

In this issue

In German and European historical culture of the year 2009, the commemoration of autumn 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening up of Europe was the dominant topic. In spring 2009 we heard many voices – some hopeful, some critical – proclaiming that the ‘table of remembrance’ was ‘bountifully laid’, which was likely to precipitate ‘a new round in the state’s appropriation of history’.¹ On 9 November, the actual day of the commemorative festivities, however, there was mostly just exhaustion in the face of the ‘XXL-mumbo-jumbo’. Some raised the anxious question what the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Berlin Wall would bring.² Among the various curious ways of dealing with history that are more concerned with a vague historical feeling than with insight and understanding is an extremely diluted solution called ‘Murus Berlinensis’ which British homoeopaths have concocted from bits of the Berlin Wall to counter inner blockades.³ These sorts of attendant phenomena are perhaps the unavoidable price of a broader public interest in history – which undoubtedly exists and which is in principle positive, of course. Historical research can respond to it with the means at its disposal. In the run-up to the twenty-year anniversaries, historians have on the one hand closely re-examined the events of 1989/90 themselves,⁴ and on the other tried to historicise and ‘locate’ the ambivalent memories of the GDR.⁵ What is still largely lacking, however, is a synthesising examination of the ‘global histories’ of 1989/90.⁶

This number is deliberately not conceived as a special issue on the end of the GDR and German unity, or more generally on the demise of the socialist regimes. By also including other topics, we want to avoid a monothematic concentration on the currently topical commemorative dates. Hence, two articles deal with the history of the ‘old’ Federal Republic: *Michael E. O’Sullivan* recounts supposed Marian apparitions especially at the beginning of the 1950s – the great resonance they elicited and the mobilization potential they unfolded. He thus contributes an illuminating perspective on the situation of West German Catholicism in the postwar era. The popular adoration of the Virgin

¹ Norbert Frei, Der Erinnerungstisch ist reich gedeckt, in: *ZEIT*, 26 March 2009, p. 51.

² Stefan Jacobs, Dominomino, in: *Tagesspiegel*, 9 November 2009, p. 15.

³ Christina Rietz, Mauertropfen, dreimal täglich, in: *ZEIT*, 5 November 2009, p. 22. If it had another publication date, one would be inclined to consider this an April Fools’ joke.

⁴ As a stimulating essay on selected, mostly English-language publications from the wide range of recent books, see Timothy Garton Ash, 1989! in: *New York Review of Books*, 5 November 2009.

⁵ Cf. for example Martin Sabrow (ed.), *Erinnerungsorte der DDR*, Munich 2009.

⁶ Among others also Garton Ash, 1989! (fn. 4). For a multifaceted reading book, however, see Susanne Stemmler/Valerie Smith/Bernd M. Scherer (eds), *1989/Globale Geschichten*, Göttingen 2009.

Mary sparked harsh controversies between the official church and local believers. *Nepomuk Gasteiger* researches a slightly later phase – the 1960s and 1970s, in which mass consumption and its effects on the social structure of the Federal Republic became virulent issues of dispute. Gasteiger draws a connection between the contemporary sociological and philosophical discussions on consumption (including its critique) and social differentiation on the one side and the practice of marketing, market research and consumer protection on the other. While a sense of crisis was spreading in the advertising industry, consumer protection achieved a successful political breakthrough.

In the third article of this issue, *Gerhard Paul* continues his studies on historical image motifs, more specifically on the histories of their production, manipulation and reception.⁷ He traces the metamorphoses of the official Mao portrait, which he regards as ranging among the ‘super-icons of the twentieth century’. Besides the attempts of Chinese propaganda to regiment and optimise the image of Mao, in particular the transfers and transformations of the motif are fascinating: since the mid 1960s, Western protest movements as well as Western artists have appropriated and adapted the picture. At the same time, however, Mao is a figure that Chinese artists also work with – in many cases critically or ironically and with a clearly discernible reference to the imagery of Western Pop Art. Paul combines this case study with a more general plea for a ‘visual history of portraits of rulers’ with the aim of investigating in more depth the function of these sorts of images in the ‘establishment, preservation and erosion of power’.

Christine Gundermann’s article deals with portraits of rulers of an entirely different kind. She explains why it is appealing (also) for (contemporary) historians to read the popular comic ‘Asterix’ – not just for leisure time pleasure, but also with professional interest. From a contemporary history perspective this comic, which has now shaped the public image of Roman imperial rule and unrelenting Gallic resistance to it for fifty years, is an interesting source on the one hand because its great and sustained success, which has spread far beyond France, has made it a document of popular culture after the Second World War. On the other hand, it is enlightening when, how and by whom the basic narrative structure of ‘Asterix’ has been adapted for contemporary issues (‘Asterix and the Nuclear Power Plant’ etc.).

In his contribution to the section ‘rediscovered classics’, *Peter Krause* deals with Hannah Arendt’s interpretation of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. The

⁷ Most recently, see especially Gerhard Paul (ed.), *Das Jahrhundert der Bilder*, 2 vols, Göttingen 2008/09; previously in this journal: id., Die Geschichte hinter dem Foto. Authentizität, Ikonisierung und Überschreibung eines Bildes aus dem Vietnamkrieg, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 2 (2005), pp. 224–245; id., Das HB-Männchen – Werbefigur des Wirtschaftswunders, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 4 (2007), pp. 84–115.

subtitle of her book ('A Report on the Banality of Evil') expresses Arendt's aspiration to contextualise Eichmann as a person in the broader context of the 'administrative mass murder' during the Nazi era and in the twentieth century more broadly. This also provoked strong criticism, however. The question surrounding the significance of anti-Semitism to this day remains a central problem for research on the National Socialist system, particularly with regard to the actions of the perpetrators. In this sense, Arendt's work undoubtedly ranks among the 'classics'.

The topics described so far show that this issue does not exclusively focus on the caesura of 1989/90. Nevertheless, research and debates on this epochal turn also receive their due attention here, since after two decades there is a justified demand for discussion, findings and outlooks that is not just produced by the media and the 'commemoration calendar'. The debate section is dedicated to the transformation processes that have unfolded since 1989/90, hence the mid- and long-term changes in Germany (see the contribution by *Christoph Kleßmann*) and Europe (see the contribution by *Philipp Ther*). Transformation research has until now primarily been a domain of the social sciences, but it should also be understood as a genuine task of contemporary history. After all, it addresses processes that on the one hand exhibit a historical path dependency and on the other have not yet come to an end in the present. A thesis common to both of these essays is that transformations are by no means limited to 'the East'. 'The West' (of Germany and of Europe, respectively) is also undergoing many changes. The decisive geographical and political dividing line, which shaped both country and continent for a long time, is increasingly being augmented with and superimposed by other conflict constellations – a fact that admittedly only began to be perceived with a certain delay in the West.

From a historical perspective, twenty years are a rather short time period, after which interpretations of the recent past are usually not yet stable and definitive. Still – or precisely due to this fact – societal and political actors are attempting to firmly establish their specific viewpoints. An example of this is the somewhat strained attempt to canonise the concept of the 'Peaceful Revolution' (preferably with a capital 'P') and the entire set of assumptions associated with it. Even more so, debates are to be expected (and necessary) when it comes to shaping public space in the form of permanent monuments and memorials. In 2008/09 there was a contest for the design of a *Freiheits- und Einheitsdenkmal* ('Monument to Freedom and Unity') to be erected on the Schlossfreiheit in the centre of Berlin, but for the time being it has not yielded any concrete result. However, it has produced a rich collection of illustrative material encompassing more than five hundred proposals. *Martin Schönfeld* summarises the initiative and the contest for this monument, interpreting both as an 'antithesis' to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe erected in 2005. *Hans-Ernst Mittag* took a closer look at the site of the planned monument and the remains

of the Kaiser Wilhelm National Monument erected there in 1897. Both authors stress that in the future, the discussions surrounding a 'Monument to Freedom and Unity' must be more transparent and more precise than in the past.

Besides a review of the American website 'Making the History of 1989' by *Peter Ulrich Weiß*, two articles in the section 'rediscovered classics' also address the events of 1989/90, including their pre-histories and their consequences. *Dieter Segert* introduces Timothy Garton Ash's essay collection *Ein Jahrhundert wird abgewählt*, which appeared already in 1990. Although research has since clarified and modified many aspects, reading this fascinating book is still worthwhile in order to better understand the open situation in autumn 1989, which was surprising for all observers. *Stefan Jordan's* rereading of Francis Fukuyama's article and book *The End of History* (1989/92 – in the case of the article initially phrased as a question) provides a contrast to Garton Ash's work: Fukuyama does not proceed from details and personal experiences, but from a philosophically founded, almost apocalyptic grand theory on the triumphal march of liberalism – a theory that seemed to perfectly fit the demise of the socialist orders, but was also criticised as ideological from the beginning.

'Historiography is a laundrette from which the laundry generally emerges even dirtier than it was brought in,' the artists Victor Kégli and Filomeno Fusco assert. Their project *weiss 104* is depicted on the cover of this issue. In autumn 2000, they installed 104 washing machines on Schlossplatz in Berlin and offered to wash people's laundry in this 'temporary national monument'.⁸ This sort of action, although somewhat askew in its imagery, was seen (too) rarely in the commemoration year 2009. For research in contemporary history, an important task also in 2010 will consist in 'being a danger to national myths',⁹ questioning their narratives and asserting its own perspectives in the bustle of anniversaries.

The Editors

(translation: Eva Schissler)

⁸ Cited from: Waschen gegen das Vergessen, 1 September 2000, online under URL: <<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/0,1518,91440,00.html>>.

⁹ As was already argued by Eric Hobsbawm, Eine Gefahr für die nationalen Mythen sein. Dankrede für den Preis zur europäischen Verständigung, in: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Ostern 1999, Zeit und Bild, p. 3.