

CHAPTER 1

Wende

After that it all began with the Wende ... and after that ... the downsizing; we were the first, see? That we were no longer necessary. Sure we had our profession, but we could no longer practice it: we were no longer useful, see?

—Dieter, Interview, 2010

In 2010, a fifty-eight-year-old man named Dieter talked to one of the authors of this book about losing his job at a shipyard in the early 1990s. It left him without a steady job for more than a decade. The epigraph to this chapter is part of his semiautobiographical narrative: Dieter's attempt, in cooperation with an interviewer, to make sense of his life by telling stories from and about it. It is interesting that Dieter accounted for being fired neither in terms of his job performance nor in terms of a structural crisis in the economy. He framed his personal crisis in terms of a major historical event for German-speaking Central Europe called *the Wende*.

Dieter was born in 1952, so for him, Germany had simply meant the German Democratic Republic (GDR). During the Cold War from 1947 to 1989, Germany was divided into a smaller Communist East and a larger Capitalist West—the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). These two Germanies, along with a neutral Second Austrian Republic, were ground zero for the Cold War in Europe. The GDR was integrated into the East, led by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), through the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and the Warsaw Pact. The FRG was integrated into the West, led by the United States, through the Marshall Plan, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the European Economic Community (EEC). The stakes in Germany were high for the two superpowers, but they were even higher for the Germans themselves, who were recovering from the mass destruction and total defeat of World War II.

Germans helped create this Cold War, including the Berlin Wall that divided East from West Germany from 1961 to 1989. They also challenged it at regular intervals, and they helped ultimately to undermine it (Port 2007; Steege 2007; M.W. Johnson 2008; Major 2009; Klimke 2010; Lemke 2011). In the 1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev, the general secretary from 1985 until 1991 of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, had signaled his willingness

for reform of the communist systems in satellite countries by introducing policies of openness, transparency, and restructuring—called glasnost and perestroika—in the USSR. When the stubborn, gerontocratic politburo of the GDR opposed the Soviet reform models, it isolated the satellite state from its big brother and found itself in a position of weakness by fall 1989.

In Leipzig during a regular series of demonstrations on Mondays, the demands for domestic reform grew to include the opening of the Wall to inter-German traffic. Protests quickly spread across the GDR, further undermining both the legitimacy and the confidence of the Socialist Unity Party (SED). The leaders of the GDR conceded to opening the Wall and to general, democratic elections. Days later, and somewhat in contradiction to these earlier goals, voices of both East and West Germans began demanding the reunification of these two Germanies. With the support of the Western Allies, FRG chancellor Helmut Kohl moved quickly to admit the *Länder*, or federal states, of the East into a so-called reunited Germany (Maier 1997; Pfaff 2006; Richter 2007; Fischer 2014).

Germans on both sides of the Wall were bewildered by the rapid pace of these massive transformations in the economics and geopolitics of East Central Europe (Maier 1997; Herspring 1998; Pfaff 2006). These remarkable events sent shock waves into the village in the GDR where Dieter lived. Looking east, he observed the collapse of the Warsaw Pact along with the Communist regimes throughout East Central Europe and the Soviet Union. Looking west, Dieter watched as his community was absorbed into—some would say annexed by—the larger and richer West Germany. By default, Dieter fell under the protection of NATO and became a citizen of the EEC, soon to be renamed the European Union (EU). Through these national, regional, and global institutions, a Western-style social market economy penetrated into the East, destroying many of the formerly state-owned industries that were no longer competitive.

A *Wende* means *a turn* or, better, *a pivot*. *The Wende* refers collectively to this series of rapid-fire events that took place between 1989 and 1991 during which Dieter's country, the GDR, collapsed and was absorbed into the FRG. In framing his long-term unemployment in terms of the *Wende*, Dieter employed his *historical imagination*. He depicted his personal biography as part of a linear, temporal sequence of events driven by causes and consequences. Many people believe that the *Wende* marked a *turning point* in history: a brief moment in time when a relatively solid and fixed set of structures suddenly became fluid—and changed.

Dieter's way of telling his life story also involved a *sociological imagination* (Mills 1959). He implicitly associated this turning point in his life with a turning point in the lives of a larger *imagined community* (Anderson 1983) of people called *Germans*. Both ways of interpreting his experience arose out of

the “general everyday life scheme of expectations” (Schütze 1975: 1005; Berger and Luckmann 1996); and yet Dieter had an agenda. In light of the Wende’s detrimental consequences for people like him, Dieter implicitly challenged the legitimacy of its outcome: German reunification. In doing so, he made his personal struggles into a problem for Germans writ large. As he asserted, “It all began with the Wende.”

Losers and Winners

Referring to the Wende in the singular may give the false impression that these very different experiences were all part of one coherent story. Dieter is perhaps a typical example of a so-called *Wende-loser*: someone who lost out as a result of the Wende. But we could have just as easily begun this book with a story of a *Wende-winner*: an East German who was able to make the successful transition to capitalist democracy in a reunited Germany. It is hardly surprising, given this diversity of experiences, that there has been little consensus on the meaning of the Wende among Germans.

The imposition of a global system of capitalism left many East Germans like Dieter without a steady job for the long term (Lepsius 2013). Ironically, it was the pillars of the former GDR—the factory, the mine, and farmworkers of the so-called *Workers’ and Farmers’ State*, as the GDR named itself—who faced the most uncertain and precarious future. Two polls were conducted in fall 2014, excerpts of which were published widely on 1 October 2014 in the German media (e.g., Kleditzsch, “25 Jahre nach ...”; Berlin Aktuell, “Jeder Zweite ...”). One was by the Allensbach Institute (Wertewandel Ost) and commissioned by the newspapers in Eastern Germany in collaboration with the magazine *Super Illu* (Burda Newsroom, “SuperIllu bringt ...”); the other by the television station N24 and Emnid (Presse Portal, “N24-Emnid-Umfrage ...”). According to both polls, most East Germans are still proud of their Eastern heritage, though they do not all identify primarily as East Germans.

A minority of East Germans, however, still describe themselves as Wende-losers, feeling like second-class citizens. They sometimes express retrospective nostalgia for the East (*Ost*)—a phenomenon known as *Ostalgie*—and believe that German reunification cannot be called a success story. To use literary terms, the plots of their Wende stories are *tragic* (White 1973, 1987): they depict human protagonists overwhelmed by forces beyond their control.

By contrast, Wende-winners believe that they benefitted more than they were disadvantaged by the Wende. It took some time and effort, but they made the transition by adapting their old practices to new circumstances. The plots of their Wende stories are *romantic* (White 1973, 1987): they depict

human protagonists overcoming sublime challenges in tales that culminate in happy endings.

Nonetheless, Wende-winners maintain a sense of their difference from Westerners—called the *Wall in their heads* (Schneider 1982; Straughn 2016). As of 3 October 2014, British historian Frederick Taylor, author of a book about the Berlin Wall (2006), concluded (in a radio interview in 2014) that this Wall is getting smaller—particularly as new generations are born who do not remember divided Germany. But it is still there.

Histories are both factual accounts and literary narratives. Understood as rhetorical devices, labels like Wende-winners and -losers connect everyday lives to a larger story of Germany and the world, but in the process, they reduce a very wide range of stories to either success or failure. And there are many other ways to use storytelling to shape the interpretation of events. When people write historically, they make interpretive choices to begin and end their tale at particular points in time. They choose which figures to use as their protagonists and which sources best exemplify the past. As we have seen, they embed the wide and often unruly range of human experience into a plot. These ordinary tools of the storyteller all help make the story more compelling (White 1973, 1987; Schütze 1976, 1995; Rosenthal 1995).

We selected Dieter as the first protagonist for this book in part because his account of the Wende speaks directly to our plot: a story of ruptures in the everyday lives of modern Germans. Still unresolved at the time of the book's publication, the challenges he faces raise the prospect that these ruptures will remain unresolved for modern Germans as well. His story also allows us to raise scholarly questions about the purpose and impact of writing interpretively about the everyday. We have already raised a first concern: that we misrepresent the facts when we reduce the multiple and oft-contradictory experiences of many people to a discrete event (Vann 1998; Magnússon and Szijártó 2013).

Consider Dieter. He has found no happy ending to his Wende story. His story is more of an *existential tragedy* in which the protagonist is fully aware of, but can never escape, the purgatory of his condition. His initial unemployment marked only the first in a series of ongoing personal crises that ended in permanent underemployment, drunkenness, and an array of family problems: "And I wasn't bringing any money home, and no wife could accept that, right? And I had two children, then the divorce came, that came next, then everything took its course, and we were no longer needed." Dieter has been paralyzed by this *cumulative mess* (Strauss 1985; Riemann and Schütze 1991). Underemployment led to disinterest, self-limitation, resignation, and then despair.

And then I jumped from the balcony, because—because I could no longer endure it ... Fourth floor, see? Then things fell apart afterwards just as before. I was away 14 days ... A drainpipe altered my fall [chuckling] and I landed on the grass ... Afterwards one can laugh, but—

Even after his suicide attempt, Dieter's story took another unexpected pivot: he survived. So now he tells his story like a *black comedy*, whose protagonists find only a temporary reprieve through ironic engagement with the very gallows that condition their lives.

Reducing Dieter's experiences to only one story would miss the whole point (Klein 1995). His life kept turning and pivoting, each time abruptly and in unexpected and profoundly disruptive ways. Even for Dieter, there was no single *Wende*.

Our Trajectory

This book is designed to introduce a generally educated reader to some of the big themes of German studies. The authors of this book want to provide a different point of entry into this interdisciplinary field than the traditional surveys of German culture, economics, politics, and society. Rather than a typical survey of major figures, social groups, broad statistics, geographic regions, or abstract ideas, this book offers views of the everyday lives of modern Germans on the ground. Their stories make for particularly compelling reading because of the repeated tragic and often violent disruptions that they experienced. Indeed, they were so frequent, and so severe, that it makes little sense to treat them as exceptions to the rule. For modern Germans, ruptures were their *normal*.

For scholars, this book offers an alternate approach for how one might study everyday life in Germany or elsewhere. Everyday life is fragmented, multivocal, ambiguous, dynamic, and contradictory. It is the locus of complex interactions between elites and masses, micro and macro, public and private, the ordinary and the extraordinary. It contains a confusing mix of structure and agency, myths and experience, propriety and unruliness. These qualities have made it hard to pin down precisely. To make matters worse, this book addresses a particularly messy layer of human experience that resists smooth incorporation into overarching stories: the ruptures of everyday life. Identifying a relatively coherent approach is no small task, as there are many different doorways through which prior scholars have entered into it. Our response to this challenge, outlined here in this first chapter, is to place the paradoxes of the everyday at the core of our approach.

Gradually over the course of this book, we develop four interrelated concepts for analyzing the everyday. We treat its features as inherently *plastic* in nature

in the sense of being potentially fixed or fluid in any given social situation. They acquire this characteristic, we argue, thanks to the way people interact with one another in everyday life—what we call *microsocial interactions*—and the way that people lay claim to the right to shape the features of everyday life as they see fit—what we call *self-authorizations*. Remarkably, people still come to a common, pragmatic, if provisional, kind of *consensus* about its nature in order to get on with the business of living. How modern Germans chose to do so shaped—for better or for worse—not only their own lives but also the lives of many other people around the world.

We fully explore these analytic concepts only in the final chapter because we derive our concepts ethnographically from engagement with the evidence. For similar reasons, we will not introduce you here to the various sources and methods of each individual case study, for there are too many different ones. You will find that information too in the chapters to follow. Instead, we use this first chapter to describe the scope of this study in broad theoretical terms: what we mean by *ruptures in the everyday* and *views of modern Germany from the ground*. Unconventionally, we engage already in this chapter with empirical evidence to derive our theories and methods. As a result, this introduction is longer than usual and reads a lot like a body chapter. These breaks with academic tradition are all appropriate for a book about rupture.

The trajectory of this book is not linear. We move abruptly between fragmentary anecdotes of personal experience from everyday life and various kinds of shared, pragmatic understandings about it. Dieter's struggle to figure out how to frame his experiences illustrates the scope of the challenge: *how can he fit his experiences of rupture into a coherent story of his life? and into a collective story of modern Germans?* It is hard to make sense of everyday life when it has been so repeatedly and fundamentally disrupted. Yet the authors of this book think that it is worth attempting. Here is how we plan to do so.

Modern Germans

The topic of this book, as promised by the title, poses a number of analytic challenges. Take the term *modern* for instance. Colloquially it refers to the present in contrast to the past, but modern also implies a rejection of the old in favor of the new. The repudiation of traditional or sanctified forms often led to chronic instability and an experience of existential alienation. Moreover, that process of replacing the old with the new never took place evenly, all at once, or without conflict. Indeed, the introduction of the new and the destruction of the old is one major source for the disruptions with which this book is centrally concerned. The modern everyday is thus paradoxically conditioned by its own ruptures.

As German scholars, we too use modern as an analytic concept to refer to a period of human history generally characterized by instability, alienation, juxtaposition, unevenness, and rupture (Burckhardt 1860; Harootian 2000; D. Harvey 2003). German accounts of modernity are particularly useful to scholars for two reasons. Those experiences of instability, alienation, juxtaposition, unevenness, and rupture were particularly evident in the German versions of modernity. And in response, German intellectual and popular culture have made precisely those issues into the subject of critical reflection (e.g., Tönnies 1926; Kracauer 1963; Benjamin 2006 also Chakrabarty 2000; Harootian 2000; Durst 2004).

Although the scope of the modern is highly debated in the literature, we limit it—solely for the purposes of this book—to the period from 1914 to 2015. We begin our story roughly with the memory of World War I; we pay considerable attention to the Weimar Republic, Nazi Germany, and the GDR; and we end with the memory of the *Wende* in the FRG. Writing in 1994, and therefore ending his periodization in 1989, British historian Eric Hobsbawm referred to this period as *the short twentieth century*. We end our periodization in the present in terms of the consequences of the *Wende*, and we include a few outliers from the Second Empire before 1914 and even earlier in Brandenburg-Prussia. These outliers hint at some of the origins of these modern events and remind us that the periodization of modern Germany is fraught with problems.

Politically, the conflicts of the twentieth century were structured by the three-way struggle between capitalist democracy, communism, and fascism for world dominance. Geopolitically, however, those conflicts centered in part on Germany, owing to unresolved conflicts relating to its boundaries, political system, and disproportionate strength vis-à-vis its European neighbors. One way of posing the so-called German question, at least in the modern era, points to the many different proposals for fitting the different Germanies into a united one that is also located within a larger, peaceful, and stable framework for Europe and the world (Habermas 1997).

The Great War, World War II, the Cold War, and other conflicts were fought over these and other fundamental issues. One turning point in these stories, for many historians, was the Great War from 1914 to 1918. It began as an internal European civil war but escalated into a global conflict. It saw the collapse of old European empires in East Central Europe and the emergence of fascism and communism as modern political movements. During the mislabeled *Interwar Period*, these conflicts only shifted strategies and battlefields. In fact, many have continued to the present.

In this account of modern German history, the apparent defeat of fascism in 1945 marked only the midpoint of seventy-five years of conflict. World War II concluded formally with the so-called Two-Plus-Four

Treaty by the Allies and the two German states in 1990. It closely coincided with the crisis of European communism, the fall of the Berlin Wall during the *Wende*, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet this periodization makes sense only if you accept the story of the *Wende* as the inevitable, ultimate victory of Western-style capitalist democracy over the forces of totalitarianism at the “end of history” (Fukuyama 1992). Such a rendering of events is quite misleading. As of 2016, communism is still a powerful force in world politics and fascism is once again a growing threat. More to the point, events like the *Wende* were never the inevitable product of historical forces but the product of the agency of leaders and citizens alike (Mazower 2000).

A static and discrete definition of *Germany* is also an analytic challenge. Germany has always been a compilation of pieces: a multiplicity of political, social, economic, and cultural units on different levels. In the modern period, the region loosely called *Germany* frequently changed its borders, reflecting the fact that Germany has always been a place in the making. Reunification in 1990 only partially resolved this issue. In post-*Wende* Germany, we see ongoing tensions, for instance, between former East and West Germans, between natives and immigrants, and between member states of the EU about German dominance. The four maps created for this book, seen below, capture only some of this rich diversity and particularism in the wide range of German places.

For a study of everyday life, however, national boundaries are only one feature and perhaps not the most salient. Our maps of Germany would be far more splintered and conflicted if we were to include its many other divisions of politics, society, religion, economy, and culture. It makes even less sense to speak of Germans as a whole when we take into consideration the wide range of experiences of everyday life, for instance within particular social milieus. Furthermore, it would be a mistake to leave out the many Germans who lived outside the borders of the German states or inside them but on the peripheries. Particularly during the twentieth century, Germans crossed boundaries in all sorts of complicated ways, resulting in hybrid senses of self, while changing state borders and fluctuating populations similarly complicated the self-image of the people who stayed put.

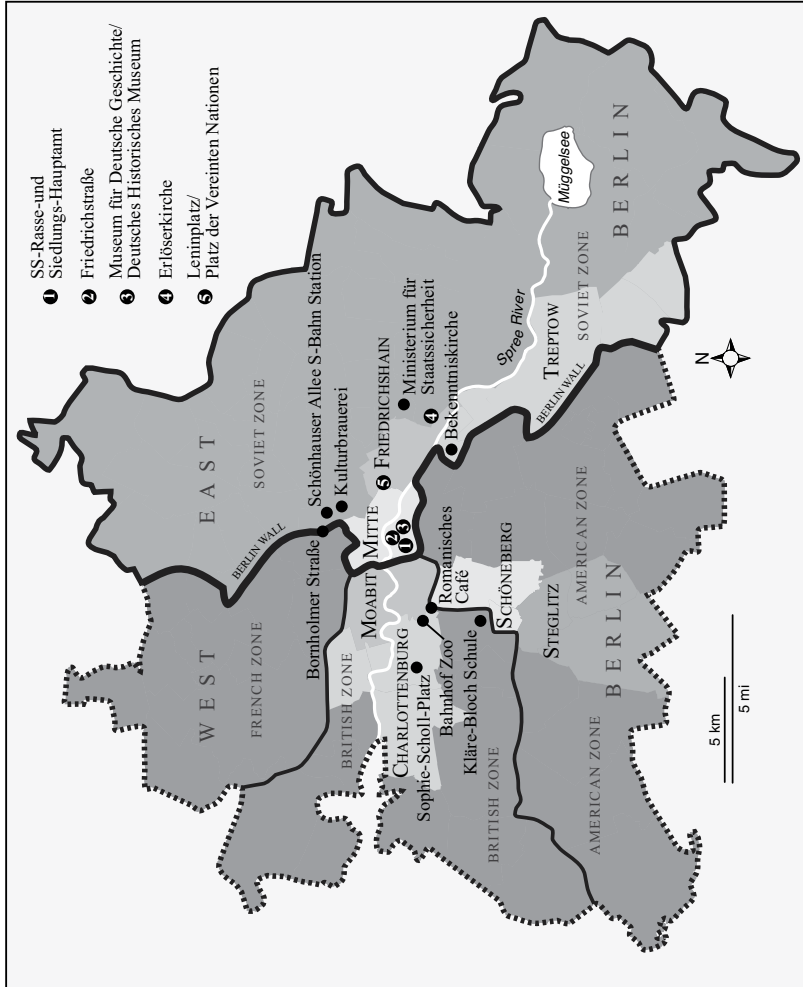
We address these issues in two ways. First, we follow modern Germans as they move to, trade with, and conquer other lands and places; as they move within and between various German states and regions; as they construct borders, communities, and worlds; and as they negotiate their sense of self—all transnationally. Second, we devote some attention to places within the nominal boundaries of Germany that are peripheral or outliers in the way we think about modern Germany. In both ways, we define modern Germans not as a fixed identity but a relational one. Accordingly, the four maps we created are

not exhaustive; they list only the places that are relevant for the stories we tell in this book. We encourage our readers to refer back to them for reference in this and subsequent chapters.

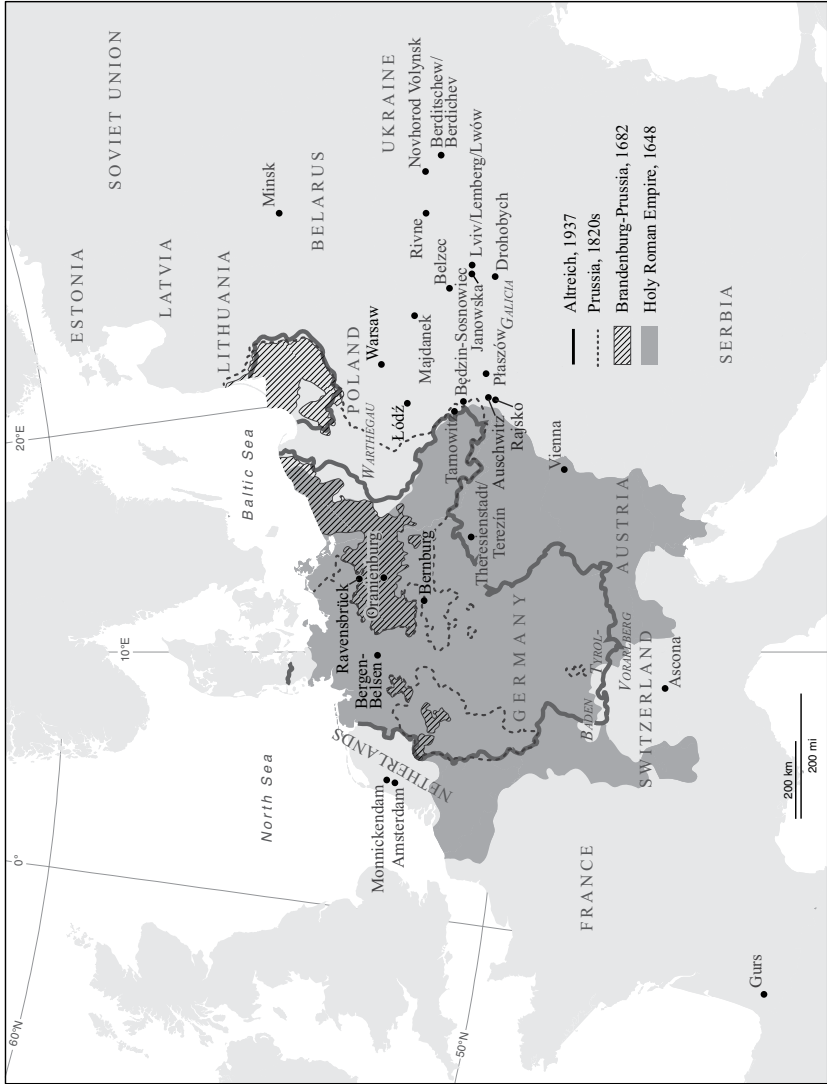
During the Cold War, the GDR was just such a periphery. In the East, it marked the furthest extent of the Soviet empire in Europe; in the West, it was viewed pejoratively as the other German state.



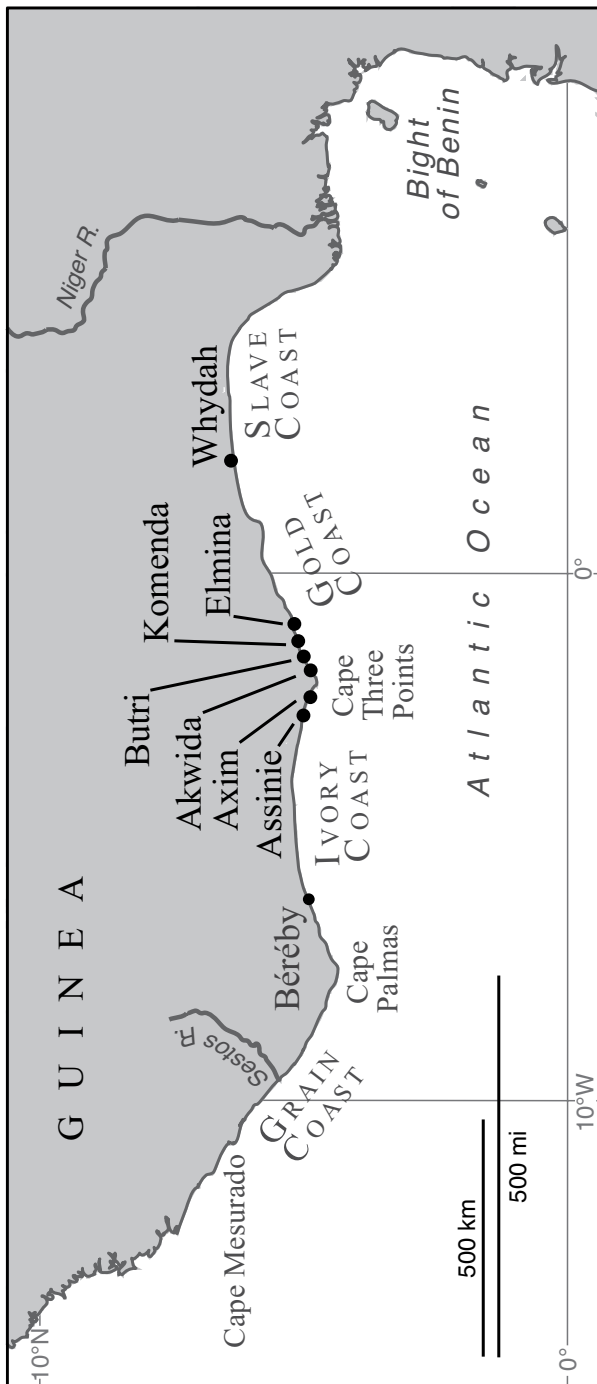
Map 1.1. Germany Post-1945¹



Map 1.2. Modern Berlin²



Map 1.3. Germany in Europe 1648–1945³



Map 1.4. European Trade Sites in Seventeenth-Century West Africa⁴

Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (MV), the provincial land where Dieter lives, was the periphery of this periphery. Located along the coast of the Baltic Sea, it marks the northern border of German-speaking Central Europe. East Berlin, capital of the GDR, and Berlin, subsequent capital of the reunited FRG, were located just to the south within the Land of Brandenburg. Yet in Berliner dialect, MV is the very definition of *janz weit draussen* meaning *very far away* (also abbreviated *j.w.d.*).

MV is paradoxical in many ways. A largely rural land, it was deeply embedded in industrial production during the GDR only to deindustrialize after the *Wende*. With the exception of a few cities and tourist centers, commentators have described life there today in depressing terms: empty apartments; poor traffic connections; consolidation and closing of offices, hospitals, post offices, and small businesses; loss of population; declining birthrate; aging population; lower qualification levels; reduced social connections; and a thinning out of social networks. Negative taglines dominate media coverage of these regions, including *suffering*, *desolation*, *empty highways*, *depopulated space*, *pensionopolis*, *return of the wolves*, and *call of the barren*. As these labels suggest, this German region has been not only physically but also *symbolically degraded*, to borrow a phrase from French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1993: 166). MV does not fit comfortably in the success story of reunified Germany.

But that is precisely why it belongs in a book about ruptures: outliers like this one refuse to sit comfortably with normative assumptions about everyday life. As scholars of the everyday have long argued (Niethammer 1989; Ginzburg and Poni 1991; Medick 1994, 1996; Prakash 2000; Magnússon and Szijártó 2013), the life stories of marginal individuals shed light on the structures and norms of everyday life by their very *alterity*. The differences in their conditions, attitudes, and action are part and parcel of the juxtapositions, unevenness, alienation, and disruptions of modernity. Outliers are thus not really outside at all.

One way of summarizing the problem with the category of modern Germans is to note its inherent *discontinuities*. What it means to be German in the modern period depends on one's class, ethnicity, gender, generation, race, region, sexuality, state, and so on. Yet these definitions change over time. Considered natural in one situation, they can suddenly be questioned and perhaps reinvented in the next (Scott 1988; Butler 1990; Foucault 1994; Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

The danger of broad generalizations about modern Germany thus lies in their tendency to erase all of this messiness. Thinking about ruptures requires careful attention to contradictions, crises, details, discontinuities, fragments, outliers, and particularities. Hence our preference is to speak of modern Germans. It seems to capture most clearly the cacophony of voices insisting on sharing their own unique stories of everyday life.

Collapsed Houses

The Wende began long before 1989, and its impact was still felt long after (Wowtscherk 2014). Illustration 1.1, a photograph of a house in MV taken by one of our authors in 2010, is an example. The worn-out exterior of the house on the right side of the image—draped in sepia, the ubiquitous color of Eastern Europe before the Wende—seems to stand in sharp contrast to the newly painted white exterior of the house in the center—probably repainted after the Wende. This juxtaposition seems to imply that the problems in MV can be traced back to the communist system of the GDR. By contrast, the collapsed roof, the dirt road, the graffiti, and the trash bins all seem to suggest that the social decay is more a matter of the capitalist system of reunified Germany. Taken together, though, they suggest longer-term processes of change in everyday life that transcend the political divisions of East and West.

When struggling to comprehend how these changes took place, scholars tend to organize their thinking in terms of either *structures* or *agency*. Agency refers to the actions of intentional individuals, which then shape the conditions of the possible for other people. Structures refer to the patterns of power, markets, relationships, and meanings that also both constrain and enable that



Illustration 1.1. Collapsing House, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2010. Photo: T. Gurr.

action. It has been quite some time since scholars called for *poststructuralist* approaches that move beyond this rather unhelpful distinction (e.g., Bourdieu 1974; Lloyd 1991; Sewell 2005). Understanding everyday life requires this kind of synthetic approach. Dieter's experiences in MV can once again help us to illustrate ours.

MV is not urban, but it is also not strictly rural. During the GDR, many agricultural workers there were employed in various forms of collaborative and cooperative farms. They were not farmers in the traditional sense but trained workers specializing in particular tasks within or in support of these agricultural enterprises. These enterprises structured everyday life, providing early childhood education, sporting facilities, cafeterias, and sometimes also local public transportation. The long-term structural decline of agriculture was therefore more sudden and shocking in the East. Whereas only 3 percent of all workers in the FRG were employed in the agricultural sector at the time of the *Wende*, it had been 10 percent in the GDR (Lutz and Grünert 1996: 101–20).

The *Wende* almost completely destroyed those structures. Within two years of the fall of the Wall, the number of people employed in agriculture shrank from around 850,000 to 250,000, which included 150,000 in short-term or part-time jobs (Meyer and Uttitz 1993: 221–47). When local agricultural production cooperatives in MV failed, so too did the sociability that was based on the services they provided. An equally dramatic set of structural adjustments took place in the industrial branches, which is where Dieter had been working. Seventy percent of the people employed in industry lost their jobs as a result of reunification. To be sure, some industrial concerns, like the shipyards of MV, were kept alive through privatization but only through massive reductions in employees. Their former workers lived in a continual state of crisis characterized by high unemployment, declining work skills, and dependence on welfare (Hauss, Land, and Willisich 2006: 34; also Merkl 2012).

Drawing attention to these structures is essential for understanding everyday life. In both sectors, it was the working classes rather than the white-collar workers who were let go and who then lacked other viable alternatives for employment. Both also lost the high status that they had enjoyed as workers and farmers in the Workers' and Farmers' State. Although they both lived in rural settings, neither could turn back to traditional agricultural practices or ways of life to substitute for this collapse, as those traditions had long disappeared. To be sure, similar processes of deindustrialization and privatization have taken place in many other regions around the modern world; the situation in the GDR differed in that its citizens faced both at the same time and in both industry and agriculture.

The GDR was partially to blame: they failed to reinvest sufficiently in industry in the years before the *Wende*. Yet the reunited German government

proved similarly unwilling to commit resources necessary to modernize these concerns thereafter. Unable to compete globally, the only other choice seemed to be liquidation and closure. The celebrations of the twenty-fifth anniversary of reunification praised the successful transition of a few of these firms but with only a fraction of the original employees; and the stories of those who lost out from these structural changes entered into the media stories mostly in terms of *Ostalgie*.

The benefit of a structural analysis is that it can demonstrate the impact of changing conditions on the people experiencing them. The people interviewed for this study had all completed their training as skilled workers in the former GDR, but despite the high value placed on such training, they were all dismissed from work after 1989. The thing that most disappointed them about the *Wende* was their feeling of being dispensable. They were industrial workers in deindustrialized and postindustrial areas. They quickly lost the sense of belonging—not just to the GDR but also to Germany, the working classes, their village, their families. They became outcasts. German scholars called them *decoupled, surplus, superfluous*. These labels tell stories (Klein 1995: 292).

Dieter's long-term unemployment is certainly evidence of a larger structural problem in the economy. Yet the fact that Dieter framed his personal struggles in terms of the *Wende* illustrates a more complex phenomenon. People respond to their circumstances with actions, interactions, and stories of those experiences. These responses lie at the heart of this study of the everyday precisely because of the way that they incorporate both structure and agency. It is in everyday life that human beings put structure into action. They do so through various processes of implementation, negotiation, adoption, and adaptation; and they make sense of those dynamics through storytelling.

The point is a fine but important one about the human condition. Most people cannot predetermine their circumstances before they act; they must make do with the circumstances available to them. But more often than not, those circumstances were created for them by their fellow human beings. That is to say, all structures are also the products of agency, just as all agency is made possible by structures. To capture this particular paradox of human experience, scholars of everyday life often quote Karl Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852; Ginzburg 1985: 48; Niethammer 1988: 11; Lüdtke 1991a: 110; Röhr and Berlekamp 1995: 330; Wierling 2002: 9; see also Rosa Luxemburg 1913). In our loose translation: "People make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances of their own choosing but under circumstances already existing—given and transmitted from the past."

The photo in Illustration 1.1, *Collapsing House*, documents at least two examples of people making their own history even if not under circumstances

of their own choosing. One of the first repairs that East German families undertook after the Wende was to replace roofs as housing materials became more readily available. Evidenced by the newly tiled roof on the white house, someone clearly believed that the Wende would bring an improvement to the local economy. Yet the roof collapsed—a fact that suggests that the structural changes anticipated in a reunited Germany, like the home improvements themselves, were not well constructed.

No doubt, this house also contained a family. In the early years after the Wende, they were probably still embedded in a network of social relationships in the village, land, and GDR more broadly. Yet the collapsed roof implies that they chose to abandon their home and those relationships in search of better prospects. In response to the multifaceted structural crisis of the former GDR, some 3.7 million people chose similarly to emigrate out of the former East Germany between 1989 and 2007 (Wolf 2010). Home construction and emigration reflect both structures and agency at the same time. To understand the everyday lives of modern Germans, we need to analyze them in poststructuralist terms as both the objects and the subjects of history.

Life out There

The first step to do so is to view everyday life from the perspective of the modern Germans themselves, that is, through the stories of their own experiences. Those anecdotes are often fragmentary and contradictory. Dieter can help us once again to find some ways to think through the challenges of working with this kind of material.

Given the personal hardships that Dieter faced as a result of reunification, we were rather surprised by his appreciation for the West. In spite of his long-term unemployment, Dieter admitted to finding some aspects of his new life in the FRG agreeable. At the same time, he did not wish to become a burden on anyone else. Dieter remained largely isolated socially and physically from “life out there,” as he called it, and he implied that this isolation was generally a good thing.

More than anything else, this phrase reflects Dieter’s efforts to reorganize his everyday life in a way that removed the pressure for him to make any decisions whatsoever. Still, this phrase hints at subtle shifts in the nature of Dieter’s village as a periphery—a redefinition of Dieter’s relationship to these various modern Germanies that in turn redefined his relationship to Germanness. For the residents of rural MV, “life out there” prior to the Wende had referred to the pulsing life of the big cities in East Germany like East Berlin and Leipzig. But the GDR was their Germany, and most residents of MV, Dieter included, still felt a sense of belonging to it.

After the Wende, this phrase still evoked his experience of living on a rural periphery, but “life out there” now referred primarily to Western cities like Hamburg, Munich, and the reconstructed capital of Berlin. Moreover, “life out there” now conveyed a sense of alienation from a reunited Germany. Dieter’s choice to remain in his small and isolated village allowed him to maintain an insular existence even as the village crumbled around him; dismissing “life out there” seemed to legitimize the choice to stay put. At the same time, this phrase evoked layers of memory that contradicted and undermined that conviction.

Dieter’s case study derives from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2010 by one of our authors, a sociologist by training, with twelve former East Germans between the ages of fifty-three and fifty-nine years old. All of them experienced long-term unemployment since the Wende, though interrupted by some very short periods of temporary work. Applying an *action-oriented grounded theory* approach (Strauss and Corbin 1990) to this series of autobiographical interviews provided this researcher with insight into the everyday lives of this cohort, their memories of the past, and their expectations for the future.

Like many others marginalized by the modern capitalist economy, this cohort tended to inhabit a world that was not only relatively restricted but also isolated. Personal contacts could not be taken for granted, and these individuals even tended to avoid family members out of a feeling of not wanting to be a burden. Lacking social contact and relational security, they experienced a persistent sense of doubt about their situation and decisions. The Wende, broadly defined, thus robbed them of not only a sense of belonging to reunited Germany but also the support of community relationships to confirm a sense of self.

A rather confusing array of concepts can be found among different schools of thought as to how to refer to that world of experience, and scholars often use them in different ways. To make matters worse, these debates are rather political because Germans have often deployed these terms for political purposes. So for instance, some scholars consider the concept of a *life world* to be discredited because of its connotations of *rootedness* in a particular *Heimat*, or homeland. Associated with the philosopher Martin Heidegger, the concept of rootedness was politicized as part of the Nazi ideology of *blood and soil* (Wolin 1992; Heidegger 2014). Among other scholars, however, it is an accepted term, referring to the reality we construct for ourselves through our actions and interactions with people and objects (Schütz 1971; Husserl 1973: 41–46 para. 10; Schütz and Luckmann 1973; Luckmann 1979; Berger and Luckmann 1996; Honer and Hitzler 2011: 11–26).

The basic premise here is that human beings determine their reality in terms of the way they apprehend it. By *apprehension* we mean the use of all senses and the brain to collect and make sense of phenomena in the world. Along with *make sense of*, we use *comprehend*, *evaluate*, and *interpret* as shorthand for this

phenomenological process of apprehension. Some scholars say that the dimensions of our life world are determined by the so-called horizon of relevance. That external boundary of the life world is inscribed, they argue, by directing attention to the things within it and away from other things (Schütz 1971; Husserl 1973: 41–46 para. 10; Schütz and Luckmann 1973; Luckmann 1979; Berger and Luckmann 1996; Honer and Hitzler 2011: 11–26). So when Dieter referred disparagingly to “life out there,” he was not only making a geographic and political distinction. His actions also drew a boundary between the inside and outside of his life world.

Some of us would go further. Even within the horizon of relevance, the life world is also determined by how people interpret its features. There are no human actions without meanings associated with them, so it follows that the life world is shaped by what people do in, to, and with the things in it. But these interpretive acts can generate confusion or even conflict. There might be considerable dissonance between the life worlds of different people, or *particular life worlds*. Here we are not referring just to the *partial life worlds* of distinct social milieus (Honer and Hitzler 2011: 11–26) but to differences in subjective experience for individuals. If every person makes sense of the world to some degree in their own way, then each of us inhabits slightly different particular life worlds.

Each of these twelve informants inhabited their own world in relative physical, social, and psychological isolation. Some filled their everyday lives with simple tasks, like cleaning, that created a sense of order in their household. These new rituals provided solace, intimacy, and stability. Many cherished finding functional, long-lasting, bargain-priced household items. They also used furniture and clothing to insulate themselves from a disheartening outside world. They devoted considerable time and effort to the construction of this new normalcy.

To be sure, we should not draw too broad a generalization from this small sample. Other people have responded to long-term unemployment by improving their economic activities or redirecting them, for instance, into the black market or artistic pursuits (Schnapper 1981). The extreme kind of isolation described here is far more typical of the kind of “upheaval” unemployment we have seen with the Wende (Vogel 1999). In all cases, however, their life worlds have been shaped by both structure and agency; and even people living seemingly similar everyday lives can inhabit life worlds that are radically particular.

On the Ground

Life worlds are dynamic phenomena, for they are the byproducts of our actions, interactions, and experiences in everyday life. Paying close attention to the way

that people tell their life stories is one way that researchers can access and reconstruct this process. Yet we do not wish to imply that life worlds somehow take place within this framework or container called everyday life (cf. Honer and Hitzler 2011: 12). Everyday life has particular qualities of its own. We understand the temptation to seek more analytic stability in the concept of everyday life, given the dynamic and idiosyncratic nature of life worlds. But everyday life as a concept is no more reliably fixed than the life world. It, too, is a product of the things we do in it and with others *on the ground* (Mailänder Koslov in Bergerson et al. 2009: 571).

The German term for everyday life is *Alltag*, and it has been the subject of much scholarly attention in many fields (e.g., J. Douglas 1971; Lefebvre 1974; Elias 1978; Hammerich and Klein 1978; Thurn 1980; Alheit 1983). Generations of cultural critics, philosophers, political scientists, and sociologists have employed this term, for instance, in their effort to understand urban modernity. Within the framework of critical theory inherited from Marxism, *Alltag* emerged along with the concept of *ways of life* to bridge the theoretical gap between the two layers of the Marxian dialectic: the infrastructure and the superstructure. Marxists argue that society is shaped essentially by the mode of production, which in turn shapes consciousness, culture, politics, and agency. For some theorists, it made sense to talk about everyday life as the place where these mediations took place, particularly if one wished to understand and influence those outcomes (Katznelson and Zolberg 1986; Lüdtke 1991b, 1991c, 1993).

German historians refer to the study of the history of everyday life as *Alltagsgeschichte*. This approach emerged in the 1960s out of an interest in the experience, actions, and compliance of the working classes, women, and other supposedly concrete and ordinary Germans at key points in modern German history. For many historians of everyday life, the *Alltag* served as the place where one could observe, and connect on a variety of scales, the dynamic interactions of politics, economics, society, and culture (Niethammer 1982; Borscheid 1986; Eley 1989; Lüdtke 1995, 2003; Steege et al. 2008; Lindenberger 2014; cf. Wehler 1988). All of the authors of this book are familiar with this school of scholarship, and some of us were trained in it specifically.

In both colloquial German and English, *Alltag* and everyday are often used to refer to something that happens frequently or in a repetitive, consistent, or ritualized fashion. As a concept, everyday life seems to some to be particularly well suited to describing the modern, rationalized, mechanized, industrial world of mass production and consumption. Others, by contrast, theorize the everyday in more paradoxical ways, arguing that it already includes disruptions and discontinuities (Lüdtke 1991b: 110). In colloquial speech, the everyday can also refer to what is *normal* in the sense of what the common people do; but it can just as readily refer to what is *normative* in the sense of referring to

what one is supposed to do. We begin to see how the everyday creates its own myths, if disruptions are disguised by rationalization and the normative is being treated as normal.

Also in colloquial speech, the everyday is often defined by what it is not. It seems to refer to the realm of the profane rather than the sacred, the familiar and homey rather than the uncanny and foreign. It can be used to refer to what is not political. The elites who have power and status seem far from the so-called ordinary people who inhabit everyday life. This insularity of the everyday can be expressed geographically in the sense of a political core and its dependent peripheries, hierarchically in terms of authorities and their subordinates, or spatially in terms of inside and outside.

But these dichotomies often disguise as much as they explain. If we were to believe the myths of everyday life, the calamities of disease and death, the violence of conflict and war, indeed history itself—when reduced to a classical story of policies and politics—all seem to penetrate and disrupt everyday life from the outside. The outbreak of the Great War or the Allied bombardments of German cities are examples of historical ruptures that sometimes appear, from the perspective of ordinary people, as interruptions of their everyday lives. Many East Germans experienced the *Wende* similarly as a series of extraordinary events that happened to them. Such distinctions between history writ large and the everyday lives of ordinary people may very well be tropes for how we tell these kinds of stories. Yet those dualities become structural features of our everyday lives when we speak in those terms, experience them as real, and act accordingly (Bergerson 2008, 2010).

It would be more accurate to say that experiences of the ordinary or the extraordinary are embedded in one another, constituting each other dynamically in dynamic circumstances. For *Wende*-losers like Dieter, it was the loss of a job that remained the biggest source of dissatisfaction and the biggest stumbling block on the path to a new normal. Like the vacant and decrepit factories around them, the unemployed felt superannuated: their skills were no longer required in the labor market of reunited Germany.

During the interviews, their comments suggested that they remained deeply committed to a healthy work ethic, in which personal worth and status is tied to making a living through hard work, but they were also distraught that that opportunity was not afforded to them. Some found it unbearable to be receiving welfare, as this status conflicted with their self-image. They responded to this contradictory situation by trying to avoid thinking about it. They submerged into their new daily routines based on reduced circumstances and possibilities. Here, even the ordinary and the extraordinary become tools for the construction of reconfigured life worlds. This cohort ironically used routines to banish the extraordinary, as if another rupture would only call into question their newly and provisionally constructed ordinary lives.

Clearly, the everyday is not just a synthetic but also a dynamic category. Its structures shape what people can do, and what they imagine they can do, just as those structures often also derive from the kinds of practices people use to act in it. Indeed, most of the categories you will find in this book—from the self to the state—are often redefined in use. It is the question of how people construct, negotiate, and express these categories in everyday life that concerns us here.

In order to study this dynamic process, we adopt a perspective *from the ground*. We try to avoid dividing our subjects into elite and ordinary Germans, respectively, shaping events *from the top down* or *from the bottom up*. Viewing the German *Alltag* on the ground seeks to wed these perspectives—though maintaining an astute sensitivity to the differences of power and status that empower different kinds of actions and interactions. With our focus on the ground, our lens can capture particular life worlds as they are shaped and experienced in practice.

Following from the way ethnographers engage in fieldwork, this approach strives to simultaneously and self-critically maintain the informant's *emic* perspective from within their life world and the scholar's *etic* perspective from outside it (Headland, Pike, and Harris 1990), for that is also an everyday interaction. The meaning of everyday life thus depends on the movement of meaning between figure and ground akin to the way artists represent the world and art viewers appreciate the work of art (Mitchell 1994). Viewing everyday life on the ground means that we pay close attention to the interplay of meaningful practices that both constitute and rupture everyday life.

Rupture

So the everyday is neither fixed nor stable. As people act and interact within it, they also act on it. Reproducing and transforming its features, these manifold actions can often interrupt or even disrupt the flow of daily life in terms of its established authorities, norms, patterns, relationships, and practices. Rather than seeing ruptures as an extraordinary break in the ordinary, the inherent dynamism of everyday life implies that they are part and parcel of it. We use the term *ruptures* to refer to these disruptions and interruptions, some of which were also quite destructive and violent (Mailänder 2010: 32; Gudehus and Christ 2013: 1–15). Ruptures refuse to be fixed or contained within discrete frameworks of time, space, experience, or memory. Because of their centrality to the experience of modern Germans, they are the overarching theme of this book.

From the evidence already provided about the Wende in MV, we could identify at least five layers on which ruptures take place. We could point first

to the *physical* destruction of the living environment like houses, roads, or factories, often leaving only object remnants behind.

Second, we could add the way that ruptures can undermine or destabilize *topographic* features such as roofs, walls, highways, and borders together with the economies and politics they support. Note that these topographic ruptures can be subtractive or additive: a collapsed roof, building a wall, or painting graffiti on it.

Third, we could identify the collapse of the *institutional* structures like families, governments, or organizations. These are, in a sense, more important than asphalt and concrete because of their integrative functions in society.

Fourth, we would like to emphasize the undermining of *interpretive* frameworks that inform those physical and institutional structures. These frameworks are particularly significant for the problem of rupture, as they have a dual role to play. Not only are they important in themselves, but they also provide the structures of meaning that allow people to engage with their physical, topographical, and institutional environment. The loss of these frameworks hinders people's ability to make sense of events both as they are taking place and then again in retrospect.

And fifth, we would also like to emphasize the disruptions to the *self*—individual understandings of gender, class, ethnicity, and so on—that make it even harder to locate the self in the new situation. The *Wende* undermined or destroyed many of these features of everyday life in the GDR, making it hard not only to adjust to the profound changes but also to come to terms with those events.

Consider Dieter again as an example. It is hard to know for sure the degree of Dieter's integration into the former GDR. His memories have been influenced no doubt by the overwhelming impact of the *Wende*, perhaps also by *Ostalgie*. But there is probably some basis for that nostalgia in his experience. Though unwilling to change the system, the GDR leadership had been able to elicit integration, participation, and even identification from its citizens by meeting some of their needs and responding to some of their demands with compromise. GDR citizens responded with a familiar mix of cooperation and independence (Lüdtke 1994a, 1994b; Lindenberger 1999, 2007, 2014; Fulbrook 2005; Madarász 2006; Port 2007; Schmieding 2014).

The *Wende* then forced Dieter to reframe his self in terms of the reunified German nation–state. His experiences of it have made that into a many faceted and complicated maneuver. Moreover, he now relates his new self to these various incarnations of Germany across temporal and spatial ruptures—to both the existing FRG and the former GDR. Dieter's personal sense of Germanness transgresses historical periods and topographic boundaries, ironically even while he stayed put in his provincial home. Notice, then, that staying put does not mean that Dieter stayed the same.

The *Wende* was hardly the first such rupture that modern Germans have faced. Let us imagine the biography of Dieter's grandparents. If they had been born in 1900 in MV, they would have participated in the creation and destruction of multiple German nations and empires. They would have lived through no fewer than seven political systems: the Wilhelmine Empire, the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, the Soviet Occupation, the GDR, the FRG, and a reunified Germany within the EU. They also would have been part and parcel of long-term structural changes in capitalism and socialism, modernization and globalization. Examples here include the hyperinflation after World War I, the economic transformations after World War II, and of course the *Wende*. They would have experienced multiple revolutions in the political, economic, social, and cultural order ranging from the fall of the monarchy to the systematic extermination of the Jews of Europe to postwar revolutions in consumption and sexuality (Herzog 2005; McLellan 2011; Steinbacher 2011).

These many different ruptures were distinctly German in at least three senses: they took place in German-speaking Central Europe; Germans played a significant role in implementing them; and in many cases, Germans were directly responsible for them. Yet they were not limited to Germany. They often sent massive shock waves around the world, and many were hardly unique to Germany. The challenge for modern Germans lies in the sheer number, scale, and frequency of the ruptures. For many modern Germans, it was not only the seismic nature of these changes but also the dizzying pace of them that made them so hard to handle.

Dangerous Memories

Some of these systematic changes were peaceful, like the much contested and far from consensual effort in the postwar Germanies to deal with the Nazi past—referring to the period of rule in Germany and Europe by the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP). Yet many were exceptionally violent, like the Nazi war of annihilation launched for so-called living space. This genocidal project led to an unprecedented destruction of human lives as well as their living environments, social institutions, political geographies, cultural frameworks, and senses of self. German thought on the issue of rupture derives in large part from the struggle to deal with this past, and the six main authors of this chapter developed their understanding of this concept in this context. Dieter did not directly mention these events in the interviews, but because he was born in 1952, they necessarily shaped his self. Like the *Wende*, these events created dangerous memories that, with their demands on the present, disrupt the normative linearity of history.

Notice how difficult it is even to name this rupture. At the time, it was framed as the *Final Solution to the Jewish Question* by anti-Semites, while bureaucratic killers used terms like *special treatment* to refer to mass murder euphemistically. Today it is called the *Shoah* in Hebrew, meaning *calamity*. In English, it is called the *Holocaust*, which is a Greek translation of the ancient Israelite practice of offering a burnt offering in the temple in Jerusalem: an *olah*. Insofar as this liturgical act was originally designed to sanctify the children of Israel, it seems inappropriate as a term for a system of industrial mass murder designed particularly for killing Jews along with many others. The difficulty in naming these events typifies the challenge of understanding ruptures.

Scholars also debate which part of these mass atrocities stands at the core of the Shoah: ghettos, camps, mass shootings, trains, gas chambers, or crematoria. The German political theologian Johann Baptist Metz prefers *Auschwitz*, the name of one of the most notorious networks of industrial mass murder, as a more specific metonym for genocide (Metz 1981, 1998). Yet emphasizing Auschwitz prioritizes the last of the great killing centers, perhaps falsely because Western scholars had more access to the historical records of this camp while the bulk of the murder took place farther east.

An emphasis on trains and gas chambers seems to support an interpretation of these events as industrial genocide or an incarnation of modernity in its most terrible form. By contrast, an emphasis on the unremitting mass shootings throughout Eastern Europe seems to underscore both the personal roots of anti-Semitism and the personal experience of the genocide in which the killers confronted their victims face to face (Hilberg 1961; Bauman 1989; Browning 1992; Goldhagen 1996; Megargee 2007; Gigliotti 2009; Snyder 2010).

Different perspectives arise from different experiences. Compare the Jews of Central Europe who successfully left Germany before 1939 to the Jews of Eastern Europe. The rupture of the Shoah took place for the former when they lost citizenship, jobs, and property and were forced to leave Germany; for the latter it came with the invasion of the Germans and the murders to follow. Meanwhile, the primary rupture for non-Jewish Germans—at least the way they often tell the story—was the bombardment of German cities by the Allies (Thiessen 2007; Arnold 2011; Fuchs 2012; also Swett 2013) followed in close succession by the experiences of forced migration, rape, and occupation (Liebman 1995; Naimark 1995; Moeller 2001; Niven 2006; Grossmann 2007, 2011; Demshuk 2012; Douglas 2013; Greiner 2014). It is hard to put together into a single story (Klein 1995) such a wide variety of horrific actions and experiences, including the many ways of dying and killing. Choosing one story over the other only seems to validate one group's suffering at the expense of another.

Still, the sixty-five million inhabitants of Germany, all in one way or another, had to adjust to the new order established by the Nazi regime. Some

less and some more, they abandoned civility and democracy for the fascist and racist community envisioned by the Nazis as a *Volksgemeinschaft* (Diner 1988; Bergerson 2004; Bajohr and Wildt 2009; Wildt 2012a, 2012b, 2013). The vast majority of non-Jewish Germans also contributed to the Nazi conquest of a European empire through waging a war of extermination, benefitted from it, or both. By fault or default, they became so-called *Aryans*—the Nazi term for the Germanic race. Only in the wake of this complicity and as a consequence of it did they experience strategic bombing, resettlement, rape, and occupation. Whether or not acknowledged as such, those subsequent ruptures were always experienced in relation to the previous ones (Lüdtke 1989: 11; Bergerson 2004).

These memories of suffering and death thus disrupt the sense of mastery over the past that we typically assume when telling the stories of nations. When one considers the physical destruction of the lived environment, the collapse of institutional structures, the devastation of the political landscape, the undermining of interpretive frameworks, and, most of all, the tremendous loss of life and fundamental challenge to our humanity, the Shoah remained present as the absence at the heart of German everyday life long after 1945. Even after the war, modern Germans necessarily reconstructed the self as postwar—always defined in relation to those earlier ruptures.

Debates about the legitimacy of remembering or forgetting the Nazi past, or of identifying with the perpetrators or victims, miss the point; ruptures break with simple categories of identification and the simple linearity of history. These *shattered pasts* prove hard to fit into overarching stories of Germans as a whole (Jarausch and Geyer 2004), which in turn make a German identity hard to pin down precisely. Many Germans and the scholars who study them have concluded that the process of making sense of these experiences is, and should remain, ongoing, which ties German identities to that process of memory work (Krondorfer 1995; Habermas 1997; Sider and Smith 1997; Neumann 2000; Confino and Fritzsche 2002; Moses 2007; Berger and Nevin 2014). But even that laudable strategy in no way simplifies the challenge of dealing with the ruptures in the everyday lives of modern Germans.

Take Metz, for example. Because he is a theologian, the context for his reflection is religious tradition, in his case Roman Catholic Christianity, although it was nurtured by, rather than rejecting, its Jewish roots. As a specifically *political* theologian, though, he has resisted turning Christianity into a privatized faith in service of the spiritual longings of individuals. For him, ruptures are more than private traumas: they have a political dimension and effectiveness. Moreover, he worries that explaining genocides, as scholars are wont to do, could ironically serve to close off critical engagement with them. Instead, Metz reads the central story of Christianity—the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth—as embodying a debt that cannot be

repaid and a wound that cannot be closed. It keeps the door open to human suffering and its critical import (Metz 1998, 2006; Ostovich 2002).

To explain this debt, Metz turns to the concept of *dangerous memory*, adopting and adapting the ideas of Walter Benjamin, the Jewish German philosopher of modernity who developed this notion in the 1930s (Ostovich 2002). Metz, following Benjamin, labels the kind of triumphant historical interpretation that characterized German reunification a “victor’s history” (2007: 60–84, 114–27). He argues that there are memories that “break through the [historical] canon of all that is taken as self-evident” and “subvert our structures of plausibility.”

Such dangerous memories “illuminate for a few moments and with a harsh steady light the questionable nature of things we have apparently come to terms with” (Metz 1972: 15, also 2007: 89). Here Metz is showing how dangerous memories question the normative notions of time and the official histories built on them to forge links of solidarity between past and present. To forge those links, he calls for a kind of *anamnestic reason*. He means a historically and politically situated form of thinking that operates in “solidarity backwards” with the victims of history (Metz 1992; Ostovich 2006, 2010).

Ruptures break with normative trajectories of historical time. French anthropologist Alban Bensa and sociologist Eric Fassin (2002) insist that “events” constitute “ruptures of intelligibility” in the sense that they not only separate the past from the future but force us to rethink and reorder past, present, and future. Ruptures place demands on the present, compelling us to rethink the past and identify backward with the victims. Dieter’s memories of the Wende fit this model of refusing to stay put temporally. Although not horrifically violent like the Shoah, the Wende represents a rupture nonetheless (e.g., Lahusen 2013). Many West Germans might have initially accepted the official version of reunification as a triumph of freedom; but it is clear that, just as the topography of MV has been physically and symbolically degraded, many East Germans’ material, mental, and psychological suffering continued long after reunification. Those stories underscore the persistent struggle in everyday life to deal with the past when Germany as a whole appears to have moved on.

The point we are making here is that the wars, revolutions, and genocides in modern German history did not end when the violence stopped or the turning point turned. They continue to disrupt the present: not only with the destruction of physical resources or conceptual frameworks (Wagner-Kyora 2014), or even with the psychological impact of trauma (Brunner and Zajde 2011), but also with memories of the ethical debt owed to the victims. To understand Dieter’s everyday life today, we must “brush history against the grain” (Benjamin 2003: 396).

Our Stories

In bringing our first chapter to a close, we should admit that this book represents an experiment in our scholarly everyday (Lüdtke and Prass 2008). It is an attempt at large-scale coauthorship.

The project was conceived, organized, and led by Andrew Stuart Bergerson and Leonard Schmieding. Our coauthors were Jonathan Bach, Susanne Beer, Mark E. Blum, Michaela Christ, Cristina Cuevas-Wolf, Mary Fulbrook, Eva Giloi, Thomas Gurr, Jason Johnson, Craig Koslofsky, Dani Kranz, Phil Leask, Wendy Lower, Elissa Mailänder, Josie McLellan, Alexandra Oeser, Steve Ostovich, Will Rall, Johannes Schwartz, Sara Ann Sewell, Paul Steege, Maximillian Strnad, Julia Timpe, and Heléna Tóth.

For the purposes of this book, we refer to ourselves collectively as *ATG26*, shorthand for our *AllTag* Group of *twenty-six* people. We come from a wide range of countries, social backgrounds, and positions in our academic careers. We bring experience working in anthropology, art history, history, literary criticism, museum studies, philosophy, political science, sociology, and theology among other disciplines.

This book is historical in that most of our stories take place in the past, and yet it is not a history in any strict disciplinary sense. The experiences we seek to understand disrupt the normative flow of time in simple chronological sequences. We move rather suddenly between case studies of very different times and places. We frequently shift the tenor of our interpretations from one discipline to the next. And we embed ourselves in the story of the German *Alltag* that we seek to understand. These choices seem appropriate for a study of everyday life that resists disciplining. So we ask the reader to be prepared for a somewhat rocky ride.

Throughout the book, we will strive to identify to whom precisely this *we* refers at that moment. Each chapter was written by a team of two to five scholars but with lots of inspiration and input from other authors. The first and last chapters, serving somewhat as an introduction and conclusion, derived from the middle ones and were written last. The whole book was revised many times in response to considerable internal and external peer review. The names listed at the end of each chapter correspond to the scholars who feel primarily responsible for that chapter—and who may or may not wish to take responsibility for other parts of the book. Not all of the authors of this book wish to take responsibility for this introduction, for instance. Yet no part of this book could have existed without the significant input of many members of *ATG26*, this chapter not least. In the end, our book has become much more than an edited collection. It is a collaborative monograph—hardly a new genre but one that deserves more serious use.

Like the people we study, we wrote this book based on the preexisting circumstances of our—scholarly—everyday. We gathered this particular set of cases through an electronic call for papers in 2010. In a sense, the topics represent the research interests of our authors and a self-selecting sample of scholarship at that point in time. Placing these anomalous stories together in one book made for hard work. We worked with the plastic evidence given to us in everyday life, shaping it into interpretations while also adapting those interpretations in response to its resistance. Grounded in microsocial interactions, self-authorizations, and consensus building, the writing process represented an effort to develop scholarly practices that more closely correspond to the everyday we seek to understand.

No doubt the reader might find many frustrating gaps in our sample: for instance, there is a certain lack of stories from the Federal Republic, almost no mention of Austria, and an overemphasis on mass dictatorships. Yet one could make the case that our sample is closer to empirical reality precisely because our evidence was not handpicked by the authors in advance in order to create a sense that we have covered the topic completely. Any attempt to do so is necessarily artificial and inevitably erases the outliers. We also gain a certain representativeness through the multiple, interdisciplinary lenses that we bring as twenty-six different authors to the material. In this way, we make connections that are far broader than the standard kind of scholarly work whose interpretations are dictated by a solo author.

This eclectic array of life stories also allows us to make connections between cases that cross ethical, political, and spatial divides. In the book, you will read about elites and masses; communists and Nazis; East and West; homosexuals and heterosexuals; capital cities and provinces; Jews, Slavs, and Aryans; Europe, the United States, and Africa; and so on. In juxtaposing these unfamiliar bedfellows, the authors are not trying to normalize criminal behavior or regimes. We do not wish to give the impression that the suffering or the circumstances of these different situations are comparable. We have no desire to diminish the ethical, political, or geographical differences between, for instance, perpetrators, bystanders, resistance fighters, and victims. Moreover, there are many good reasons for distinguishing between political systems. It makes an enormous difference to the people involved if they lived in a constitutional monarchy, a republic, or a fascist or a communist dictatorship; if their society was focused on mass consumption or mass destruction; if children were raised in the shadow of prosperity and security or rubble and trauma; or if neighborly interactions were based on civility or racism. And these were just a few of the many varied contexts at work in modern German history.

Yet this book begins elsewhere. We accept the inevitably fragmentary nature of any representation of ruptures in the everyday lives of modern

Germans. In seeking to understand them, we look for those dynamics that tend to go unnoticed by laypeople and scholars alike. Intertwining these seemingly incongruent stories will enable us to think differently about the political multiplicities of the twentieth century. Studying them from the same perspective on the ground affords a much more finely tuned picture of how these different political systems functioned. It also allows for a better understanding of how everyday actions and interactions produce dynamics of their own—relatively independent of the political or ethical systems in which they are embedded.

In the chapters to follow, we invite you to enter the interdisciplinary study of modern Germany through this different doorway—not of leading figures, collective groups, ideal types, or abstract forces but of the Germans themselves. The extraordinary and the ordinary are embedded in their same stories. If we have an overarching interpretation in this book, it is that ruptures were part and parcel of the everyday lives of modern Germans. We tell those stories to draw attention to how Germans created, experienced, and responded to those ruptures in common.

We begin in the next chapter with the self. From there we move through ever larger forms of social complexity: interpersonal relations, families, objects, memories, institutions, policies, and violence. We finish along multidimensional borders, where we try to think about how everyday practices play out on different scales at the same time. Overall, the trajectory of this book is to move us from fragmentary experiences in everyday life to some kind of shared, pragmatic understanding of it.

What then are the contributions of this book? In terms of general theory, it tries to move the already very fruitful debates about everyday life onto new ground. We offer microsocioal interactions, plasticity, self-authorization, and consensus as ways to think about the everyday practically, synthetically, and integratively. In terms of research design, we propose a collaborative method of coauthorship grounded in these same everyday practices. The book works on the premise that, if we adapt our scholarly *Alltag* to correspond more closely to the everyday lives we seek to understand, then we may discover new and different insights. In terms of interdisciplinary German studies, our insights center on the ruptures in the everyday lives of modern Germans. But we will not provide any more of a preview of that story up front, the way most academic books do. We insist on keeping the everyday experiences themselves at the center of attention.

We invite you to listen closely to all of the different voices speaking in these stories of the German *Alltag*: hundreds of different informants, twenty-six authors, and many other scholars, reviewers, audience members, and editors. We encourage you to add your own views on the matter as well. Because of its multivocality, this book should be read as less orderly than it seems. The messy

experiences of everyday life, particularly in the case of modern Germans, can never quite fit comfortably into a single story.

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Notes

1. Cartography by Mark Livengood, November 2016. The base geographic data for this map was downloaded from Natural Earth (www.naturalearthdata.com), except for the German states, which were downloaded from www.gadm.org, an open-source geospatial database of “global administrative areas.” The map uses the Albers Equal Area Conic projection and the European 1950 geographic coordinate system. The scale is 1:4,500,000. Cities were located using Google Maps and the zones of Allied occupation are based on by the map “Deutschland nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg 1.9.1945” published on the website IEG-MAPS, Server für digitale historische Karten (www.ieg.maps.uni-mainz.de). Additional locations were provided by the authors.
2. Cartography by Mark Livengood, November 2016. The base geographic data for this map was downloaded from Open Street Map (<http://download.geofabrik.de/europe/germany/berlin.html>). The map uses the Albers Equal Area Conic project and the European 1950 geographic coordinate system. The scale is 1:1,000,000. Sites were located using Google Maps and zones of occupation were determined by the map “Deutschland nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg 1.9.1945” published on the website IEG-MAPS, Server für digitale historische Karten (www.ieg.maps.uni-mainz.de) and other sources.
3. Cartography by Mark Livengood, November 2016. The base geographic data for this map was downloaded from Natural Earth. The map uses the Albers Equal Area Conic projection and the European 1950 geographic coordinate system. The scale is 1:10,500,000. German boundaries are based on three maps published on the website IEG-MAPS, Server für digitale historische Karten: “Deutschland 1648”; “Der Deutsche Bund nach dem Frankfurter Territorialrezess um 1820”; and “Das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1937.”
4. Cartography by Mark Livengood, November 2016. The base geographic data for this map was downloaded from Natural Earth. The map uses the Albers Equal Area Conic projection and the WGS 1984 geographic coordinate system. The scale is 1:18,000,000. Map locations are based on a map of the voyage of Groeben 1682–83 published in Adam Jones, *Brandenburg Sources for West African History, 1680–1700*, Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag, 1985, fig. 1, and other locations provided by the authors.