

Régimes of Consumer Culture: New Narratives in Twentieth-Century German History

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Germans chewed gum before World War I, but it was only after 1925, the year in which American chewing gum manufacturer William Wrigley opened a factory in Frankfurt am Main, that the product and its annoying use became truly widespread. 'Divided in the popular referenda, the Germans appear to want to become for Wrigley a united nation of gum chewers', wrote cultural critic Ernst Lorsy of the new craze. 'The Fordson tractor lags far behind Wrigley's Spearmint.'¹ Lorsy decried the coming of the 'hour of chewing gum', arguing it was the result both of a massive advertising campaign and of the Germans' desire to chase (or taste) anything that smacked of American culture. Serious political consequences followed, according to Lorsy, who attributed American workers' lack of revolutionary ardour to the fact that their jaws were too busy to allow their minds to work. Surely chewing gum would have the same unfortunate effects in Germany.

Critiques of the kind Lorsy developed appeared in many different variations and with reference to scores of different objects, images and practices in the 1920s. Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin gained praise, both from contemporaries and (even more) from subsequent generations of readers, for their perspicacious observations on the commercial culture of the era. But there were many more commentators, labouring away in the trenches of illustrated magazine publishing and the daily press, in popular novels and in travel literature, who were concerned with such issues. From cars² to cigarettes, from tourist guidebooks³ to furniture, the issue of what to consume and why and how to consume it garnered enduring and often contentious interest. Those concerns were not unprecedented, of course. Economic prosperity—its extent, form and

¹ Ernst Lorsy, 'Die Stunde des Kaugummi's', *Das Tagebuch*, 26 (26 June 1926), pp. 913–15, as reprinted in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg (eds.), *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994), pp. 662–3.

² Wolfgang Sachs, *For Love of the Automobile: Looking Back into the History of our Desires* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992), pp. 32–46.

³ Rudy Koshar, *German Travel Cultures* (Oxford and New York, 2000), pp. 65–114.

meaning—was an important subject of expert conversation and even parliamentary debate in Imperial Germany. Intellectuals, politicians and journalists worried out loud about the effects of various modes of consumption before the Great War, whether the subject was the ‘luxury’ of the upper and middle classes or the *‘Tingeltangel’* of popular entertainments for urban workers. But Weimar was different. As much as it was a laboratory for avant-garde artistic experimentation, the Weimar Republic was also the site of the first great movements toward mass consumption in German history—even when state policy failed to register this change in any consequential way until Hitler came to power. As much as it was an arena of devastating conflict over parliamentary majorities, the Weimar Republic was also witness to heated discussions over the political effects of commercial society. Did shopping reduce Germans’ ability to concern themselves with the great power-political issues of the day? Did a preoccupation with style liberate women or simply re-create a more fashionable prison house of discrimination? Was American-style mass consumption a practical or even a desirable goal for the working-class movement? Did mass unemployment put the lie to all the predictions of prosperity emanating not only from official circles but also from the imagery of popular cultural practices? Did identification with certain products and styles unite otherwise bitterly divided Germans at a moment when the Republic required essentially nothing more than a sense of common purpose? Lorsy’s image of ‘a united nation of gum chewers’ was not only a devilishly ironic turn of phrase; it was also a serious reference to everything that was at stake in the emergent consumer society.

Lorsy’s commentary limned the future: the anxieties and potentialities generated in an emergent consumer culture—‘a society-wide structure of meaning and feeling organized primarily around acts of purchase’⁴—would appear again and again in historically specific guises and different political contexts for the rest of the century. One can only wonder, then, why it has taken historians of German-speaking Europe so long to appreciate and analyse the history of consumption not merely as a narrative of what was consumed but of how and why things were consumed. Of course, it is not a matter of singling out the German field as a historiographical laggard. In the past two decades, historians of Britain, the United States and France have devoted much attention to the development of consumption in early and late modern history, but even these attempts must be regarded as both belated and selective. After all, government and business recognition of mass consumption not only as an agent of social change but also as an aim of state policy can be dated to the era of the Great

⁴ Victoria de Grazia, ‘The Arts of Purchase: How American Publicity Subverted the European Poster, 1920–1940’, in Barbara Krueger and Phil Mariani (eds.), *Remaking History* (Seattle, 1989), pp. 221–57, here p. 223.

Depression in the United States and western Europe.⁵ The issue has been an enduring (if often hidden) theme of liberal political philosophy since the late eighteenth century, when Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* declared consumption to be the key purpose of production. In a broader global perspective, the historical evolution of commodity societies in Britain and northwestern Europe appears to have been slow indeed when compared to parts of China, to take one significant example, and scholarly concern with western consumerism appears even more ethnocentric and belated in this context.⁶ One may reasonably ask why Anglo-American scholarship did not take up the subject of the history of consumption in Britain and North America before the late 1970s. Even so, historical study of German consumption has developed more slowly than the rest. It is only recently that some of the best Anglo-American writing on the subject has been translated for German audiences;⁷ it is only in the past decade or so that Anglophone historians of Germany have begun to produce important monographs and research articles that cumulatively amount to a significant body of scholarship on the subject; and it is only since 1990 that German-speaking scholars themselves have begun to outline the history of a broader culture of consumption in the modern period.

It would take us well beyond the limits of this introduction to account fully for the timing of this new turn in scholarship. One could of course point to the long-term structural decline of producer industries within European and North American economies and the simultaneous expansion of consumption. More specifically, in the United States, 1980s Reaganite selfishness married to supply-side economics put the emphasis on consumerism and 'style',⁸ while in Britain the Thatcherite apotheosis of the (consuming) individual had much the same effect. But if the 1980s seemed to be a turning point, one cannot overlook the effect of the 1960s either. It was in that decade that college students, foot soldiers in the first great consumer armies of the post-war baby boom, burst on the scene to fuel not only anti-war protest and social reform but also a new emphasis on individualized expression, 'swinging London', and a proliferation of subcultural experiments, each with its own favoured clothing,

⁵ See, for example, Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern and Matthias Judd (eds.), *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1998) and Frank Mort, 'Introduction: Paths to Mass Consumption: Historical Perspectives', in Peter Jackson, Michelle Lowe, Daniel Miller and Frank Mort (eds.), *Commercial Cultures: Economies, Practices, Spaces* (Oxford and New York, 2000), esp. pp. 8–10.

⁶ Craig Clunas, 'Modernity Global and Local: Consumption and the Rise of the West', *American Historical Review*, 104, 5 (December 1999), pp. 1497–1511, here p. 1505.

⁷ See the articles by John Brewer, Neil McKendrick, Victoria de Grazia, Peter Stearns, Lynn Abrams and others in Hannes Siegrist, Hartmut Kaelble and Jürgen Kocka (eds.), *Europäische Konsumgeschichte: Zur Gesellschafts- und Kulturgeschichte des Konsums (18. bis 20. Jahrhundert)* (Frankfurt/Main and New York, 1997).

⁸ Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* (rev. edn, New York, 1999).

musical tastes and drugs.⁹ The long-term impact of these phenomena was not lost on scholars, many of whom were participants in what amounted to the (politically inflected) style wars of the 1960s. Nor were these effects unknown in continental Europe, where French intellectuals discovered (with great drama) that they were living in the age of the commodified ‘spectacle’,¹⁰ and where German university students decried US consumerism as they protested, relaxed and (occasionally) studied wearing American blue jeans and listening to American rock music. In all such movements, moreover, an increasing consciousness of limits to growth (after the early 1970s) and of the environmental costs of high rates of consumption stimulated an interest in the evolution of consumer societies, often as harbingers of grave new crises to come.

On German soil, these long-term influences combined with specific historical circumstances to create a new sensitivity to consumption as a factor that ramified across politics, culture and society. German governments, economic managers and labour leaders had had a long history of raising expectations about prosperity—and then renegeing on their promises. In the Weimar Republic, Fordism and rationalization movements were grist for the mill of those who promised heroic eras of mass well-being.¹¹ Under National Socialism, Hitler publicly imagined a brave new world of superhighways, ‘people’s cars’ and comfortable German travellers—and then demanded that Germans await the triumphal end of their nation’s conquest of ‘living space’ to realize such visions. Even the ‘workers’ and peasants’ state’ of the German Democratic Republic promised socialist prosperity but then dashed such hopes, inadvertently guaranteeing the corrosion of its legitimacy. Only the Federal Republic broke the historical cycle of hope and despair, promise and disillusionment, most successfully from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. Despite energy crises, political turmoil and countercultural protest, the Federal Republic’s combination of parliamentary democracy and economic prosperity stood the test of time. It remained the only viable framework for a reunified German nation after 1989, the efforts of a handful of well-meaning reformers searching for a ‘third way’ between capitalism and socialism notwithstanding. The success of the West German model, its historical legitimacy as well as its power to reconstitute, for better or worse, the cities, markets and minds of the former East Germans, undoubtedly explains a good part of German historians’ heightened interest in consumption as a social force. But so too does the surprising nostalgia felt by former East Germans for the inferior consumer products of the German Democratic Republic, from Trabant automobiles to functionalist living room furniture.¹² Reunification alerted scho-

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York, 1994), pp. 320–43.

¹⁰ Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle* (Paris, 1967).

¹¹ Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York and Oxford, 1994).

¹² Paul Betts, ‘The Twilight of the Idols: East German Memory and Material Culture’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 72, 3 (September 2000), pp. 731–65.

lars, pundits and politicians to the fact that consumption—its dynamics and cultural influences, its characteristic institutions and political locations, its products and attendant practices—have *always* mattered in modern German history. Perhaps reunification put the political exclamation point on a deeper cultural process, allowing consumption and consumer objects to be accorded their full importance. Once and for all, Germans had the opportunity to abandon the discursive ground on which the notional profundity of *Kultur* always and inevitably trumped the ‘superficialities’ of Western civilization, which included materialism, luxury and allegedly unthinking consumerism—and which always seemed to stem from the insidious influence of ‘Americanism’ on Europe.¹³

If the reasons for the new turn are complex, the accomplishments of historical scholarship are simultaneously impressive and uneven. Scholars of Britain and North America have extended the chronological boundaries of the history of consumption back in time, to before 1800 generally, and in some cases to the end of the sixteenth century.¹⁴ A recent and very innovative study of ‘everyday things’ locates the ‘birth of consumption’ in France in the centuries between 1600 and 1800.¹⁵ It is generally recognized that a new, more distinctly elaborated consumer society came into being during the ‘long’ nineteenth century, and that the twentieth century saw the culmination of many developments begun in the previous one hundred years. Yet mass consumption, as a permanent force resonating throughout all areas of society, came into its own only in the twentieth century. This transformation was marked by the appearance of an array of goods that was not only much more varied but also available to broader segments of the population than ever before; by the more forceful elaboration of leisure not merely as a realm for the reproduction of labour power but as an independent site of meaning with its requisite practices, products and symbols; by the evolution of a wider ‘culture’ of consumption defined by discussions of style and fashion, and marked by communicative strategies and conventions in which consumers themselves emerged both as historical actors and as targets of state and corporate policy; and, of course, by systematic criticism of consumption, both by opponents and by advocates of consumers as defined and organized agents of change. The timing of this transformation was variable, of course, and it was neither predetermined nor linear; one of scholarship’s goals must be to map the temporal dimensions of the process,

¹³ Note the extraordinary attention given to consumer objects and artefacts in the recent popular exhibition on the history of the two Germanys: Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin (ed.), *Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit: Wege der Deutschen, 1949–1999* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1999).

¹⁴ Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (eds.), *The Consumption of Culture 1600–1800. Image, Object, Text* (London, 1995); John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993); Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington, 1982); Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in England, 1600–1760* (London, 1998).

¹⁵ Daniel Roche, *A History of Everyday Things: The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, 2000).

engaging, for example, Hannes Siegrist's argument that it was only in the period from 1920 to 1970 in western Europe that a class-based and ultimately limited nineteenth-century consumer society ended, or Victoria de Grazia's analytical schema for the transition from 'bourgeois' to 'Fordist' 'consumption régimes'.¹⁶ Such matters of timing are especially relevant in German historiography, where tried and true historical markers derived from political history—1870, 1914, 1918, 1933, 1939, 1945, 1949 and 1989—continue to constitute scholarship. We return to this issue in the concluding remarks to this introduction.

Scholarship focusing on the rise of mass consumer society has extended in a number of directions. Significantly, there is no synthetic account of the transformation of the United States into a consumer economy.¹⁷ Yet there are many specialized studies that suggest what such a project would entail, not only for North America but for any society transformed by a culture of getting and spending. US scholars have put much of the emphasis on advertising, although scholars of Victorian Britain have also contributed in significant ways to the analysis of this subject.¹⁸ On both sides of the Atlantic, the department store has offered a rich field for research that extends across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and that ideally relates shopping, leisure, advertising, work relations, business organization, urban development, class and gender.¹⁹ The relationship between gender and consumption has now received a most sophisticated treatment in a collection of essays that sets the research agenda

¹⁶ Hannes Siegrist, 'Konsum, Kultur und Gesellschaft in modernen Europa', in Siegrist, Kaelble and Kocka (eds.), *Europäische Konsumgeschichte*, pp. 47–8; Victoria de Grazia, 'Changing Consumption Regimes in Europe, 1930–1970: Comparative Perspectives on the Distribution Problem', in Strasser, McGovern and Judt (eds.), *Getting and Spending*, pp. 59–83. See also Peter N. Stearns, 'Stages of Consumerism: Recent Work on the Issues of Periodization', *Journal of Modern History*, 69 (1997), pp. 102–17.

¹⁷ See Charles McGovern, 'Consumption and Citizenship in the United States, 1900–1940', in Strasser, McGovern and Judt (eds.), *Getting and Spending*, p. 37 n. 1; a relevant commentary in this context is Paul Nolte, 'Der Markt und seine Kultur—ein neues Paradigma der amerikanischen Geschichte?', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 264 (1997), pp. 329–60. For a new analysis of the causes of the rise of commercial society in the United States, see Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Society: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* (New York, 2000).

¹⁸ Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York, 1976); T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York, 1994); Lori Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (Oxford, 1994).

¹⁹ Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain (eds.), *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store 1850–1939* (Aldershot, 1999); W. Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (London, 1995); William Leach, 'Transformations in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890–1925', *Journal of American History*, 71 (September 1984), pp. 328–42; Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869–1920* (Princeton, 1981); Susan Porter-Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890–1940* (Urbana, 1986).

for years to come.²⁰ Significantly, women's historians have often shied away from the history of consumer cultures, partly because they have viewed women as especially vulnerable to the exploitative forces of advertising, retailing and everything associated with consumer industries. Nonetheless, gender studies raise the issue of the historical relationships between consumption and self-sameness, or 'identity', broadly defined. With the dismantling (or virtual absence, as in North America) of *Ancien Régime* consumption patterns in which goods functioned to stabilize existing hierarchies, new practices emerged in which consumer products became 'more directly constitutive of social status'.²¹ This approach also suggests that other key vectors of identity creation, including nation, class, ethnicity, region, subculture, generation and religion, deserve more attention than scholars have given them in the literature on consumption. Indeed, the broader issue of social competency and participation, of citizenship in the fullest sense, has become central for scholars who focus on the history and theory of consumption, or for those who have related the 'language' of property rights to conceptions of citizenship and selfhood.²² At what times and places, and with what consequences, did the issue of the right of access to certain goods and services, or the right to gain and maintain personal property, have a determinant impact on individual and collective selfhood for broad masses of the population?²³

If we turn more pointedly to scholarship on Germany—and here one can aim only for a general characterization—we find a similar situation: islands of relatively intense research highlighted against a broad, undifferentiated background still left untouched or dealt with only superficially. There is relatively little comprehensive discussion of commercial cultures, that is, of the historically specific and reciprocal interactions of economic and cultural capital, for the *Kaiserreich*, for example. The richest area of research, at least for German-language scholarship, is the social-historical study of working-class household economies, most of it a product of the last decade. Systematic research on

²⁰ Victoria de Grazia with Ellen Furlough (eds.), *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996). For an excellent overview of the literature, see Mary Louise Roberts, 'Gender, Consumption, and Commodity Culture', *American Historical Review*, 103, 3 (June 1998), pp. 817–44.

²¹ De Grazia, 'Introduction: Changing Consumption Regimes', in de Grazia and Furlough (eds.), *The Sex of Things*, p. 18.

²² Besides McGovern, 'Consumption and Citizenship in the United States', see John Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (London and New York, 2000), p. 167; Urry, *Consuming Places* (London, 1995); Daniel Miller, 'Consumption as the Vanguard of History: A Polemic by Way of an Introduction', in Miller, *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies* (London, 1995), esp. pp. 42–50; and Martin Daunt and Matthew Hilton (eds.), *The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America* (Oxford and New York, 2001); Hannes Siegrist and David Sugarman (eds.), *Eigentum in internationalen Vergleich (18.–20. Jahrhundert)* (Göttingen, 1999).

²³ The access to goods and spaces of consumption was an important issue in the segregated South. See the discussion on the ambiguous and contradictory power of consumption by Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York, 1998), ch. 4.

bourgeois household expenditures and property is by comparison less developed, although by no means insignificant.²⁴ Still, given the range of studies on the pre-World War I German *Bürgertum*,²⁵ the relative lack of attention to middle-class consumer cultures in German historiography is striking.²⁶ Meanwhile, scholarship on working-class consumption has concentrated more on nutrition and ‘necessities’ than on issues of leisure culture, shopping or the symbolic importance of particular goods.²⁷ The cumulative picture that emerges—reinforced by scholarship on consumer cooperatives that drew on working- and lower-middle-class audiences²⁸—is a consumer society deeply shaped by the structural, cultural and psychological effects of class, and thus still rather far away from a central characteristic of the age of mass consump-

²⁴ See the discussion of the literature by Klaus Tenfelde, ‘Klassenspezifische Konsummuster im Deutschen Kaiserreich’, in Siegrist, Kaelble and Kocka (eds.), *Europäische Konsumgeschichte*, pp. 245–66. On the middle classes, see David Blackbourn and Richard J. Evans (eds.), *The German Bourgeoisie* (London, 1991), the essays in which treat consumer practices and objects more implicitly than explicitly; on bourgeois concerns about consumption, see Warren G. Breckman, ‘Disciplining Consumption: The Debate on Luxury in Wilhelmine Germany, 1890–1914’, *Journal of Social History*, 24 (1991), pp. 485–505. For general concepts, see Wolfgang Kaschuba, ‘Konsum—Lebensstil—Bedürfnis. Zum Problem materieller Indikatoren in der Kultur- und Mentalitätsgeschichte’, *Sozialwissenschaftliche Informationen*, 17 (1988), pp. 133–8.

²⁵ See the studies discussed in John Breuilly, ‘The Elusive Class: Some Critical Remarks on the Historiography of the Bourgeoisie’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 38 (1998), pp. 385–95. Breuilly points out that the impressive research effort on the German bourgeoisie over the last decade has still not resulted in close analysis of ‘styles and forms of life’ (p. 391), which is, at least in part, the culture of things and the relations to which their use gave rise.

²⁶ Alon Confino, ‘Consumer Culture is in Need of Attention: German Cultural Studies and the Commercialization of the Past’, in Scott Denham, Irene Kacandes and Jonathan Petropoulos (eds.), *A User’s Guide to German Cultural Studies* (Ann Arbor, 1997), pp. 181–8. But see also David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York, 1984).

²⁷ For a useful overview of research on the politics of food: Manfred Gailus and Heinrich Volkmann (eds.), *Der Kampf ums tägliche Brot: Nahrungsmangel, Versorgungspolitik und Protest 1770–1990* (Opladen, 1994). In general, nutrition is one of the most thoroughly researched subjects in the history of consumption; see also Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, ‘Konsum und Handel im Europa des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts’, in A. Caveras and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds.), *Storia economica e sociale dell’Europa* (Rome, 2000); Hans J. Teuteberg (ed.), *Durchbruch zum modernen Massenkonsum: Lebensmittelmärkte und Lebensmittelqualität im Städtewachstum des Industriezeitalters* (Münster, 1987); Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, 2000); Davis, ‘Geschlecht und Konsum: Rolle und Bild der Konsumentin in den Verbraucherprotesten des Ersten Weltkrieges’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 38 (1998), pp. 119–39. For other studies dealing in part with varied forms of consumption: Lynn Abrams, *Workers’ Culture in Imperial Germany: Leisure and Recreation in the Rhineland and Westphalia* (London and New York, 1992); Gerhard Huck (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte der Freizeit* (Wuppertal, 1980); Lutz Niethammer (ed.), *Wohnen im Wandel* (Wuppertal, 1979); Jürgen Reulecke and W. Weber (eds.), *Fabrik, Familie, Feierabend: Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte des Alltags im Industriezeitalter* (Wuppertal, 1978); Adelheid von Saldern, *Häuserleben. Zur Geschichte städtischen Arbeiterwohnens vom Kaiserreich bis heute* (Bonn, 1995); Kirsten Schlegel-Matthies, *‘Im Haus und am Herd.’ Der Wandel des Hausfrauenbildes und der Hausarbeit 1880–1930* (Stuttgart, 1995); Hasso Spode, *Alkohol und Zivilisation: Berausung, Ernüchterung und Tischsitten in Deutschland bis zum Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1991).

²⁸ Michael Prinz, *Brot und Dividende: Konsumvereine in Deutschland und England vor 1914* (Göttingen, 1996).

tion, namely the extension of goods to a wide range of individuals who participate, though at quantitatively and qualitatively different levels, in the social world of commodities. There is at present a broadening of scholarship on pre-World War I Germany to include more creative and varied research on gender relations,²⁹ popular culture, social welfare, religion, regions, everyday life, the variable effects and meanings of modernity, the transformation of natural and urban landscapes, post-colonialism and memory cultures.³⁰ Given that consumption practices intersect on many different levels with such topics, it is inevitable that the history and varied meanings of consumption will play a productive role in this scholarly transformation.

Scholars recognize the Weimar Republic's status as a laboratory of modernity,³¹ but it is surprising to find how little research has dealt specifically with the implications of this recognition for the history of consumption. From a social-historical perspective, there is scholarship on lower-middle-class incomes and consumption between the wars, on the Weimar era as the structural point of origin of mass leisure travel, on expert debates over the possibility of mass consumption, on working-class culture as an attribute of socialist and communist movements, and of course on the effects of wartime and post-war crises on various consumer groups.³² Cultural-historical research has concentrated more generally on the avant-garde, devoting attention to architecture, film, art, literature, music and other areas.³³ We have the classic studies of Kracauer and Benjamin, whose work still gives us important analytical cues about how to talk about commercial society. Yet the often anecdotal mode of analysis employed by the two great observers of inter-war culture hides as much as it reveals.³⁴ Peter Jelavich has offered a compelling discussion of cabaret, but it is focused more on content than on reception, which is to say

²⁹ Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey (eds.), *Gender Relations in German History: Power, Agency and Experience from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Durham, N.C., 1997).

³⁰ See the essays in Geoff Eley (ed.), *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany 1870–1930* (Ann Arbor, 1997).

³¹ Peter Fritzsche, 'Did Weimar Fail?', *Journal of Modern History*, 68 (September 1996), pp. 629–56; Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York, 1992).

³² Sandra Coyner, 'Class Consciousness and Consumption: The New Middle Class During the Weimar Republic', *Journal of Social History*, 10 (1977), pp. 310–31; Christine Keitz, *Reisen als Leitbild: Die Entstehung des modernen Massentourismus in Deutschland* (Munich, 1997); Nolan, *Visions of Modernity*; W. L. Guttsman, *Workers' Culture in Weimar Germany: Between Tradition and Commitment* (New York and Oxford, 1990); Eric Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890–1990* (Princeton, 1997); Richard Bessel, *Germany after World War I* (Oxford, 1993); Gerald D. Feldman, *The Great Disorder: Politics, Economics, and Society in the German Inflation 1914–1924* (New York, 1993).

³³ A recent exception is Kaspar Maase, *Grenzenloses Vergnügen. Der Aufstieg der Massenkultur, 1850–1970* (Frankfurt/Main, 1997), but its focus is necessarily general and synthetic.

³⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York, 1969); Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989); Gertrud Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer: An Introduction* (Princeton, 2000); Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995); Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany* (London and New York, 1998).

consumption, by Weimar audiences.³⁵ Gender analysis and women's history have used Berlin in particular as a useful focus for highlighting how Weimar culture created new opportunities for the expression of female subjectivities—as well as for the often prurient exploitation of women in cinema, theatre, illustrated magazines and many other areas.³⁶ Bridging Weimar and the Nazi period, Nancy Reagin's work analyses images of housewifery and the 'politics of consumption' of women's organizations.³⁷ The fascinating subject of women as consumers of radio programming—a leading edge of new communications technologies and the community of listeners that grew up around them—was largely ignored until Kate Lacey's work.³⁸ All such areas, from representations of the 'New Woman' to cabaret, from homemaking to cinematic experimentation, from tourism to radio listening, not only imply but demand the study of new patterns of consumption, new consumer groups, and new meanings of consumer goods. For all the research devoted to the period, we still have a surprisingly undifferentiated picture of Weimar culture; the history of consumer practices and objects can specify and focus the narrative to highlight new trends and tensions.

If recognition of the Weimar Republic's status as a harbinger of mass consumer society has been belated, so too has comprehensive research on the cultures of consumption in the Third Reich.³⁹ Discussions of Nazi social and economic life have been shaped by debates over working-class resistance, National Socialism's relationship to modernization, and Hitler's ability to adjudicate between a consumer economy and rearmament.⁴⁰ The history of consumption in Nazi Germany remains to be written from the point of view of the broader evolution of consumer society—which of course entails a consideration of the modernization thesis as regards Nazism—a perspective that will undoubtedly qualify previous historical narratives oriented to the state, the war economy, and the apparatus of repression. Scholars agree that there were massive limits

³⁵ Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993).

³⁶ Katharina von Ankum (ed.), *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997); Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, 1989); Joachim Schlör, *Nachts in der großen Stadt: Paris, Berlin, London 1840–1930* (Munich, 1991).

³⁷ Besides this volume, see also Nancy Reagin, 'Comparing Apples and Oranges: Housewives and the Politics of Consumption in Interwar Germany', in Strasser, McGovern and Judt (eds.), *Getting and Spending*, pp. 241–61.

³⁸ Kate Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere, 1923–1945* (Ann Arbor, 1996).

³⁹ Two early and now outdated exceptions: David Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution: Class and Status in Nazi Germany, 1933–1939* (New York, 1966); Hans Dieter Schäfer, *Das gespaltene Bewußtsein: Deutsche Kultur und Lebenswirklichkeit 1933–1945* (Munich, 1981), pp. 114–62.

⁴⁰ Avraham Barkai, *Nazi Economics. Ideology, Theory and Policy* (New Haven and Oxford, 1990); Harold James, *The German Slump: Politics and Economics 1924–1936* (Oxford, 1986); Timothy Mason, *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Opladen, 1977); Richard J. Overy, *The Nazi Economic Recovery 1932–1938* (Cambridge, 1996); Overy, *War and Economy in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1994); Michael Prinz and Rainer Zitelmann (eds.), *Nationalsozialismus und Modernisierung* (2nd edn, Darmstadt, 1994).

to consumption under the régime, but even if the actual level of consumption was restricted, Germans did participate in a relatively prosperous culture of getting and spending that, its many shortages notwithstanding, rested on the most affluent economy on the continent. Beyond that, Germans dreamt of consuming more, often to the chagrin of Nazi officials who preached sacrifice—and who tried to control desire not only through direct state propaganda but also through film, advertising and other media.⁴¹ The *Autobahn* only fed consumerist dreams,⁴² as did the increasing number of automobiles, radios, vacations, movies, books, illustrated magazines and household goods available to the public. It is a paradox that the most deeply researched era of German history has received the least amount of scholarly attention on the question of the values and meanings associated with consumer culture. A recent study that purports to be a comprehensive ‘social history of the Third Reich’ devotes only scattered attention to consumption and consumers, and it offers just one sentence on the broader problem of whether Nazi Germany was moving toward a modern ‘consumer society’.⁴³ Where such subjects have gained explicit or (more often) implicit attention, they have been reduced to effects of a Nazi propaganda machine that gave a ‘beautiful look’ to a genocidal régime.⁴⁴ But what do we know about how Germans travelling through Nazi Germany regarded the landscapes, the ‘gracelands’,⁴⁵ and the commodified spectacles of their homeland? What do we know about how particular consumer objects were used, or how their meanings were transformed in particular social settings, in Nazi Germany, or in the post-war societies in which many of those objects still ‘lived’ their social lives?⁴⁶

Because it not only marked a break with the preceding decades of economic shortage but also prefigured the era of truly impressive prosperity of the 1960s and 1970s, the decade of the 1950s is arguably the most productive area of

⁴¹ Hartmut Berghoff, ‘Konsumgüterindustrie im Nationalsozialismus: Marketing im Spannungsfeld von Profit- und Regimeinteressen’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 36 (1996), pp. 293–322; Berghoff, ‘Von der “Reklame” zur Verbrauchlenkung. Werbung im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland’, in Berghoff (ed.), *Konsumpolitik: Die Regulierung des privaten Verbrauchs im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen 1999), pp. 77–112.

⁴² Erhard Schütz and Eckhard Gruber, *Mythos Reichsautobahn. Bau und Inszenierung der ‘Strassen des Führers’ 1933–1941* (Berlin, 1996); Thomas Zeller, ‘“The Landscape’s Crown”: Landscape, Perception, and Modernizing Effects of the German *Autobahn* System, 1934–1941’, in David Nye (ed.), *Technologies of Landscape: Reaping to Recycling* (Amherst, 1999).

⁴³ Pierre Ayçoberry, *The Social History of the Third Reich, 1933–1945* (New York, 1999), p. 75.

⁴⁴ Peter Reichel, *Der Schöne Schein des Dritten Reiches: Faszination und Gewalt des Faschismus* (Munich, 1991).

⁴⁵ Tourist guidebooks offer a specific kind of source for addressing this question; see Koshar, *German Travel Cultures*, pp. 115–59. Michael Burleigh uses the term ‘gracelands’ to denote the sites of the Hitler cult in Nazi Germany in *The Third Reich: A New History* (New York, 2000), pp. 206–15. See note 64 below for additional sources on the historiography of leisure travel in Nazi Germany.

⁴⁶ See Paul Betts, *The Pathos of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design, 1930–1965* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, forthcoming).

research right now in the history of West German consumption.⁴⁷ The fascination stems from a broader Euro-American preoccupation with the culture of the 1950s as it appeared in everything from hula hoops to jazz and rock music,⁴⁸ and from finned and chrome-laden automobiles to an unheard-of outpouring of gleaming household appliances. A significant part of the debate revolves around the meaning and content of ‘reconstruction’, ‘restoration’ and ‘modernization’—terms that West German scholars have used to analyse the combination of political conservatism and economic dynamism of the 1950s. No less important for German scholars has been the question of American influence and ‘Americanization’, topics that engage the history of consumption to varying degrees in the scholarship.⁴⁹ Axel Schildt argues that despite the seemingly overwhelming caesura caused by Nazism, World War II and the Occupation, the 1950s may be seen in the context of a broader sociohistorical continuity from the 1920s to the beginning of the 1960s. He maintains that at the end of the fifties there occurred a structural breakthrough—prepared by complex, long-term developments in the economy, in popular culture, in leisure activities and in patterns of consumption—that deserves the name ‘modern’.⁵⁰

As the foregoing suggests, scholars have focused on the timing of the breakthrough to mass consumption, and they have emphasized the social limitations, structures and representations by which this breakthrough was shaped.⁵¹ Michael Wildt has demonstrated that the ‘economic miracle’ spread its benefits unevenly, as many post-war working-class families subsisted on budgets that recalled the Depression and the war more than the prosperity that was to

⁴⁷ Arne Andersen, *Der Traum vom guten Leben: Alltags- und Konsumgeschichte vom Wirtschaftswunder bis heute* (Frankfurt/Main and New York, 1997); Axel Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten: Freizeit, Massenmedien und ‘Zeitgeist’ in der Bundesrepublik der 50er Jahre* (Hamburg, 1995); Schildt and Arnold Sywottek (eds.), *Modernisierung im Wiederaufbau: Die westdeutsche Gesellschaft der 50er Jahre* (Bonn, 1993); Michael Wildt, *Vom kleinen Wohlstand: Eine Konsumgeschichte der fünfziger Jahre* (Hamburg, 1994). For the emergent historiography of East German consumer culture, the 1960s appear to be the analogue to the Western fascination with the fifties; see Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK) (ed.), *Wunderwirtschaft: DDR-Konsumkultur in den 60er Jahren* (Cologne, 1996).

⁴⁸ Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000); Kaspar Maase, *BRAVO Amerika: Erkundungen zur Jugendkultur der Bundesrepublik in den fünfziger Jahren* (Hamburg, 1992).

⁴⁹ Michael Ermarth (ed.), *America and the Shaping of German Society 1945–1955* (Providence and Oxford, 1993); Konrad Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist (eds.), *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland 1945–1970* (Frankfurt/Main and New York, 1997); Alf Lütke, Inge MarBolek and Adelheid von Saldern (eds.), *Amerikanisierung: Traum und Alptraum im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1996).

⁵⁰ Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten*, pp. 441–50.

⁵¹ See Philipp Heldmann, ‘Das “Wirtschaftswunder” in Westdeutschland: Überlegungen zu Periodisierung und Ursachen’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 36 (1996), pp. 323–44, which in part considers the consumer goods industry with reference to West German economic reconstruction. For a recent discussion of the general problem of periodization and the history of the Federal Republic, see Axel Schildt, *Ankunft im Westen: Ein Essay zur Erfolgsgeschichte der Bundesrepublik* (Frankfurt/Main, 1999), esp. pp. 15–48.

come.⁵² Arnold Sywottek uses the concept of Americanization to discuss patterns in the uneven development of leisure in West German society.⁵³ Another kind of social limitation had to do with gender relations in the broadest sense, but particularly with women. Robert Moeller's research shows how state policies were reshaped to situate women, men and families in the reconstruction of West Germany.⁵⁴ Going beyond the realms of political discourse and family law, Erica Carter makes a convincing claim that a significant dimension of the 1950s on both sides of the German–German divide was a redefinition of citizenship and nationhood that put consumption at the centre of things. In turn, women, as housewives and consumers but also as objects of representation in advertising, film and fashion photography, entered the mainstream of public discourse, although often in unacknowledged or manipulated ways. The rational housewife—in opposition to both the elegant bourgeois and the working-class mass consumer—became the normative category if not the social reality.⁵⁵ New research has linked memory culture to consumption by illuminating how remembrance of the Third Reich influenced state policies and public relation campaigns.⁵⁶

Finally, the topic of East German consumption is also a most promising area of research. The importance of consumption in the GDR's economic and fiscal policy is recognized by scholarship.⁵⁷ Tensions arising from the earliest attempts of the political leadership to promote consumption within a 'productivist' system shaped above all by the Soviet model and an antipathy to 'Fordist' agendas of mass consumption has received attention in a recent doctoral dissertation.⁵⁸ Yet the dominant tendency in scholarship has been to analyse questions of consumption or, more broadly, daily life and social existence, as a function of the political domination of the SED and the Communist state. Justified though a strongly 'statist' perspective may be, it fails to consider whether a modicum of human agency was available to East Germans as they

⁵² Michael Wildt, *Am Beginn der 'Konsumgesellschaft': Mangelserfahrung, Lebenshaltung, Wohlstandshoffnung in Westdeutschland in den fünfziger Jahren* (Hamburg, 1994); see also Wildt, *Vom kleinen Wohlstand*.

⁵³ Arnold Sywottek, 'The Americanization of Everyday Life? Early Trends in Consumer and Leisure-Time Behavior', in Ermarth (ed.), *America and the Shaping of German Society*, pp. 132–52.

⁵⁴ Robert Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993).

⁵⁵ Erica Carter, *How German is She? Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman* (Ann Arbor, 1997).

⁵⁶ Jonathan Wiesen, 'Public Relations as a Site of Memory: The Case of West German Industry and National Socialism', and Elizabeth Heineman, 'Gender, the State, and Memory: Waiting Wives and War Widows in the Postwar Germanys', in Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche (eds.), *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture* (Urbana, forthcoming).

⁵⁷ Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945–1989* (Chapel Hill, 1997); Charles Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, 1997).

⁵⁸ Mark Landsman, 'Dictatorship and Demand: East Germany Between Productivism and Consumerism, 1948–1961', Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2000.

adjusted to a deeply administered society in everyday life. Scholars critical of this tendency have offered important but necessarily still incomplete strategies and analyses to give the socio-cultural history of East Germany its due.⁵⁹ Systematic discussions of consumers and consumer cultures in East German everyday life such as those produced by Ina Merkel or more recently (in a comparative, German–German key) by Katherine Pence nonetheless remain very much the exception.⁶⁰

II

While building on this impressive but uneven historiography, the essays in this volume seek to push the topic of consumption further. Nancy Reagin traces the policies pursued by Nazi organizations under the Four-Year Plan that were designed to curtail the growth of wages and private consumption. She shows the specific responsibilities of thrift and prudence that Nazi leaders sought to impress on women, so that women would serve the autarkic designs of Nazi militarism. She thus presents one important facet of Nazi consumer politics, namely the attempt to manage housewives and regulate consumption. The essay complements recent work that emphasizes the attempts by the Nazis in Germany and the fascists in Italy to appeal to consumers' tastes.⁶¹ It would be a mistake to view these interpretations as contradictory. Nazi consumer policy reflected National Socialism's racial-ideological way to modernity. On the one hand, the Nazis appreciated the importance of consumer satisfaction not only as a way to appease the masses, but also as an essential element of modern life; they were not, in principal, against consumption. On the other hand, consumer

⁵⁹ For a discussion of some of the literature, see Konrad Jarausch, 'Die gescheiterte Gegengesellschaft: Überlegungen zu einer Sozialgeschichte der DDR', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 39 (1999), pp. 1–18; Alf Lüdtke, 'Die DDR als Geschichte: Zur Geschichtsschreibung über die DDR', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B36 (28 August 1998), pp. 3–16. See also Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen (eds.), *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen, 1996); Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949–1989* (Oxford, 1995); Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka and Hartmut Zwahr (eds.), *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart, 1994).

⁶⁰ Ina Merkel, 'Consumer Culture in the GDR, or How the Struggle for Antimodernity Was Lost on the Battleground of Consumer Culture', in Strasser, McGovern and Judt (eds.), *Getting and Spending*, pp. 281–99; Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis: Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne, 1999); NGBK (ed.), *Wunderwirtschaft*, conceived in part by Ina Merkel; Katherine Pence, 'From Rations to Fashions: The Gendered Politics of East and West German Consumption, 1945–1961', Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1999; Pence, 'Labors of Consumption: Gendered Consumers in Post-War East and West German Reconstruction', in Abrams and Harvey (eds.), *Gender Relations in German History*, pp. 211–38. See also John Borneman, *Belonging in the Two Berlins: Kin, State, Nation* (Cambridge, 1992), where consumer goods, exchange and family household economies in relation to notions of selfhood are discussed. And see also Judd Stitzel, 'Fashioning Socialism: Clothing, Politics, and Consumer Culture in East Germany, 1953–1971', Ph.D. Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 2001.

⁶¹ Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996); de Grazia and Furlough (eds.), *The Sex of Things*. On Italy, see Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992); Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy 1922–1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2001).

aspirations under the Four-Year Plan were necessarily sacrificed to the preparations for war. But it is not at all inconceivable that, had the Nazis won the war, they would have established a consumer society based on exploitation and slave labourers. It is an interesting thought experiment to attempt to describe how a National Socialist consumer culture would have looked in a Nazi-dominated Europe. This society would have resembled neither the free-market economy of the United States nor the managed and regulated consumption described by Reagin.⁶²

That the Nazis were not averse to consumption is well illustrated by the case of tourism and leisure. The greatest part of leisure travel in the Third Reich took place outside the realm of state-organized culture, just as the bulk of tourist literature appeared under non-state auspices.⁶³ Nonetheless, much Nazi-era travelling, like any social activity under National Socialism, was tightly controlled and ideologically motivated. The 1936 summer and winter Olympic Games, for example, were a showcase for the régime, while the Strength through Joy organization (*Kraft durch Freude*, or KdF) aimed at controlling all leisure activities in the Third Reich.⁶⁴ But, at the same time, the Nazis understood well the nexus between modernity and travelling by viewing travelling as an entitlement. The KdF did offer cheap vacations at home and less affordable ones abroad on board cruise ships. Between 1934 and 1939, the organization sent seven million Germans on vacation.⁶⁵ The régime thus carved its own way to modernity as an alternative to either liberal capitalism or communism. But in no way should this be taken to imply that the tourists themselves adopted the attitudes of the régime; they may have approached tourism in much the same way their counterparts in the capitalist West did—as pleasure-seeking consumers without much interest in political ideology.

Whatever community of fate the Germans experienced between 1933 and 1945, the defeat threw them in centrifugal ways into two irreconcilable modes of existence (*Lebenswelt* is the appropriate word here). Katherine Pence explores the significance of consumption in East Germany's June 1953 crisis, when the SED realized that shortages in consumer goods had become a destabi-

⁶² On how history could have turned out, see the interesting volumes by Niall Ferguson (ed.), *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (New York, 1999) and Robert Cowley (ed.), *What If? The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been* (New York, 1999). It is worthwhile remembering that, with memories of World War I privation, hunger and resentment fresh even in 1939, one of the foundations of Hitler's *Blitzkrieg* military strategy was to ensure domestic satisfaction and the continuation of normal life, consumption included.

⁶³ See Koshar, *German Travel Cultures*, esp. pp. 115–34.

⁶⁴ On the KdF see Hasso Spode, 'Arbeiterurlaub im Dritten Reich', in Carola Sachse, Tilla Siegel, Hasso Spode and Wolfgang Spohn (eds.), *Angst, Belohnung, Zucht und Ordnung: Herrschaftsmechanismen im Nationalsozialismus* (Opladen, 1982); Shelly Baranowski, 'Strength through Joy: Tourism and National Integration in the Third Reich', in Baranowski and Ellen Furlough (eds.), *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America* (Ann Arbor, forthcoming); Keitz, *Reisen als Leitbild*, pp. 209–57.

⁶⁵ Vacation policy in the Third Reich was at the time the most developed in the world; see Spode, 'Arbeiterurlaub im Dritten Reich', p. 287.

lizing factor. Although the party leadership sought to address the issue by appointing a Commission on Trade and Supply, the SED in 1953, as throughout the decade, seemed uncertain about how to reconcile socialist ideology and the needs of the consumer. In the early 1950s, it is worthwhile to remember, it was still unclear whether West Germany's social-market economy or East Germany's socialist planned economy would prove the more successful model for prosperity. For the SED, significantly, building up a consumer society was a key to gaining and maintaining power; it viewed consumer satisfaction as an important (if still, ultimately, secondary) tenet of its vision for the utopian planned economy. But what to do, asks Pence, when the ideals crash on the production machines of the planned economy?

West Germany, in contrast, seemed by the second half of the 1950s on the way to consumer prosperity. Rationing was eliminated in 1950, travelling returned to the level of its inter-war years by decade's end, and the 'economic miracle', or *Wirtschaftswunder*, became a household term to describe the early years of the republic. Paul Betts uses debates over the West German *Nierentisch* design, that is, mass-produced consumer goods with organic abstract shapes, to illuminate the 1950s as 'post-Nazi commodity culture'. In his narrative, the 1930s and 1950s were not so much irreconcilable periods, but instead bound together in multiple, ambiguous links.⁶⁶ Debates over consumption reflected changing configurations of high and low culture, when intellectuals posited, yet again, the distinction between consumption and *Kultur*. Betts successfully shows how consumer goods design mattered as a means to conceive of life after National Socialism: for some it was synonymous with starting afresh, while for others it connected the remembered prosperity of the 1930s with the economic take-off of the 1950s.

By focusing on consumer culture, material objects and design, Betts thus brings a new dimension to the venerable topic of how Germans came to terms with the Nazi past. Support of National Socialist beliefs and ideology became a taboo in West German society in the 1950s, and candid discussion in the public sphere of personal and national exploits during the Third Reich was not permitted. But far from being totally repressed and silenced, the Third Reich was everywhere: in everyday life, in gestures and modes of speech, in school textbooks and films, in political rhetoric and novels, in tourist guidebooks and travelogues.⁶⁷ For a long time, too long perhaps, the common interpretation has

⁶⁶ The work of Lutz Niethammer is important on the continuities between pre- and post-1945 recollections. See: *'Die Jahre weiß man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll': Faschismuserfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet* (Berlin and Bonn, 1983); *'Hinterher merkt man, daß es richtig war, daß es schief gegangen ist': Nachkriegserfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet* (Berlin, 1983); "'Normalisierung" im Westen: Erinnerungsspuren in die 50er Jahre', in Dan Diner (ed.), *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit* (Frankfurt/Main, 1987).

⁶⁷ Some recent studies that articulate this idea are Robert Moeller, 'War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany', *American Historical Review* (October 1996), pp. 1008–48; Heide Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany: Reconstructing National Identity after Hitler* (Chapel Hill, 1995); Frank Biess, "'Pioneers of a New Germany": Returning POWs from the Soviet Union and the Making of East German Citizens, 1945–1950', *Central European History*, 2, 2 (1999), pp. 143–80; Maria Mitchell, 'Materialism and Secular-

been that West Germans repressed the Nazi past. The problem is that decades of mystification which surrounded the topic have impeded the development of historical common sense. How on earth, one wonders, could Germans have done anything but negotiate, wrestle with, and fight—but not simply repress—their Nazi past? Ultimately, scholars were part of the interpretative problem, for they looked for answers only in selected places. If we look for traces of National Socialism only in artefacts and practices created intentionally to represent it, we may not find them; there was no Holocaust museum in 1950s Berlin. If we look for traces in practices, representations and policies that were directly related to the Third Reich (such as war crime trials, or political acts like the 1950s agreement on restitution for Holocaust survivors), the results are interesting and important though not wholly unexpected. But if we look for these traces in practices and representations where National Socialism was not directly discernible, such as material objects, the results may be unpredictable. These kinds of sources, practices and representations may ultimately reveal more about attitudes and beliefs.⁶⁸

What emerges from the essays of Pence and Betts is that consumer culture has significant symbolic power to construct the self and to legitimize political régimes, and that, at the end, it was also prosperity that differentiated the Nazi past from the post-war era, and West Germany from East Germany. Differently put, economics, as a commercial, political, cultural and symbolic activity, matters⁶⁹—and especially the economics, thus broadly defined, of everyday life. Elizabeth Ten Dyke's essay shows how different consumer culture régimes shaped understanding of time, space and social cohesion as well as creating dislocation for East Germans in the dramatic period around 1989. Based on anthropological field work in East Germany, Ten Dyke's discussion analyses how the experience of consumption shaped, and was shaped by, the quotidian, and how it formed a sensibility of change, of how time goes by in hours, days, seasons and years. What were the implications, on the personal, everyday level,

ism: CDU Politicians and National Socialism, 1945–1949', *Journal of Modern History*, 67 (June 1995), pp. 278–308; Peter Dudek, 'Der Rückblick auf die Vergangenheit wird sich nicht vermeiden lassen.' *Zur pädagogischen Verarbeitung des Nationalsozialismus in Deutschland (1945–1990)* (Opladen, 1995); Elizabeth Heineman, 'The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's "Crisis Years" and West German National Identity', *American Historical Review* (April 1996), pp. 354–95; Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich, 1996); Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870–1990* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000), chs. 3 and 4 *passim*; Helmut Peitsch, 'Deutschlands Gedächtnis an seine dunkelste Zeit.' *Zur Funktion der Autobiographik in den Westzonen Deutschlands und den Westsektoren von Berlin 1945 bis 1949* (Berlin, 1990).

⁶⁸ For a full articulation of this argument see Alon Confino, 'Traveling as a Culture of Remembrance: Traces of National Socialism in West Germany, 1945–1960', *History and Memory*, 12, 2 (Fall/Winter 2000), pp. 92–121.

⁶⁹ See Werner Abelshauser, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1945–1980* (Frankfurt/Main, 1983); Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany*; Maier, *Dissolution*.

of the sudden move from 'a distinct simplification of everyday life' to the seemingly unlimited possibility of it?⁷⁰

Overall, the essays highlight two fundamental topics in thinking about German consumer culture. Reagin and Pence show how consumption was determined by gender. The gendered meanings of consumption were obvious when Nazi and Communist officials viewed women as primary consumers. While the Nazi régime politicized women's household domestic roles, East German male leaders showed one important way for a female politician to claim authority in the communist system, namely by becoming a spokeswoman on 'women's issues', such as consumption. These studies should pave the road for more research on how consumer culture shaped German sexual and gender identities, of men and women.⁷¹ The essays of Betts and Ten Dyke demonstrate the link between material culture and memory. What happened when basic markers of identity and orientation, represented in consumer goods, reappear (though in different guise, as the *Nierentisch*) or disappear (the experience of East Germans after unification)? Central to these two essays is the relation between images of the past and material goods, and the claim that goods carry ideas. In the burgeoning literature on German memory, the connection between memory and materiality is a promising and under-researched topic.⁷²

III

What are some of the common themes and future research directions that emerge from these essays? One finding is the importance of consumption to construct modern narratives of selfhood and nationhood. Consumption was viewed as entitlement, as a practice and a material reality that defined political legitimacy, but also, significantly, a sense of happiness and self-fulfilment. Nazis, communists, Social Democrats and liberals acknowledged consumption as an integral and essential part of modern life. Consequently, to consume was equated with a sense of having order in life, while severe limitation on consumption was perceived as unnatural. Viewed in this way, consumer goods and material culture appear as one fundamental vehicle to narrativize the links between the personal, quotidian level of life and the political and social order of the collectivity. Studies on consumer culture can thus have an important role in writing a new history of modern Germany by linking everyday life, sensibilities and social-political orders, just as they can be used to engage broader, cross-disciplinary studies on consumption and citizenship.

⁷⁰ The phrase is from Timothy Garton Ash, *The File: A Personal History* (New York, 1997), p. 70.

⁷¹ Robert Moeller correctly pointed out the paucity of research in this area. See Moeller, 'Introduction: Writing the History of West Germany', in Moeller (ed.), *West Germany under Construction: Politics, Society and Culture in the Adenauer Era* (Ann Arbor, 1997), p. 23 n.43.

⁷² See Confino and Fritzsche (eds.), *The Work of Memory*; Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward and Jeremy Aynsley (eds.), *Material Memories* (New York, 1999).

Such a history must begin by avoiding the most serious historical error, namely that of psychological anachronism. Looking back at the twentieth century, it is easy to view the free-market economy, democracy and the bourgeois mode of consumption as inevitable, as the only viable system of life and thought in modern history, rather than as something unprecedented and historically unique.⁷³ But we should not treat National Socialism and Communism as antechambers to liberal democracy viewed as the authentic apparition of historical fate. The narrative voice of our studies on consumer culture should capture the viability, hopes and disappointments of all these régimes, without hindsight and preconceptions. The question is not whether Nazism and Communism could inform, via material culture, intimate sensibilities, but how and why? It is easy to forget now that in the 1950s socialism and capitalism were engaged in a tight race. The fifth party congress of the SED in 1958 declared that East Germany's 'main economic aim' was to 'catch up with and overtake' *per capita* consumption in West Germany.⁷⁴ This was not simply propaganda; the future was still open.

At the same time, we must take into account the success of western capitalist democracy to provide its citizens with notionally unlimited consumer pleasures. The West did transform into a model for emulation: in the 1950s and 1960s this was a model to be conquered, but from the 1970s a model of envy.⁷⁵ More than anything else, perhaps, material culture, prosperity and immediate gratification came to symbolize the West for those living beyond its territory: when the Wall came down, East Germans directed their steps to Berlin's 'cathedrals of consumption', not to sites of freedom, democracy or German unity.⁷⁶ To put the point another way: without resorting to a triumphalist history of the march of liberal ideology through a century of war and destruction, one should nonetheless reach a critical understanding of the power of the liberal consumer model, its force and potential for emancipatory practice, and its importance to societies that remain committed to the relatively free and tolerant evolution of individual personalities, however shaped by inequitable patterns

⁷³ De Grazia, 'Changing Consumption Regimes: Introduction', in de Grazia and Furlough (eds.), *The Sex of Things*, p. 18.

⁷⁴ Cited in Berghoff, 'Konsumregulierung im Deutschland: Forschungsansätze und Leitfragen', in Berghoff (ed.), *Konsumpolitik*, p. 8. See also Jörg Roesler, 'Planwirtschaft und Produktionspropaganda', in Dieter Vorsteher (ed.), *Parteiauftrag: Ein neues Deutschland. Bilder, Rituale und Symbole der frühen DDR* (Munich, 1996), pp. 345–63.

⁷⁵ In the late 1950s, Nikita Khrushchev, in the famous kitchen debate with Richard Nixon, confidently declared the aim of socialism was to overtake capitalism. On consumption in the eastern bloc see Susan Reid and David Crowley (eds.), *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* (Oxford, 2000).

⁷⁶ Berghoff, 'Konsumregulierung im Deutschland', p. 9. That is not to say, of course, that questions of freedom of speech, movement and political choice were not crucial as well. On consumption after unification, see also Helen Kelly-Homes, 'United Consumers? Advertising Discourse and Construction of German Identity', in Patrick Stevenson and John Theobald (eds.), *Relocating Germanness: Discursive Disunity in Unified Germany* (London, 2000), pp. 91–108.

of social, sexual, political and economic power, and however marred by jealousy, envy and injustice.

When we abandon the narrative of the inexorable victory of the free-market capitalist economy, we can appreciate the crucial sentiment of relative happiness and personal fulfilment embedded in consumer culture, and its methodological implications.⁷⁷ The peace years of the Nazi régime looked favourable to many Germans compared to the Great Depression or the period of total war and occupation that followed (1943–9). The mid-1950s in West Germany seemed a huge improvement over the years of total war and occupation. In East Germany, the 1950s were still experienced as a continuation of the hardship of the past, while the 1960s presented growth, modernization and personal consumption.⁷⁸ On one level, a history of consumption should be written as a history of small steps, when material goods, linked to everydayness, shaped sentiments of pleasure, self-fulfilment or disappointment, and came to identify a period, an identity and a state of mind.

The history of small steps is closely connected to the history of things, which in turn necessitates thinking of consumption in its broadest possible terms. The history of consumption does not consist only of analysis of purchasing and household budgets, nor of consumer societies and state policy. Nor can one stop with the history of the symbolic meaning of goods, although this is an area of most promising research with a venerable theoretical tradition.⁷⁹ ‘Consumption’ also considers the use of goods and the practices associated with that use, both of a ritualized or symbolic nature and of more routinized and everyday character. Arjun Appadurai’s evocative notion of the ‘social life of things’, much quoted in academic research but only rarely operationalized, at least in historical scholarship, offers a useful point of departure here.⁸⁰ What itineraries do things traverse as they make their way from the stage of production, to mediation through advertising and distribution, and finally to the stage of consumption and daily use? How are old, used or damaged consumer objects finally discarded—or re-used and ‘preserved’? To ask such questions is to direct scholarly attention to the materiality of consumption, and to the multiform meanings and uses that crystallize around certain objects at certain

⁷⁷ This is Wildt’s point of departure in his *Am Beginn der ‘Konsumgesellschaft’*. See also Wildt, ‘Plurality of Taste: Food and Consumption in West Germany during the 1950s’, *History Workshop Journal*, 39 (Spring 1995), pp. 23–41.

⁷⁸ Ina Merkel, ‘Der aufhaltsame Aufbruch in die Konsumgesellschaft’, in NGBK (ed.), *Wunderwirtschaft*, p. 20.

⁷⁹ See especially Jean Baudrillard, ‘The System of Objects’, ‘Consumer Society’, and ‘For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign’, in his *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford, 1988).

⁸⁰ See Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986), especially Appadurai, ‘Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value’ and Igor Kopytoff, ‘The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process’. Timothy Burke’s *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham, 1996), which explores cosmetic products in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe, is an interesting study that uses the idea of cultural biography and ‘prior meanings’ of things that give them ‘their rich individuality within a specific place and time’ (pp. 5–6). See the discussion by Roberts, ‘Gender, Consumption, and Commodity Culture’, esp. pp. 833–6.

times. But to ask such questions is also to remind us that a history of things must take as its premise the fact that consumption is intimately linked to production and producers and to distribution systems and distributors as well. The 'culturalist' tendency of much recent scholarship on consumption often blocks the view of these important historical connectivities, although it must be pointed out that a cultural approach by no means precludes such broadly gauged and comprehensive perspectives.⁸¹

A history of the cultural and social biography of German things has still to be written. Most recent work has been done by ethnographers and anthropologists on East German material objects,⁸² partly because they disappeared so suddenly, and partly, and most importantly, because when an entire régime of consumer culture vanishes literally overnight it makes us cognizant, at times painfully so, of the significance of its objects to everyday life, politics and ideology. Some popular-culture as well as scholarly attempts to capture the remembrance of past material things are steeped in *Ostalgie*, a nostalgia for the purported simplicity of everyday life in the GDR; others are more critical, or provide a combination of the two approaches.⁸³ Be that as it may, the focus on material culture is novel. Thus, a short history of the *Goldbroiler*, an electric grill used in restaurants in East Germany in the 1960s, illuminates eating habits, health sensibilities (the problem of chicken fat) and agriculture policy.⁸⁴ *Präsident 20*, to name another example, was the condescending name given by the SED to a new, improved kind of fabric for clothes presented as a gift from the party to the people at the twentieth anniversary of the DDR. It links conceptions of youth and beauty, gender history and ideological overbearing.⁸⁵

Moreover, the history of small steps is especially illuminating when used to

⁸¹ See for example Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (London and New York, 1988), esp. pp. 80–5. A key text for the theoretical understanding of a history of usage is Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984).

⁸² See, most recently, Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999), pp. 11, 104–39; Berdahl, Matti Bunzl and Martha Lampland (eds.), *Altering States: Ethnographies of Transition in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor, 2000); but on material culture, see also Wolfgang Ruppert (ed.), *Fahrrad, Auto, Fernsehschrank: Zur Kulturgeschichte der Alltagsdinge* (Frankfurt/Main, 1993). For German-language scholarship on East German usage of consumer objects, see in particular Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis*, esp. pp. 357–410, which is based on intensive ethnographic research. In general, the study of German material culture has been advanced more by anthropology than by history, as evidenced in the now classic works of Hermann Bausinger: *Folk Culture in a World of Technology* (Bloomington, 1990); *Volkskunde: Von der Altertumforschung zur Kulturanalyse* (Tübingen, 1987).

⁸³ For a critical account see Betts, 'The Twilight of the Idols'.

⁸⁴ Patrice Poutrus, 'Kurzer Abriss der Geschichte des Goldbroilers', in NGBK (ed.), *Wunderwirtschaft*, pp. 138–43; Poutrus, 'Lebensmittelkonsum, Versorgungskrisen und die Entscheidung für den "Goldbroiler": Problemlagen und Lösungsversuche der Agrar- und Konsumpolitik in der DDR, 1958–1968', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 39 (1999), pp. 391–421.

⁸⁵ Cordula Günther, "'Präsident 20"—Der Stoff, aus dem die Träume sind', in NGBK (ed.), *Wunderwirtschaft*, pp. 144–51; see also Raymond Stokes, 'Plastics and the New Society: The German Democratic Republic in the 1950s and 1960s', in Reid and Crowley (eds.), *Style and Socialism*, pp. 65–80; Rainer Gries and Cordula Günther, "'Jeden Tag ein neues Geschenk". Gedanken zum Geschenkgestus in der DDR', in Vorsteher (ed.), *Parteiauftrag: Ein neues Deutschland*, pp. 241–53.

study things across, rather than within, political régimes, for it underscores the fact that the consumer régimes of National Socialism, West Germany and East Germany cannot stand by themselves, but can have meaning only in relation to one another, to past experiences and future aspirations. Take the car, for example, which, despite its importance in German history, has rarely been considered as a desired consumer object. Until World War I, the automobile was very much a symbol of élite consumption, especially for wealthy sportsmen and the road-bound equivalents of the earliest flying aces. World War I alerted ordinary Germans to the practical functions of motorization, as soldiers used trucks, ambulances and armoured vehicles to do the work of war. The difficult economic times of the post-war era made automobile ownership impossible for most Germans; there were forty-four times more cars in the United States than in Germany in the 1920s although the US had only twice the population of Germany. Nonetheless, the automobile had begun to make inroads among middle-class buyers—as an extension or ratification of business success, as an elegant accessory of the ‘New Woman’, or as the symbol of the bourgeois family. Advertisements, automobile shows and automobile magazines⁸⁶ indicated that if the majority of Germans still did not own automobiles, they fantasized about doing so, and they assumed they would purchase a car in the not too distant future. Even the working class could take hope from the fact that *per capita* motorcycle ownership was as high in 1932 in Germany as it was in Great Britain; for many workers and not a few *petits bourgeois*, the motorcycle was viewed as a step toward car ownership. Hitler played on such desires, promising a people’s car that would traverse the nation’s slick new superhighways, and offering the working-class family a compelling image of motoring vacations and Sunday afternoon drives.⁸⁷

The people’s car was never built for commercial sale during the Third Reich, of course, although World War II proved to be a vast training ground for German drivers, who gained valuable new experience in handling motorized transport on both fronts. The first decade after the war saw substantial increases in car and motorcycle ownership, but as in many other areas of the consumer economy in the Federal Republic, it was not until the second half of the 1950s that mass motorization began to take off. The average annual increase in auto-

⁸⁶ Ulrich Kubisch, *Das Automobil als Lesestoff: Zur Geschichte der deutschen Motorpresse 1898–1998* (Berlin, 1998).

⁸⁷ Heidrun Edelmann, *Vom Luxusgut zum Gebrauchsgegenstand. Die Geschichte der Verbreitung von Personenkraftwagen in Deutschland* (Frankfurt/Main, 1989); Rudy Koshar, ‘On the History of the Automobile in Everyday Life’, *Contemporary European History*, 10, 1 (2001), pp. 143–54; Koshar, ‘Germans at the Wheel: Cars and Travel in Interwar Germany’, unpublished paper, German Studies Association annual conference, Houston, 5–8 October 2000; Kurt Möser, ‘World War I and the Creation of Desire for Automobiles in Germany’, in Strasser, McGovern and Judt (eds.), *Getting and Spending*, pp. 195–222; Wolfgang Sachs, *For Love of the Automobile*. Both with respect to automotive history as well as to the broader history of commercial society, Sachs’s study of the car is one of the few analyses to consider the history of desire for a specific consumer object in modern Germany. Nonetheless, his book is also quirky and journalistic, and now rather outdated considering that it first appeared in German in 1984.

mobile ownership for the 1950s was 21 per cent, a startling figure, but it was only in 1957 that more cars than motorcycles were registered. Buoyed by extensive roadbuilding, significant decreases in operating costs, favourable taxation schemes and a fully-fledged belief in the right of the modern citizen to individual mobility, the automobile achieved unprecedented status as a valued consumer object in the 1960s, the first decade of true mass motorization in German history. Just as the middle-class owner of the inter-war era treated his or her first automobile more like a family member or pet rather than a machine—automobile magazines included letters to the editor debating whether it was appropriate to name the family car—automobiles took on a cultural life of their own in West Germany. Many Germans remembered the buying of the family car as an important step in establishing a household, second only in significance to the purchase of a home or apartment; many others indexed their childhoods with reference to their first drive in father's Volkswagen or Borgward 'Lloyd'. In many respects Hitler's vision of a people's car as the leading edge of mass automobility came true, but under quite different political conditions, as the Volkswagen was celebrated by automotive journalists as the 'classless car', the perfect symbol of West German democracy. More than fifteen million VWs were produced before the model was discontinued. So profound was the automobile's impact on West German culture, so extensive was the 'democratization of consumption' for which it stood as a symbol, that Arne Andersen argues that the car transformed the ideals of the Enlightenment and bourgeois revolution to accommodate mass consumption.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, grudgingly—the car could after all be seen as a symbol of the decadent, selfish West—and without either the technological expertise or access to quality materials that characterized the Volkswagen, East Germany produced the Trabant, the Communist rejoinder to the classless automobile of the West. Its poor construction notwithstanding, the Trabant shared many general attributes with the Volkswagen, such as the emphasis on stylistic continuity rather than year-to-year model changes, a characteristic also to be found in the East German motorcycle industry. But the cheap, trudging Trabant finally also symbolized both the unmet desire for automobiles in DDR society and the SED's suspicion of consumers and consumer culture.⁸⁹ From before World War I until the present day, the car's itinerary through German history reveals fascinating clues to the changing (or persistent) symbolic and cultural meanings of consumer goods over time.

Together with, and closely related to, key words in German history such as identity, memory, trauma, nation and war we should certainly add German

⁸⁸ Andersen, *Der Traum vom guten Leben*, pp. 29–30, 157–74; Dietmar Klenke, *Bundesdeutsche Verkehrspolitik und Motorisierung* (Stuttgart, 1993); Franz-Josef Oller (ed.), *Mein erstes Auto. Erinnerungen und Geschichten* (Frankfurt/Main, 1999); Wolfgang Ruppert, 'Das Auto: Herrschaft über Raum und Zeit', in Ruppert (ed.), *Fahrrad, Auto, Fernsehschrank*, pp. 119–61.

⁸⁹ Heinz Hirdina, 'Gegenstand und Utopie', in NGBK (ed.), *Wunderwirtschaft*, pp. 48–61; Jonathan Zatin, 'The Vehicle of Desire: The Trabant, the Wartburg, and the end of the GDR', *German History*, 15, 3 (1997), pp. 358–80.

things, goods and commodities. Similar to Reinhard Koselleck's *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, which set out to delineate historical concepts, and Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de mémoire*, which explored an array of sites of memory, perhaps we need a major collaborative work that will map the existence and meanings, material and immaterial, of *deutsche Sache*.⁹⁰ The value of this approach is that it focuses on the relations between people and things, and on commodities as carriers of ideas. One can think of key words that belong in such a lexicon: choice, abundance, luxury, frugality, sense, materialism, necessity, pleasure and many others. Historians have long been aware that the making of consumer culture entailed 'a new language of goods'.⁹¹ But how did that language evolve in time and place, with reference to the things it represented, and above all with reference to the specific temporalities, feelings and experiences of its users?

Alongside the histories of things and of small steps, our narratives should also capture the view from above by linking consumption to politics, ideology and economics. In contrast to a history of small steps, this is a history of state interventions, economic policies and trends, and world views.⁹² Consumption was at the centre of all German régimes from 1933, and was anticipated as both policy and problem before this fateful year, for the simple reason that production and consumption are inherent to industrial society—capitalist, socialist or National Socialist. The question—some may say the predicament—of the modern world is not whether to consume, but how and what to consume, and the best way to divide goods fairly. We need to know more about the relations between the planned economies under National Socialism and East Germany, but also about the continuities in government policies between National Socialism and West Germany.

Viewing the history of consumption as one of small steps and large movements challenges the received political narrative and chronology of modern German history. Differently put, it provides a way to link the personal histories of everyday life with the overarching narratives of ideology, state policies and national identity. A narrative emerges from the essays of this volume—from the austerity imposed on housewives in the 1930s, to the consumer prosperity and discontent in the 1950s BRD and DDR and beyond—that is, a narrative of consumption as a vehicle to capture the transformation from the enormous ideological sacrifice and mobilization that Germans were willing to endure in the 1930s–1950s to a changing sense of self and of a German collectivity from the 1960s–1970s. This historical narrative introduces complexity to the temporal markers of German history categorized according to political régimes. It avoids the facile historical break in 1945 as 'zero hour', and is more sensitive

⁹⁰ Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, vol. I: *La République*; vols. II–IV: *La Nation*; vols. V–VII: *Les France* (Paris, 1984–92). Reinhart Koselleck et al. (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 8 vols. (Stuttgart, 1972–97).

⁹¹ De Grazia, 'The Arts of Purchase', p. 223.

⁹² On state intervention see Berghoff (ed.), *Konsumpolitik*.

to long-term trends in everyday life as well as in macroeconomic and state policies. Moreover, it is more suitable to capture the *processes* of commodification in twentieth-century Germany, and to view these processes, in spite of the political changes, as parts of a comprehensive whole. Viewed in this way, the years after 1945, well into the 1950s, seem in many respects closer to the 1930s than to the 1960s. Consumption may be a constitutive factor at the heart of these developments.

One process closely indexed to commodification is the making of German identity. In an evocative phrase, Daniel Roche has remarked that the 'history of consumption as production' has still to be written.⁹³ One major form of such 'production' is the marketing and consumption of national cultures (in museums, historic urban commercial districts, films, cuisine, anniversaries and in the activity that represents the *sine qua non* for all this, namely tourism and travelling), which has become in the twentieth century an essential characteristic of the making and representing of identity. But there is still relatively little scholarship for Germany on the relationship between commodified cultural productions and national identity.⁹⁴ Linking the two is a particularly promising research theme. How did twentieth-century Germans, on the most basic level, change the representations of the past as a result of the commodification of every aspect of society? How did perceptions of the past and business activity commingle, oppose and contradict each other in museums, tourist attractions and similar sites?⁹⁵ How did consumer culture shape an idea of German authenticity? Consumption was used, as the present essays show, by ideologues in all German régimes to mould German identity, but only in West Germany was consumption a patriotic duty, elevated by Ludwig Erhard and his like to the level of national-political identity. What was the role, then, of consumer culture as a shaper of a shared, as well as of a divided, German national past before and after 1989?

Consumer culture may also shed unexpected light on the Holocaust as history and memory. As history: Michael Geyer has recently pointed out the dramatic interaction between the rise of consumer culture and genocide in Nazi Ger-

⁹³ Roche, *A History of Everyday Things*, p. 250.

⁹⁴ For a period, between the 1950s and the 1970s, a common topic was how and why German intellectuals resisted what they viewed as the pernicious influence of materialism on national *Kultur*. But the relationship between commercial culture and identity is a much larger topic, which goes beyond the history of ideas and cultural pessimism. More recently, national identity was linked to consumer activities such as travel and tourism, Christmas celebrations and the reception of American mass media. See Koshar, *German Travel Cultures and From Monuments to Traces*; Confino, 'Consumer Culture is in Need of Attention' and 'Traveling as a Culture of Remembrance'; Joseph Perry, 'The Private Life of the Nation: Christmas and the Invention of Modern Germany', Ph.D. Dissertation., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2001; Gerd Gemünden, *Framed Visions: Popular Culture, Americanization, and the Contemporary German and Austrian Imagination* (Ann Arbor, 1998). For an overview on consumption and identity see Hannes Siegrist, Jakob Tanner and Beatrice Veyrassat (eds.), *Geschichte der Konsumgesellschaft. Märkte, Kultur und Identität (15.–20. Jahrhundert)* (Zurich, 1997).

⁹⁵ For a recent theoretical statement on this issue: Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1998).

many. The Nazi régime believed in a politics of consumption, and its promise of consumption, if not always its realization, was more successful than Weimar's. For most post-war Germans, the Nazi years of peace, employment and victories (1936–42) were the best years of their lives (especially when compared to the Depression before and total war after). Well-being and 'fantasies of unlimited consumption', argues Geyer, were linked with sentiments of superiority, an excessive war, and of belonging to a modern nation.⁹⁶ This argument, however incomplete, shows the possibilities that open up when consumption as a fundamental pattern of thought and action is placed within German history, genocide included. As memory: the commodification of the Holocaust in contemporary society calls for a serious investigation.⁹⁷

Whatever our subject of inquiry, the key approach to consumption and identity should underline the notion of appropriation, namely that goods, material and immaterial, contain no inherent meanings, but acquire them only through the human act of social and cultural practice.⁹⁸ This approach warns against a naïve analogy of social class, religious belief, gender or world views with consumption of cultural goods. The social biography of things turns quickly into a narrative of their changing meanings under different hands. How, then, were relations of power in German society expressed in and shaped by commercial culture?

Social groups produce or appropriate as their own certain commodities to identify themselves. Consumer culture, in this sense, functions as a space of competing identities, where groups use commodities to constitute power; economic domination, gender superiority, political influence are often expressed in our society in a group's access to market goods and in the ability of one group to commodify the identity of another, that is, to exercise the power to (mis)represent the other in images, words and material objects. In a society where everything, literally, is commodified—from children's backpacks to the body to presidential elections—commercial culture is thus a fundamental sphere to acquire and exercise power. The Habermasian liberal public sphere of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries transformed into the sphere of consumer culture, where distinctions between private and public, hierarchies of low and high culture, and separation of politics from the apolitical are all blurred.⁹⁹ If this is indeed the sphere of post-modern societies in the twentieth

⁹⁶ Michael Geyer, 'Germany, or, The Twentieth Century as History', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96, 4 (1997), pp. 663–702, here p. 693.

⁹⁷ For an utterly unsuccessful attempt to tackle the issue see Richard Schneider, *Fetisch Holocaust. Die Judenvernichtung—verdrängt und vermarktet* (Munich, 1997).

⁹⁸ See Clunas, 'Modernity Global and Local', esp. p. 1500.

⁹⁹ See Matthew Hilton, 'Class, Consumption and the Public Sphere', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, 4 (2000), pp. 655–66. Post-modernists, of course, have viewed the advent of consumer culture as an essential attribute of contemporary society; see Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London, 1991); Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *Contents*, 146 (July–August 1984), pp. 53–92; Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, 1983), pp. 111–25.

and twenty-first centuries, then Germany—having tried out consumer culture under a Nazi, a Communist and a liberal régime—represents an excellent historical laboratory to explore the meaning of it all.

Whether under Nazism, Communism, or liberal democracy, Germans consumed in search of happiness and pleasure.¹⁰⁰ Looking back at twentieth-century German history, narratives of consumption should be building blocks to writing a history of German sensibilities: pleasure, desire, luxury, superfluity, envy, and also economic policies, exploitation, slave labour, and extermination. But we still know very little about how consuming sensibilities, such as pleasure, were perceived, experienced and physically felt in Germany under Nazism, Communism, and liberal democracy. Only one thing is certain: whatever sensibility consumption evoked, indifference was not one of them. For, unsurprisingly, consumption ran the entire gamut of twentieth-century German history: the comic anxiety over becoming a nation of gum chewers (admittedly, this is not a pretty sight, but is it really worse than a nation of *Imbiß* sausage eaters?),¹⁰¹ the genocidal terror of consuming fantasies, the post-war West German identity of patriotic consumption, and finally the commingled acts of prosperity's hopes and disappointments in 1989. It is time to integrate a history of sensibilities and a history of consumption within the grand narratives of German history in this century, with or without chewing gum.

¹⁰⁰ This is a controversial issue. Colin Campbell argued that we consume in the quest for pleasure and happiness. Neil McKendrick insisted in contrast that the drive for higher social status is the determining factor. See Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, 1987); McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, *The Birth of Consumer Society*. See also Lisa Tiersten, 'Redefining Consumer Culture: Recent Literature on Consumption and the Bourgeoisie in Western Europe', *Radical History Review* (Fall 1993), pp. 117–59.

¹⁰¹ Historians of consumption will be happy to know there is quite a good novella on this subject: Uwe Timm, *Die Entdeckung der Currywurst* (Cologne, 1993); translated as *The Invention of Curried Sausage* (New York, 1995).