Introduction: From Weimar to the Cold War

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As the Cold War order in Europe crystallized in the late 1940s and divided Germany into two antagonistic blocs, few periods suffered a worse reputation than the Weimar era. Across the communist-capitalist divide, politicians and thinkers looked at the republic's violent years as the ultimate negative model for their own vision. After the National Socialist catastrophe, they viewed Weimar as a disastrous political and cultural experiment whose repetition must be avoided at all costs. In West Germany (or the Federal Republic of Germany, FRG), the catchphrase "Bonn is not Weimar" became so popular that it appeared in election campaigns.[1] Yet for all the rhetorical efforts to distance the postwar era from the turmoil of the 1920s, long lines of continuities connected the two periods. Social theories, artistic modes, and political concepts that survived the Third Reich and total war left deep imprints on the Cold War imagination. The articles in this special issue explore these hidden yet crucial connections. They show how Weimar's legacy was far richer and more complex than its use as a cautionary tale of violence, unstable politics, and turmoil would suggest.

Historians have long noted that the horrific devastation wrought by World War II, the Third Reich's brutal collapse, and the far-reaching efforts of the Allies' occupations did not mark a caesura in German politics and culture. Even though both East and West Germans enthusiastically embraced the

1. Sebastian Ullrich, *Der Weimar-Komplex: Das Scheitern der ersten deutschen Demokratie und die politische Kultur der frühen Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009).

New German Critique 126, Vol. 42, No. 3, November 2015
DOI 10.1215/0094033X-3136973 © 2015 by New German Critique, Inc.

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concept of the zero hour as a powerful founding myth, conveniently claiming that the National Socialist regime had been but a detour in the country's otherwise forward march toward "normal" political culture, there were countless biographical, intellectual, and institutional continuities between Adolf Hitler's regime and the two German societies that followed it.[2] Few scholars, however, have traced the longer roots of the postwar order in the Weimar period. While many of the key figures of Cold War German culture had already been active and oftentimes well known before 1933, there is no comprehensive account of the republic's long afterlife. This absence is especially surprising, since many Germans often commented on the indebtedness of their postwar cultural projects to Weimar. As Stephen Brockmann shows in his contribution, even West and East German artists who embraced the myth of the zero hour often explicitly claimed that their own culture built on Weimar's achievements, despite the glaring contradiction between the two claims.

Shedding light on the connections between Weimar and the postwar era is far more than a matter of historical periodization. The articles in this collection provide a new understanding of key experiences and ideas that helped shape postwar politics and culture. They point to the vast intellectual and artistic reservoir that fed the works and thinking of many important figures of the postwar era. Moreover, by bringing together diverse fields—visual culture and social theory, political ideology and jurisprudence—this special issue highlights the many connections between them. It shows how seemingly disparate developments were related. Each article explores the trajectory of a prominent Cold War individual, concept, or discourse developed during the first third of the twentieth century. Together, they offer a fresh assessment of the multiple sources that made the Cold War order.

The first two articles explore the legacies of Weimar-era thought in the creation of two new states, both founded at the beginning of the Cold War: the Federal Republic of Germany and the state of Israel. That these countries, given the most recent history between Germans and Jews, would have been shaped in defining ways by a common intellectual heritage seems unlikely at

2. For a few helpful examples, see Clara M. Oberle, "Reconfiguring Postwar Antifascism: Reflections on the History of Ideology," *New German Critique*, no. 117 (2012): 135–53; Geoffrey Cox, "A Return to the Future or Forward to the Past?," *Contemporary Music Review* 29, no. 3 (2010): 251–64; Jaimey Fisher, *Disciplining Germany: Youth, Reeducation, and Reconstruction after the Second World War* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007); Stephen Brockmann, *German Literary Culture at the Zero Hour* (New York: Camden House, 2004); and Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). For an exception to this trend, which insists on the dramatic break brought by 1945, see Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (New York: Harper, 2009).

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first glance. However, as the authors demonstrate, a vital part of the leading intelligentsia in both the West German and Israeli societies of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s began their careers in the German-speaking cultural realm of the interwar period. The two sets of thinkers examined in these articles drew different lessons and took up different strains of Weimar-era ideas as they adapted them for use in their new contexts. But both emerged out of the same set of dilemmas and experiences.

James Chappel charts an intellectual genealogy of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the political party that led the government of West Germany continuously for the first two decades after its founding in 1949. He focuses in particular on the continuity between Catholic social and economic theory in Weimar—as espoused by sociologists affiliated with the Catholic Church in the western regions of Germany—and the CDU-led establishment of a so-called social market economy after World War II. It was no coincidence, Chappel claims, that CDU leaders hailed the robust performance of their country's economy (from 1950 to 1954 a growth rate of 8.2 percent) as a "miracle"; they presented the policies of West Germany's founding years as specifically Christian in provenance. Recognition of the Catholic origins of this particular brand of free market rhetoric helps us understand, among other things, how neoliberals were able to argue that they were on God's side of the Iron Curtain in the economic competition of the early Cold War.

Nitzan Lebovic interrogates the continuance of a different brand of Weimar-era thought in his article on the judges who presided over Israel's legal system from the declaration of its statehood in 1948 into the 1960s. Lebovic notes that over a third of Israel's judiciary during these formative years were of German-speaking origin, meaning that most had been educated either in Germany or in Austria before the rise of National Socialism forced their emigration to Palestine. Strikingly, he shows that the theories of the Weimar-era constitutional scholar Hans Kelsen—whom anti-Semites had called the very embodiment of a "Jewish" style of legal thinking—were foundational for a certain understanding of the young Israeli state. German Jewish judges adapted Kelsen's ideas to justify emergency measures in a country whose leaders often saw themselves under constant existential threat during the Cold War.

The next three articles investigate the influence of Weimar artistic styles, ideologies, and imagery in the emerging cultures of post-1945 Germany. Brockmann analyzes how discourse about German cultural identity—in both East and West Germany—took off where the Weimar debates ended. He shows that, just as it was in the 1920s, post-1945 literary criticism was inundated with disputes over which side of the German cultural map—now

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transformed into new political boundaries—produced the literary styles that best embedded the "genuine" national tradition. The tendency that shaped Cold War culture was not the modernist, experimental enthusiasm of the early Weimar period. Rather, post-1945 writing about art and culture seemed to repeat, and further develop, the conformist discourse of the latter Weimar years. Significantly, an emphasis on continuities between contemporary culture and the German romantic tradition of Goethe and his cohorts dominated not only the circles of liberal and conservative critics but also those of the socialist and communist Left. As Brockmann shows, the criticism of experimental "deviation" from this trajectory continued with the same vocabulary and similar implications after the demise of Nazism, in particular, but not only, within the Communist Party.

Jaimey Fisher analyzes the similarities between the cinematic narration of Weimar horror films and their sophisticated resurfacing in West Germany during the decade that followed the founding of the FRG. Fisher's analysis marginalizes the role of horror film as a distinct genre and instead characterizes horror-film "mode," which had been developed by Weimar filmmakers. Cold War filmmakers, many of them re-migrants who were making films already during the Weimar years, now reproduced this "mode" as a way to communicate a new national self-definition. Since horror-film mode was absent from Nazi cinema, it could easily be linked with the desirable characteristics of the nation. The associations attached to this mode also included nostalgia for the "good" aspects of the Weimar Republic, its cultural experimentalism and political liberalism. Thus horror-film mode enabled a representation of Cold War Germany as the revival of these aspects of Weimar culture. In focusing on mode rather than on generic definitions, Fisher attributes this trend to a diverse body of works, including within the most popular genre of the time, the *Heimat* film.

Ofer Ashkenazi examines a different aspect of the *Heimat* film, which highlights the connections between generic aesthetics and Jewish perspective on German nationality. Ashkenazi notes that Jewish filmmakers in Weimar Germany had repeatedly engaged with the concept of *Heimat* and its conventional cinematic manifestations. He argues that they often manipulated, displaced, and decontextualized the generic *Heimat* imagery in order to negotiate an alternative notion of modern German identity. The second part of the article argues that Konrad Wolf, one of the German Democratic Republics's most prominent (Jewish) filmmakers, had engaged in a similar endeavor in his historical films between 1957 and 1968. Wolf elegantly adapted the methods of decontextualization and displacement of *Heimat* imagery to the Cold War ideo-

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logical frameworks. Like his Weimar-era predecessors, Wolf sought to replace the notion of ethnic-based national community with one based on ideology; similarly, he constructed in his films a new sphere to replace the "traditional" landscape of the generic *Heimat*. Unlike Weimar Jewish filmmakers, however, Wolf rejected the concept of a transnational community of liberal urbanites. His "German" landscape is shaped by a transnational—and transethnic—cooperation of politically conscious socialist communities.

For all their considerable influence on social thought and visual culture in Germany's postwar reconstruction, ideas and figures from the Weimar era also affected political thinking well beyond its boundaries. With the rise of the Cold War, political concepts forged during Germany's first democratic experiment reverberated across Western Europe and the United States. As the final two articles show, these ideas helped articulate a new political language of the Cold War, based on international constellations and militant struggle against democracy's enemies. Equally important, they also set boundaries for the postwar political imagination, substantially shrinking its horizons.

The rise of the Weimar Republic after the 1918 revolution brought about a fundamental paradox in German politics and thought. The revolution established one of the most democratic regimes in Europe, granting equal voting rights to all adults, separating church and state, and enshrining a slew of individual and collective rights for all German citizens. But the catastrophes of war and defeat unleashed new, radical, and violent political visions into the public sphere: extreme nationalism and revolutionary communism. More broadly, the trauma of war undermined the belief that political conflicts could be resolved through peaceful elections and open discussion. That the arrival of democracy was marked by constant political violence, assassinations, and attempts at violent coups from both right and left had a profound effect on German political thought. Many supporters of the republic came to believe that democratic regimes were inherently fragile and required a robust and broad fight against its mortal enemies. For a cohort of young democratic thinkers, democratic politics had to go far beyond merely protecting individual liberties and enabling peaceful civil participation. Democracy was in a state of permanent struggle and required constant spiritual and intellectual mobilization.

While such sentiments remained on the margins of Weimar political theory, they resurfaced in the 1940s and 1950s to fuel Cold War thinking beyond Germany, in part through the influence of émigré intellectuals. As growing anxieties about perceived communist threats—both domestic and foreign—spread across Western Europe and the United States, earlier ideas helped articulate these fears and also provided frameworks for dealing with them.

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Historians have often pointed to the vital influence of German émigré academics such as Franz Borkenau, Hannah Arendt, and Waldemar Gurian on the evolution of the popular theory of "totalitarianism," which categorized National Socialism and Bolshevism under a common rubric of monstrosities and helped European and American politicians paint communism as a perverse and diabolic ideology that had to be crushed.[3] But as some of the articles show, Cold War anticommunism was underpinned by even broader political worldviews that predated the rise of Hitler and Stalin. Weimar thought helped inspire the conviction that democracy required citizens' willful participation in spiritual struggle, civil resolve, and constant mobilization across national boundaries.

Jens Hacke explores the importance of Weimar-era liberalism to an ambitious West German project of weakening German nationalism and integrating Germans into an international alliance. Hacke uncovers the works of the influential yet largely forgotten Moritz Julius Bonn, one of Weimar's leading liberal publicists. As a celebrated specialist on economics and colonialism, Bonn claimed that the era of European imperialism had ended. To prevent the expansion of the Bolshevik revolution, Germany had to embrace a parliamentary regime at home and cooperate with its former enemies, especially the United States and Britain, in forging a liberal world order of free commerce and democratic cooperation. Hacke shows how, after developing these ideas further in exile, Bonn was among the intellectuals who provided the conceptual blueprints for Germany's participation in the European community and the anticommunist alliance, as well as for its embrace of market economy and democratic governance in the domestic sphere.

Udi Greenberg's article investigates the connection between the simultaneous rise of "militant democracy"—the theory that called for the curtailing of rights as part of the struggle against communism—and the popularity of "human rights" as key terms of postwar Western reconstruction. He traces the evolution of both through the writings of Karl Loewenstein, a liberal political theorist in the Weimar era who coined and popularized the term *militant democracy* and was a key figure in drafting one of the earliest and most famous statements of human rights in the 1940s. In contrast to scholarship that has positioned the two terms as in tension with or even in contradiction to each

3. See, e.g., Anson Rabinbach, "Moments of Totalitarianism," *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006): 72–100; Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and William David Jones, *The Lost Debate: German Socialist Intellectuals and Totalitarianism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

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other, Greenberg claims that militant democracy and human rights were originally mutually reinforcing. Drawing from Weimar-era debates about the nature of rights and democratic politics, Loewenstein invested the term *human rights* with intense anticommunism. In a series of influential writings, he maintained that only devoted supporters of democracy could enjoy political and civil liberties. As a consequence, theories of German politics and law helped shape one of the most popular terms of international politics not only in Germany but also in the United States.

Ever since 1933, politicians, historians, and artists have struggled to make sense of Weimar Germany. They have intensely debated how and why Germany's first republic—its social and political norms, intellectual ferment, and new artistic languages—could have given way to the Third Reich's intense violence and racism. The articles in this issue move beyond these well-worn discussions of Weimar's self-destruction to shift our attention to its many survivals. Of course, the legacies uncovered in the following pages were only part of the broader matrix that made up the postwar world. They merged with the experiences of exile, war, and new geopolitical realities. This volume, however, suggests that the Cold War order cannot truly be understood without identifying the persistence of hopes, fears, and ideas born of the interwar struggle.

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