into a state of frenzy in 1929/1930.

Herzog is able to demonstrate how these different narratives of murder and other capital crimes reveal an almost 'paranoid' obsession with deviant behaviour that seemed to pervade society at all levels (p. 138). Crucially, the anomic crisis of society represented by and through the inflation of criminalistic fantasies was aggravated by a 'crisis of evidence' and legibility (pp. 6-8). Nineteenth century criminological discourses in the wake of Cesare Lombroso and other key authors had established a firm belief in the legibility of physical traces of crime, according to their theories of 'character types'. As Herzog's interpretation of criminological treatises and the film 'M' aims to demonstrate, Weimar observers struggled to identify criminals properly and to distinguish them from 'normal', innocent citizens. When the conventional tell tale signs of the criminal were lacking, the perception of an anomic situation was fuelled even further, as the distinction between the normal and the deviant became unstable. This interpretation successfully challenges conventional interpretations of the 'othering' of criminals in criminological science. How the crisis narratives and fantasies emerging from an obsession with crime tied in with wider discourses about the future of Weimar, however, is a problem that is not properly addressed in Herzog's brief account.

Crisis narratives are explored in a much more systematic fashion in Bernhard Fulda's well-researched and comprehensive account of daily newspapers in Weimar Germany. His focus is on Berlin, with thirty different daily newspapers in 1925 and a total print run of 3 million copies per day the undisputed capital city of the mass media. Bringing together bits and pieces of information from the scattered archival

record, Fulda does a sterling job in providing the reader with core information on newspaper circulation, finances and editorial policies. He tries to solve the conundrum posed by the discrepancy between the 'apparent might of the liberal Mosse and Ullstein' publishing houses, which dominated the market with their flagship papers *Berliner Tageblatt* and *Vossische Zeitung*, and the dwindling success of the left-liberal party DDP at the ballot box, despite its tireless support by both companies and their papers (p. 41). Fulda corroborates this discrepancy through a detailed comparison between electoral statistics and the circulation of the newspapers affiliated with the various political camps. He argues that readers clearly did not simply follow the recommendations given in the editorials of their partisan newspapers. Nonetheless, newspapers wielded a distinctive influence on politics. Drawing on concepts from the sociology of mass-communication, in particular the 'two-step flow' model of communication developed by Paul Lazarsfeld, Fulda argues that the reception of newsmedia was filtered and influenced by face-to-face interaction with local opinion leaders (pp. 209f.)

But this is only one part of the answer, and perhaps not even the most important. Taking issue with Peter Fritzsche's interpretation of the 'word city' created by the proliferation of daily and in particular tabloid newspapers in Berlin around 1900,[22] Fulda is keen to stress the 'significance of politics' and the 'fragmentation of the press in competing and often mutually hostile communication networks' as crucial parameters for an analysis of the media landscape in Weimar Germany (p. 9). Indeed, historians are well advised not to underestimate the significance of the political cleavages that structured both electoral behaviour and the competition between publishing houses and their readers. But the material presented by Fulda partially contradicts his own conceptual premises. In a revealing analysis of a survey conducted in 1924 by the *Rote Fahne*, the Communist party newspaper, Fulda is able to provide crucial insights into the reading habits and preferences of ordinary working-class people from Berlin. And as it turned out, even steadfast KPD-voters were not really interested in news about the party line or politics more generally. The preferred key sections of the paper were 'local news and courtroom news', 'illustrated supplements' and coverage of 'bourgeois' sports such as football (p. 27).

Reading habits also showed a clear gender gap, with Communist women even more interested in serialized novels and other forms of entertainment. Hence, they

[22] See Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge/Mass., 1996).

struggled with their husbands to unsubscribe to the *Rote Fahne* altogether in favour of the *Berliner Morgenpost*, which then (as today) offered a mix of light entertainment and local news stories, catering for the parochial interests of the residents in the various neighbourhoods or *Kieze* in Berlin. While Fulda is right to stress that 'increasing politicization' was a defining feature of press coverage in Weimar (p. 42), these glimpses in the reading preferences seem to suggest a different answer to the conundrum mentioned above. The reading public certainly could not avoid noticing the political preferences of newspaper proprietors, and mostly bought 'their' daily in broad agreement with one of these. But the reception of the news and their 'reality effect', i.e. the ways in which they shaped popular perceptions, was much more differentiated and less politicized. As readers opted in the first instance for sports and entertainment, political opinions and buying preferences were increasingly disconnected, and media consumption tapped into a broad variety of discourses and narratives.

This critique, however, should not distract from the major contribution Fulda's study makes to an understanding of the political 'crisis' narratives in Weimar. In a series of excellent chapters, he analyses the contribution of newspaper coverage to the climate of political strife, scapegoating and scaremongering that played into the hands of those who wanted to overthrow the republic. Taking the case of Matthias Erzberger as an example, who was vilified by the right-wing press for signing the armistice on 11 November 1918, Fulda demonstrates how 'media personalities' were shaped and how the 'climate of hate' created by relentless attacks in the press informed those perpetrators who assassinated Erzberger in August 1921 (pp. 60f.). Fulda also offers a long-overdue account of the Barmat-affair in 1925, a political scandal about the alleged corruption of civil servants in Berlin by the Barmat brothers, Russian-Jewish businessmen.[23] While several court cases and investigations found no incriminating evidence and effectively cleared the Barmat brothers, right-wing newspapers seized the opportunity to level accusations of sleaze not only against individuals, but against the democratic 'system' as a whole, as it was henceforth called in nationalist circles. The wave of anti-democratic and anti-Semitic press coverage unleashed by the scandal had lasting effects on the political culture of the republic. Equally lucid and

[23] See also Martin Geyer, 'Der Barmat-Kutisker-Skandal und die Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen in der politischen Kultur der Weimarer Republik', in Ute Daniel, Inge Marszolek, Wolfram Pyta and Thomas Welskopp (eds.), *Politische Kultur und Medienwirklichkeiten in den 1920er Jahren* (Munich, 2010), pp. 47-80.

substantial is the chapter on the 'war of words' which accompanied the increase in street violence in 1931/1932. As Fulda convincingly argues, claims that Germany was in the midst of a 'civil war' were 'nothing but a media invention and a stick with which to beat one's political opponent' (p. 173).[24]

IV. Weimar as Theatre and the Performative Turn[25]

The sophisticated application of ideas and concepts from gender history, historical semantics and media studies can challenge conventional narratives of crisis and reinject a sense of contingency into our picture of the Weimar republic, as should be clear by now. Even though many historians might be weary of subscribing to yet another cultural 'turn', they are well advised to follow the invitation by two highly innovative studies which aim to understand the theatrical nature of politics in Weimar and to analyze the significance of political performances. Building on ideas developed by Victor Turner and other anthropologists, the performative turn is interested in the ways in which rituals and public speech acts regulate transitions in the status of individuals or institutions and facilitate or reintegrate challenges to an established social order. In this perspective, speech acts do not only convey information, but also have a performative aspect.[26] At a basic level, these are anything but novel insights. Contemporary observers in the 1920s already knew about the theatrical aspects of politics. Harry Count Kessler, who chronicled political events in his diaries, compared Karl Liebknecht's quest for a world revolution with the deliberately sensationalist appeal of the plays written by Frank Wedekind. He thus drew a parallel between the big stage of world history and the small stage of a (in his view rather badly conceived) expressionist drama. And Bertolt Brecht famously saw Hitler's success as a result of his skills as a 'versatile role-player, as actor-politician'.[27]

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[24] For a less sophisticated interpretation of this 'civil war' cf. Dirk Blasius, *Weimars Ende. Bürgerkrieg und Politik 1930-1933* (Göttingen, 2005). See my critique in *English Historical Review* 123 (2008), pp. 512-514.

[25] For this section I have benefited immensely from an article by Wolfgang Hardtwig, 'Performanz und Öffentlichkeit in der krisenhaften Moderne. Visualisierung des Politischen in Deutschland 1900-1936', in Herfried Münkler/Jens Hacke (eds), *Strategien der Visualisierung. Verbildlichung als Mittel der politischen Kommunikation* (Frankfurt/Main. New York, 2009), pp. 71-92. I am indebted to Wolfgang Hardtwig for sending me a copy of his article, and for many previous discussions about Weimar Germany.

[26] For a succinct summary in German, see Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierung in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Reinbek, 2006), pp. 104-143.

[27] See Hardtwig, 'Performanz', pp. 71f.

What historians can add to these reflections is a more systematic analysis of key stages for the performative aspects of Weimar politics. Two in particular were crucial, the parliament and the street. The *Reichstag* in Berlin-Tiergarten was, since its opening in 1894, the place where the deputies of the national parliament convened, only interrupted by the interim of the National Assembly, which met in the National Theatre in Weimar until 21 August 1919, when Friedrich Ebert was sworn in as Reich president. The transformation of parliamentary sociability in the National Assembly, not least through the admission of female deputies, is analyzed in the prologue to Thomas Mergel's path-breaking study of parliamentary culture in the Weimar Republic. Mergel cites the famous dictum by Harry Count Kessler, who ridiculed the ceremony on 21 August as 'petty bourgeois theatre', but he insists that this only reflects the excess of public expectations which were addressed at the parliament, and the fact that the deputies were keen to focus on their work, and not on representation (p. 74).

In a series of brilliantly argued chapters, Mergel first sets out to describe the 'social space' of the Reichstag in Berlin. Deputies did not only meet during the plenary sessions, as a lot of legislative work was discussed in detail in the committees. But also the restaurant, the spa with several bathtubs and the parliamentary gym offered ample opportunities to meet across the parties. These details and a survey of the social composition of deputies prepares the ground for Mergel's point that permanent interaction and symbolic integration in the building fostered a sense of cohesion among the deputies, which was able to transcend the political cleavages. In a second step, this argument is strengthened through an analysis of the formal rules and informal procedures that governed the order of lawmaking, an order from which only the unruly Communist deputies, who despised the parliament as an instrument of bourgeois power, excluded themselves. Thus, Mergel insists, it is possible to make an overall positive assessment of the legislative function of the house, i.e. to stress that the deputies played a crucial role in the constant formulation of new legislation, although they were keen to share the burden of technical preparation with the government bureaucrats.

In a third step, Mergel uses discourse analysis for a dissection of four different patterns of speech which were used in the plenary sessions. While parliamentary practise is meant to lay bare political disagreement across the parties, speaking in the plenum, he argues, also required a certain degree of earnestness and authenticity when

a deputy wanted to be taken seriously. The rhetoric of the executive and that of statesmanship, the two most widely used performative patterns of speech, fostered integration through conflict over details, and left not much semantic space for a rhetoric of principled opposition to parliamentary democracy. This implicit consensus ranged from the SPD to the nationalist-conservative DNVP, Mergel insists. But this internal consensus also had pitfalls, as he makes clear. The Reichstag never really bothered to convey the meaning of its proceedings to a larger public. Only very few visitors were admitted, relations with the press were complicated, and the radio broadcasting of debates, possible since 1925, was unanimously rejected. Outside observers were not interested in the performative regulation of consensus in the house either. They expected the parliament to be no less than a utopian anticipation of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and wanted to see action, not rhetoric. These expectations prepared the ground for the National Socialists, who denounced the parliament as a mere *Quasselbude* (chatter hut) in their propaganda. Among other factors, it was also the massive presence of NSDAP deputies in the Reichstag since 1930 that ultimately led to a collapse of the common parliamentary discourse of order and to constant conflicts over formal procedural rules.

Mergel's impressive study demonstrates in exemplary fashion what 'rethinking Weimar' could mean. First, he rediscovers the Reichstag as a crucial site for the practice of parliamentary democracy. Second, he demonstrates with great conceptual diligence how the history of a political institution can be interpreted as a series of performative interactions, procedures and rules. Third, he successfully challenges the conventional wisdom that fragmentation along the lines of milieux and their cleavages pervaded all aspects of politics in Weimar. It is also for this reason that Mergel's study has triggered an angry backlash from conceptually conservative historians. Manfred Kittel in particular, author of a lengthy though anything but innovative comparative regional study of political mentalities in France and Franconia, has voiced his anger about a book that is in his view written 'in the gesture of a cultural revolutionary' and situated in the 'Bielefeld milieu' – which is the conservative codeword for the deliberate destruction of historical scholarship through left-liberal politics and cultural history approaches.[28]

[28] Manfred Kittel, '„Steigbügelhalter" Hitlers oder „stille Republikaner"? Die Deutschnationalen in neuerer politikgeschichtlicher und kulturalistischer Perspektive', in Hans-Christof Kraus/Thomas Nicklas (eds) *Geschichte der Politik. Alte und neue Wege*, Munich 2007, pp. 201-235, here pp. 204, 235. Cf. Kittel, *Provinz zwischen Reich und Republik. Politische Mentalitäten in Deutschland und*

Kittel's key criticism regards the point that the parliamentary party of the DNVP underwent a 'silent republicanisation', a pragmatic integration into parliamentary practise. This could have turned, Mergel argues, the DNVP into a German equivalent to the Tories, and was only interrupted by the radical shake-up of the parliamentary group through Alfred Hugenberg, party leader since October 1928 (pp. 323-331, 422-427).[29] In part, this critique reflects an imprecise use of terminology by Mergel. The gradual trend towards the integration of DNVP deputies into the house and their constructive parliamentary opposition would have been better labelled a 'silent parliamentarization', as reservations against the republican system surely persisted among them. But on most counts, Kittel simply misrepresents both Mergel's argument and the critique by other historians.

He picks on a fairly general formulation about the timing of this process in the conclusion, and ignores that Mergel explicitly sees the devastating defeat of the DNVP in the May 1928 elections and the subsequent decimation of the parliamentary party as the crucial turning point (pp. 422, 483).[30] Kittel makes much ado about the fact that DNVP rank-and-file members and the party functionaries in Franconia rejected any compromises. But he forgets to mention that Mergel explicitly notes the applause for Hugenberg's radicalism 'in the province' – as opposed to the deputies who were purged by the media entrepreneur, a fact that again highlights the misunderstanding between parliamentary deputies and those who were represented, a key point in Mergel's book (p. 425).[31] Finally, Kittel cites another study of parliamentary practise by Thomas Raithel, who presents, with many sound arguments, a more critical picture of a Reichstag which temporarily abandoned its legislative function already during the hyperinflation. Equally, talk of a 'silent republicanisation' of the DNVP goes 'too far' for Raithel.[32] But he thinks that Mergel has by and large 'rightly' stressed the forces that integrated the DNVP into parliamentary culture up till 1928, and argues that parliamentary integration and functional disorder were

Frankreich 1918-1933/36 (Munich, 2000).

[29] In more detail, see Thomas Mergel, 'Das Scheitern des deutschen Tory-Konservatismus. Die Umformung der DNVP zu einer rechtsradikalen Partei 1928-1932', *Historische Zeitschrift* 276 (2003), pp. 323-368. Following on from Mergel's argument see Larry Eugene Jones, 'German Conservatism at the Crossroads. Count Kuno von Westarp and the Struggle for Control of the DNVP, 1928-30', *Contemporary European History* 18 (2009), pp. 147-177.

[30] Compare Kittel, 'Die Deutschnationalen', p. 207.

[31] Cf. ibid., pp. 207-215.

[32] Ibid., pp. 234f.; compare Thomas Raithel, 'Funktionsstörungen des Weimarer Parlamentarismus', in Graf/Föllmer (eds.), *Krise*, pp. 243-266, quote p. 256.

'complementary aspects' of Weimar's parliamentarism – two remarks which are not cited by Kittel.[33]

The performative drama of Weimar politics was in many ways a result of the 'dramatization of the political' since August 1914, when the necessary sacrifices for the war effort had to be confirmed by patriotic gatherings on the streets of Berlin and other big cities.[34] Enacting the patriotic drama of national survival in the public became a pivotal form for the re-enactment of the political, and the streets were thus turned into another important stage for political performances. In the aftermath of the war, the various Combat Leagues on the left and right of the political spectrum paraded the streets in a 'struggle over public terrain and symbols, which often assumed ritualistic features and was characterized by the use of limited methods and instruments', as Dirk Schumann argues (p. 305). His regional study on the Prussian province of Saxony offers a detailed account of the various acts of political violence. Schumann charts the reasons for the various violent incidents throughout the republic, from the 'March action' in 1921, which he does interpret as an escalation of conflicts between the government and armed workers rather than as a Communist putsch, to the street battles in 1931/32.

During those years, the Nazi storm troopers were the key driving force for the escalation of political violence, whereas the Communists, the main target of violent attacks by the Brownshirts, found themselves 'in a structurally inferior position', not least after the ban of the Red Front Fighter's League in May 1929 (p. 312). But the 'seeds of the escalation of violence in the last years of Weimar were sown during the supposedly calm middle years', when members of the Protestant middle class, led by the Stahlhelm, displayed more radical tendencies in a pursuit of a unified *Volksgemeinschaft* (p. 312). This is a convincing argument[35], albeit one that is based on a highly problematic definition of political violence, as it includes acts of coercion aimed at objects (p. xvii), instead of focusing on 'deliberate bodily harm against other' persons, as Heinrich Popitz has suggested in his landmark study on the sociology of violence.[36] Stormtroopers, to be sure, also smashed shop-windows and

[33] Raithel, 'Funktionsstörungen', pp. 256, 264.
[34] Bernd Weisbrod, 'Die Politik der Repräsentation. Das Erbe des Ersten Weltkrieges und der Formwandel der Politik in Europa', in Hans Mommsen (ed.), *Der Erste Weltkrieg und die europäische Nachkriegsordnung. Sozialer Wandel und Formveränderung der Politik* (Cologne, 2000), pp. 13-41, here pp. 31ff.
[35] It was first formulated, however, by Peter Fritzsche, *Rehearsals for Fascism: Populism and Political Mobilisation in Weimar Germany* (New York, 1990), pp. 166-189.
[36] Heinrich Popitz, *Phänomene der Macht* (Tübingen, 1992) (2nd edition), p. 48. See also Birgitta

were tearing down republican symbols. But the qualitative leap to assaults on human bodies is what requires conceptual attention. These conceptual shortcomings also lead to the rather descriptive nature of Schumann's account. While he outlines the immediate causes of violent incidents in great detail, he fails to properly contextualise the performative dynamics of the violence itself. The use of violence by the storm troopers was bound up with their invention of different social configurations which enabled them to enact violent performances, as Sven Reichardt has shown in his innovative, comparative study of the Italian Squadristi and the SA.[37]

Crucial elements of these performative street politics of the storm troopers are analyzed in an innovative study by Timothy Brown. He discusses the ways in which both Nazis and Communists tried to tap into the symbolic languages of nationalism and socialism and thus formed a 'semiotic community' (p. 149). His focus is on the final years of the republic. As far as the storm troopers are concerned, he draws material from some of the familiar incidents of populist revolt against the 'fat cats' (*Bonzentum*) in the party leadership, for instance the so-called Stennes-revolt by the SA Deputy Leader East, Wilhelm Stennes, in 1931. But this is not the familiar story of two distinct and monolithic totalitarian movements which fought with similar methods for different aims. Brown insists that the performative re-appropriation of symbolic languages occurred both between and 'within those movements' (p. 149), when rank-and-file members and local leaders tried to tap into a discourse of 'social radicalism', a term Brown borrows from Helmuth Plessner (p. 4). With a lucid interpretation of textual and visual sources, Brown can demonstrate how radical currents in both parties employed gendered, militarised and anti-Semitic symbols in order to stage a popular alternative to the deficiencies of industrial capitalism and parliamentary democracy. This political performance drew on 'authenticity' as a key value, as opposed to the 'dishonesty' that characterised the political theatre in other arenas (p. 13). Thus, Brown not only confirms that the coherence of the party ideology was less relevant for the political appeal of the Nazis than the performative power of their speech acts. He also makes a vital contribution to an understanding of

Nedelmann, 'Kommentar', in: Benjamin Ziemann (ed.), *Perspektiven der Historischen Friedensforschung* (Essen, 2002), pp. 101-109.

[37] See Sven Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde. Gewalt und Gemeinschaft im italienischen Squadrismus und in der deutschen SA* (Cologne, 2002). For a concise English summary of this argument, see idem, 'Fascist Marches in Italy and Germany: Squadre and SA before the Seizure of Power', in Matthias Reiss (ed.), *The Street as Stage. Protest Marches and Public Rallies since the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 169-189.

the Weimar republic as a set of competing political stages, where radicalism was not the direct result of social or economic circumstances, but part and parcel of a deliberate dramatization of political speech.

V. Tragedy or Satire? The Significance of Emplotment

Did Weimar fail? The answer to this question was never meant to be 'no'. Rather, it was an invitation to think outside the box and to contemplate new dimensions of society and politics in 1920s Germany which do not fit into the conventional narrative of 'stabilization-crisis-collapse'. In the strand of research that has responded to this challenge, elaborate theories of modernity, so vital for Peukert's interpretation, have receded into the background. Weimar's experiments and problems were more than mere manifestations of a classical modernity, they were context-specific in space, time, and attention to relevant topics, and the fact that Weimar was a post-war society was not the least relevant of these topics. After four years of mobilization for a total war, Germans were facing the specific legacy of mass-violence in the form of mutilated soldiers, widows and orphans, and had to grapple with the consequences of the psychological investment the war had required.[38] Peukert's focus on the dangerous potentials of modernity has thus given way to a series of explorations of sites and aspects of Weimar society which have not yet been extensively scrutinised by historians.

This may sound like a retreat from any attempt to develop overarching interpretations to a mere quantitative argument that recommends a little bit more local scene-setting here and the consideration of bottom-up dynamics there. But such a critique would miss two important points. First, general arguments about the modernity of Weimar society have lost much of their appeal. Peukert drew on Max Weber's ideas about the 'disenchantment' of the modern world and about the inherent ambivalences of rationalization.[39] With hindsight, however, we can see that Peukert

[38] This point is convincingly argued by Matthew Stibbe, *Germany 1914-1933. Politics, Society and Culture* (Harlow, 2010). See also the themes developed by Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford, 1993); Benjamin Ziemann, 'Introduction', in Bernd Ulrich and Benjamin Ziemann (eds), *German Soldiers in the Great War. Letters and Eyewitness Accounts* (Barnsley, 2010), pp. 1-21, here pp. 1-11. On time and space as contexts for politics see Wolfgang Hardtwig, 'Einleitung: Politische Kulturgeschichte der Zwischenkriegszeit', in idem (ed.), *Politische Kulturgeschichte der Zwischenkriegszeit 1918-1939*, Göttingen 2005, pp. 7-22, here pp. 11ff. See also the contributions in idem (ed.), *Ordnungen in der Krise. Zur politischen Kulturgeschichte Deutschlands 1900-1933* (Munich, 2007).

[39] See Detlev Peukert, *Max Webers Diagnose der Moderne* (Göttingen, 1989).

overestimated or misinterpreted the significance of many phenomena which bore the brunt of his argument in this respect. He overestimated, for instance, the significance of the New Woman and of Americanization as social phenomena.[40] It should also be noted that Peukert had literally nothing to say about the relevance of religion and confessional conflict in Weimar, even though this would have offered a chance to discuss, for instance, the intriguing ways in which Catholic intellectuals around the journal *Hochland* and its founder, Carl Muth, encountered modernity and modern art in particular.[41] Peukert's book is an example for the total neglect of the confessional divide in the work of social historians during the 1980s. This mistake has now been rectified with regard to Imperial Germany, but not with regard to the Weimar Republic.[42]And while Peukert stressed the ambivalences of rationalization with regard to sexuality and welfare-state provision, recent interpretations uncover superstitious abortion practices and focus on the post-war context of welfare state services, as we have seen above. In addition, the implementation of Fordist and Taylorist techniques in industrial production was not so much a widely embraced modern form of social engineering, as Peukert suggested. Rationalization in industry was mostly a technical instrument to make efficiency savings and increase productivity through technical means rather than a sophisticated attempt to reshape industrial relations.[43] And while ideas for a rationalization of living permeated blueprints for housing construction in Weimar, the actual implementation of practices of rationalization was very limited when new flats were built.[44]

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[40] Peukert, *Weimar*, pp. 95-101, 178-190.

[41] See Richard van Dülmen, 'Katholischer Konservatismus oder die „Soziologische Neuorientierung". Das „Hochland" in der Weimarer Zeit', *Zeitschrift für Bayerische Landesgeschichte* 36 (1973), pp. 254-303.

[42] As an overview on these debates compare Benjamin Ziemann, 'Säkularisierung, Konfessionalisierung, Organisationsbildung. Aspekte der Sozialgeschichte der Religion im langen 19. Jahrhundert', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 47 (2007), pp. 485-508. A focus on Berlin is again bound to distort the historical record. In a rare sentence on religion and piety, Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, p. 63 asserts that 'even Berliners' did still attend church 'on a regular basis'. Far from it. With an annual rate of only 14 communions per 100 Protestants in 1913, Berlin was in fact already before the war the most secularised city in Europe. See Lucian Hölscher, *Weltgericht oder Revolution. Protestantische und sozialistische Zukunftsvorstellungen im Kaiserreich* (Stuttgart, 1989), pp. 143, 156-163; more generally, see Siegfried Weichlein, 'Katholisches Sozialmilieu und kirchliche Bindung in Osthessen 1918-1933', *Archiv für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte* 45 (1993), pp. 367-389.

[43] See Philipp Gassert, '"Without Concessions to Marxist or Communist Thought". Fordism in Germany, 1923-1939', in David E. Barlay and Elisabeth Glaser-Schmidt (eds.), *Transatlantic Images and Perceptions. Germany and America since 1776* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 217-242; Uwe Burghardt, *Die Mechanisierung des Ruhrbergbaus 1890-1930* (Munich, 1995), pp. 281-310.

[44] Christoph Bernhardt/Elsa Vonau, 'Zwischen Fordismus und Sozialreform: Rationalisierungsstrategien im deutschen und französischen Wohnungsbau 1900-1933', *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 6 (2009), 2, online at <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Bernhardt-Vonau-2-2009 > (accessed 7 April 2010).

Second, historians of Weimar should follow the lead of their colleagues who work on Imperial Germany and take regional diversity seriously as not only a quantitative, but as a crucial qualitative ingredient of Germany's political culture.[45] This regional diversity was not only a result of the federal nature and fragmentation of political institutions and parties after the demise of the Holy Roman Empire, and of the confessional divide which had characterised Central European history since the Reformation and had been reinforced through the 'culture wars' in the late nineteenth century.[46] The diversity of political culture was even more exacerbated in the 1920s as a result of the loss of territories and of foreign occupation after the war. It was thus not only a key ingredient of the Catholic and Protestant milieux in various parts of the Reich. Their specific place at the geographical periphery of the nation mattered even more for those nationalists who wanted to contribute actively to a *Volksgemeinschaft* that would unite all Germans irrespective of class or party. Middle-class citizens who protested against the Versailles treaty in both the occupied and the unoccupied parts of the Rhineland; nationalists at the Saar who fought for the return of their Heimat to Germany; Germans in Upper Silesia who were embroiled in battles with the Poles over the future of their province; and civil servants who orchestrated the *Grenzkampf* against the 'Slavic tide' in the Prussian province *Grenzmark Posen-Westpreußen*, which was cobbled together in 1922 from the dispersed remnants of the former provinces of Posen and West Prussia and was in itself only a 'site of memory' for the loss of these territories to Poland: all these Weimar Germans had specific reasons to lay claim to their contribution to the German nation, and these specifics rested to a large extent on their geographical distance from the capital city.[47] Any interpretation of the Weimar republic that takes the capital city as a symbol for the whole is bound

[45] See the pertinent remarks by Thomas Kühne, 'Political culture and democratization', in James Retallack (ed), *Imperial Germany 1871-1918* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 174-195, here p. 180. For Weimar, see Richard Bessel, 'Eastern Germany as a Structural Problem in the Weimar Republic', *Social History* 3 (1978), pp. 199-218.

[46] Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser (eds.), *Culture Wars. Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 2003).

[47] See, for instance, Judith Voelker, '„Unerträglich, unerfüllbar, und deshalb unannehmbar." Kollektiver Protest gegen Versailles im Rheinland in den Monaten Mai und Juni 1919', in Jost Dülffer and Gerd Krumeich (eds.), *Der verlorene Frieden. Politik und Kriegskultur nach 1918* (Essen, 2002), pp. 229-241; James Bjork, 'Industrial piety. The puzzling resilience of religious practice in Upper Silesia', in Michael Geyer and Lucian Hölscher (eds.), *Die Gegenwart Gottes in der modernen Gesellschaft* (Göttingen, 2006), pp. 144-176; idem, 'Nations and the parish. Catholicism and nationalist conflict in the Silesian borderland 1890 – 1922', in Michael Geyer and Hartmut Lehmann (eds.), *Religion und Nation, Nation und Religion. Beiträge zu einer unbewältigten Geschichte* (Göttingen, 2004), pp. 207-224; Moritz Föllmer, *Die Verteidigung der bürgerlichen Nation. Industrielle und hohe Beamte in Deutschland und Frankreich 1900-1930* (Göttingen, 2002), p. 210 (quotes).

to fail as it underestimates regional diversity as a key feature of German society in the 1920s and early 1930s. In their preoccupation (if not obsession) with the modernity of Berlin, many Anglophone historians and scholars in cultural studies tend to overlook the significance of the various fine local and regional studies which have been produced by German historians in the past twenty years, studies which often highlight the specific encounters Weimar Germans had with modernity in a variety of different settings.[48] Weimar was, after all, still Schneidemühl, Koblenz, Ettlingen, Essen, Gotha, and Weimar.

A number of other crucial issues wait for renewed scholarly attention and careful conceptualization. Two of them, which are more than just the usual gaps in the existing literature, shall be briefly highlighted. The first is the revolution. Historians have never stopped to investigate the political manoeuvering and backroom haggling in the final years of the republic and the significance of the Nazi seizure of power in 1933.[49] Substantial and meaningful research into the German revolution of 1918/19, however, has not been conducted since the post-1968 interest in participatory democracy faded away in the mid-1970s. Renewed interest into this episode should not get bogged down in the hackneyed question of whether the supporters of parliamentary democracy missed opportunities and had more scope of action available.[50] It should rather start with the premise that the revolution was much more than just a mere episode. Even where it partially failed in terms of power politics, the revolution stirred up emotions – both among its supporters and those who despised it –, and it substantially undermined traditional patterns of deference. It also invested

[48] Compare, for instance, Martin H. Geyer, *Verkehrte Welt. Revolution, Inflation und Moderne. München 1914-1924* (Göttingen, 1998), Helge Matthiesen, *Bürgertum und Nationalsozialismus in Thüringen. Das bürgerliche Gotha von 1918 bis 1930* (Jena, 1994); Siegfried Weichlein, *Sozialmilieus und Politische Kultur in der Weimarer Republik. Lebenswelt, Vereinskultur, Politik in Hessen* (Göttingen, 1996); Cornelia Rauh-Kühne, *Katholisches Milieu und Kleinstadtgesellschaft. Ettlingen 1918-1939* (Sigmaringen, 1991); Wolfgang Jäger, *Bergarbeitermilieus und Parteien im Ruhrgebiet. Zum Wahlverhalten des katholischen Bergarbeitermilieus bis 1933* (Munich, 1996); Ludwig Linsmayer, *Politische Kultur im Saargebiet 1920-1932. Symbolische Politik, verhinderte Demokratisierung, nationalisiertes Kulturleben in einer abgetrennten Region* (St. Ingbert, 1992); Gerhard Paul and Klaus-Michael Mallmann, *Milieus und Widerstand. Eine Verhaltensgeschichte der Gesellschaft im Nationalsozialismus* (Bonn, 1995), pp. 41-59, 154-201, 334-351 with substantial chapters on Weimar. On an important aspect of the social dynamics in Pomerania see Bernd Kölling, 'Familienarbeit, Wohnungsnot, Ausländerbeschäftigung. Zu den Ursachen der Arbeitslosigkeit pommerscher Landarbeiter 1924-1932', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 1995/I, pp. 109-130. On Saxony, though, see the relevant chapters in James Retallack (ed.), *Saxony in German History. Culture, Society, and Politics, 1830-1933* (Ann Arbor, 2000).

[49] For the former, see in hyper-realistic detail Wolfram Pyta, *Hindenburg. Herrschaft zwischen Hohenzollern und Hitler* (Berlin, 2007), pp. 555-805. For the latter, see Richard Bessel, 'The Nazi Capture of Power', *Journal of Contemporary History* 39 (2004), pp. 169-188.

[50] As an only partly convincing reconsideration of a crucial aspect, see Scott Stephenson, *The Final Battle. Soldiers of the Western Front in the German Revolution of 1918* (Cambridge, 2009).

large segments of the working class in town and countryside with a vocabulary of popular participation that did not necessarily rely on the traditional revolutionary idiom of the socialist labour movement, but focused on essential values such as justice, truth and freedom, broadly conceived. A cultural history of the revolution in 1918/19 is the most crucial desideratum for future research on Weimar Germany.[51] It should also analyse the narratives and symbols which liberals and socialists used to represent and remember their participation in these significant events, and be sceptical with regard to contemporary assertions by leftists such as Kurt Tucholsky, according to whom the revolution fell into oblivion almost immediately once it had ended.[52]

The second crucial field is the performative practice of democratic republicanism. Following on from their neglect of the revolution, historians have tended to underestimate the significance of associations and institutions which aimed to breathe life into the letters of the constitution and to enact the republic as a popular spectacle. An older tradition of intellectual history had focused on the 'republicanism of reason', on those who were, according to the famous formulation by the historian Friedrich Meinecke in 1919, *Vernunftrepublikaner*. The co-edited volume by Andreas Wirsching and Jürgen Eder reconsiders this strand of thinking, in much detail and in an attempt to broaden the concept, but without much success in doing so. In his contribution to this volume, Horst Möller thinks it is 'astonishing' that there were at all some republicans among the German people in 1919 (p. 260). But the exact opposite was the case. There were plenty of them throughout the 1920s, but surely not in the small circles of novelists and academics who pondered abstract reasons to support a parliamentary democracy. Most of these supporters of the new political system were rather republicans by heart. They recognised that more was required to make a democracy work than only new political procedures and progressive legislation. Hence, they discussed and probed how to stage and visualize republican politics, how to invent or recreate powerful symbols of popular participation and to perform the nation in parades and spectacles. The office of the *Reichskunstwart* and its ambitious head, Edwin Redslob, who was responsible for the official pageantry and the shape of state symbols in the republic, are just one important example of the

[51] An important first step are the relevant chapters in the path-breaking but often overlooked study by Geyer, *Verkehrte Welt*, pp. 59-129.
[52] As an intriguing starting point see Ulrich Kittstein and Regine Zeller (eds.), *»Friede, Freiheit, Brot!« Romane zur deutschen Novemberrevolution* (New York. Amsterdam, 2009). More conventional are most contributions to Alexander Gallus (ed.), *Die vergessene Revolution von 1918/19* (Göttingen, 2010).

many groups and institutions who were devoted to the performative aspects of a distinctively democratic form of politics. A thoughtful investigation of the ambivalences and inner contradictions of these symbolic performances will make a substantial contribution to the continuing efforts to reconsider Weimar's democratic potential.[53]

But even systematic attempts to analyze the 'present futures' of Weimar and to reinject a sense of contingency into the trajectory of German history up till 1933 do not fundamentally change the end of the story. Whenever historians have to bring closure to the narrative threads of their histories of Weimar, they fall back on traditional rhetorical strategies. One of the striking features even of the most advanced attempts to reconceptualise Weimar is the reliance on highly conventional forms of emplotment. In the end, it all boils down to the 'tragedy' of a 'vicious circle' which overwhelmed constructive forces, to quote from Fulda's conclusion (p. 224). Or, perhaps in a deliberate attempt to avoid the rhetoric of fate which is part and parcel of the tragic mode of emplotment, historians resort to 'counterfactual' reasoning in the 'what, if?' mode, as Mergel in his speculation about a possible transformation of the DNVP into a loyal supporter of the republic (p. 484). But are we really 'drawn', as Eric Weitz suggests, to the 'Greek tragedy' of Weimar' history, and thus to the tension between 'starcrossed birth' and 'utter disaster as the curtain falls' (p. 361)? I suppose we are not, at least not any longer. Ultimately, I would suggest, we can only advance our understanding of Weimar by a deliberate rejection of the conventional forms which historians use to structure their story of this period. It is therefore time to reconsider not only the history, but also the metahistory of the Weimar republic.

In his landmark book of the same title, published in 1973, Hayden White has argued that historians always rely on one of the four archetypical modes of narrative structuration. Ever since, historians have insisted that their main business is the empirical investigation of sources. But every more complex narrative arrangement of facts and events that goes beyond the mere chronicle will reiterate a certain mode of emplotment, as the most recent historiography on Weimar makes abundantly clear. And it provides also ample proof for White's more advanced point that historians who emplot their stories as tragedies, usually employ a mechanical 'mode of argument' for

[53] A first major contribution to this discussion is the book by Nadine Rossol, *Performing the Nation in Interwar Germany. Sport, Spectacle and Political Symbolism 1926-1936* (Houndmills, 2010).

their causal explanations and will use metonomy as their preferred trope of figurative language.[54]

Taking these insights into account, we have good reasons to reject tragedy as the wrong form for an overall emplotment of Weimar's troubled history. Yes, 'human action' was setting the fateful chains of tragic events on the track, as humans 'are striving for something new', as Weitz insists (p. 361). In the classical theories of drama, however, there was an understanding 'that the act which sets the tragic process going must be primarily a violation of moral law'. At the beginning of a tragedy, in other words, we do not find an eagerness to improve the human condition as in 1919, but 'hubris' as the 'precipitating agent of catastrophe' as in the years since 1933.[55] If we want to retain a sense of distinctive periods in twentieth century German history, we should reserve the term tragedy for the hubris of the Nazis and their project of a racial state, and for the plight of their millions of victims.[56] To be sure, the origins of this tragedy can be traced back way before 1933. But historians are well advised to look at this unfolding tragedy 'from below', in the satirical form of emplotment. This narrative strategy 'stresses the humanity of its heroes, minimizes the sense of ritual inevitability in tragedy, supplies social and psychological explanations for catastrophe, and makes as much as possible of human misery seem (…) superfluous and evitable'.[57] And is the specific reflexiveness of the satirical mode of emplotment not also close to a resonant theme in those intellectual self-descriptions which we have learned to appreciate as typical for Weimar's exuberant culture? Indeed, many contemporary artists subscribed to the 'archetypal theme of Satire', 'the apprehension

[54] Hayden White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore. London, 1973), pp. 5ff., 17, 36. For a thoughtful consideration of the ensuing debates see Tim B. Müller, 'Arbeiter und Dichter. Über professionelle, ästhetische und ethische Motive moderner Historiker', in Martin Baumeister, Moritz Föllmer and Philipp Müller (eds), *Die Kunst der Geschichte. Historiographie, Ästhetik, Erzählung* (Göttingen, 2009), pp. 29-51.

[55] According to Northrop Frye, on whose analysis White based his theory of emplotment. See his *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays* (Princeton NJ, 1957), p. 210. In a still highly readable article on the revolution in 1918/19, Reinhard Rürup observed how empirical studies on the revolution since the 1950s 'ceased to rely on the irrational concept of "tragedy"' and instead tended to analyse decision making processes. See Reinhard Rürup, 'Problems of the German Revolution 1918-19', *Journal of Contemporary History* 3 (1968), pp. 109-135, here p. 113. Despite of more than 40 years of further empirical research, the tragic mode of emplotment is still widely used by historians of the Weimar republic.

[56] I am not fully convinced by the argument that all historiographical narratives should be rendered in the ironical mode. See Rüdiger Graf, 'Geschichtswissenschaft zwischen Ironie und Bullshit', in Andreas Frings/Johannes Marx (eds), *Erzählen, Erklären, Verstehen. Beiträge zur Wissenschaftstheorie und Methodologie der Historischen Kulturwissenschaften* (Berlin, 2008), pp. 71-98.

[57] Frye, *Anatomy*, p. 237.

that man is ultimately a captive of the world rather than its master'.[58] Maybe it is time to consider the satirical mode of emplotment as another possible form to narrate the story of Weimar Germany, and to heed the ironical reflections by one of the eminent artists of the period:

> Go make yourself a plan
> And be a shining light.
> Then make yourself a second plan
> For neither will come right.
>
> For the situation
> Men aren't bad enough or vile.
> Human aspiration
> Only makes me smile.[59]

In any case, the ironical mode of emplotment does not do justice to the confidence and sheer dynamism of the insurrectionary movement against the republic the Nazis ultimately oversaw.[60] But part of the contradictions of Weimar society and of the braiding of different ways to rework politics and culture was that the mobilization of the right was only one crucial element of a larger story, as story that should not any longer simply be labelled as a tragedy. Choosing an ironical mode of emplotment for Weimar could also serve another aim: to understand the point that there is no metaphysical point to make about the history of the embattled republic. Ultimately, both the relative endurance and the final defeat of the republican project do not offer reconciliation or any higher meaning.[61] Writing in the ironical mode, one could say that one part of the tragedy of Weimar lies in the fact that its ultimate failure has so often been used for the purposes of political pedagogy. Against this backdrop, it is time to rethink and rewrite the actual history of this crucial period in twentieth-century European history.

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[58] White, *Metahistory*, p. 9.
[59] 'The Song of the Futility of all Human Endeavour', from the Threepenny Opera, written in 1928, trans. by Desmond L. Vesey and Eric Bentley, in Bertolt Brecht, *Plays Volume I* (London, 1963), p. 160.
[60] As a succinct summary, see Peter Fritzsche, 'The NSDAP 1919-1934. From fringe politics to the seizure of power', in Jane Caplan (ed.), *Nazi Germany* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 48-72.
[61] See also Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *In 1926: Living on the Edge of Time* (Cambridge/Mass., 1998), pp. 411ff.