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Beyond Glitter and Doom.
The Contingency
of the Weimar Republic

edited by

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- Jochen Hung: Beyond Glitter and Doom. The New Paradigm of Contingency in Weimar Research 9

RETHINKING THE CULTURAL HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

- Moritz Föllmer: Which Crisis? Which Modernity? New Perspectives on Weimar Germany 19

- David Midgley: Beyond the Clichés. On the Specificity of Weimar Culture 31

- Gustav Frank: Beyond the Republic? Post-Expressionist Complexity in the Arts 45

THE FAILURE OF WEIMAR DEMOCRACY REVISITED

- Michael Dreyer: Weimar as a 'Militant Democracy' 69

- Anthony McElligott: Rethinking the Weimar Paradigm. Carl Schmitt and Politics without Authority 87

CASE STUDIES IN WEIMAR CULTURE AND POLITICS

- Jochen Hung: 'Der deutschen Jugend!' The Newspaper *Tempo* and the Generational Discourse of the Weimar Republic 105

- Florian Krobb: Catholicism, Conservative Revolution and the Fairy Tale. The Case of Wilhelm Matthießen 119

- Jill Suzanne Smith: Prostitutes in Weimar Berlin. Moving beyond the Victim-Whore Dichotomy 135

- Geoff Wilkes: Beneath the Glitter. Berlin, the New Woman and Mass-Market Fiction in Vicki Baum's *Menschen im Hotel* 148

- Matthias Uecker: 'Das Leben [...] So ist es und nicht anders.' Constructions of Normality in *Menschen am Sonntag* 162

James A. van Dyke: Felixmüller's Failure – Painting and Poverty	176
Nils Grosch: Kurt Weill, <i>Mahagonny</i> and the Commercialization of Berlin Musical Theatre in the Weimar Republic	192
Authors	209

‘DER DEUTSCHEN JUGEND!’ THE NEWSPAPER *TEMPO* AND THE GENERATIONAL DISCOURSE OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

In the historiography of the Weimar Republic, the concept of ‘generations’ has often been drawn upon to explain the anti-democratic and reactionary attitude of the youth and its role in the demise of the first German democracy. Using the example of the newspaper *Tempo*, published 1928–33 with a decidedly generational focus, this chapter aims to show that the contemporary debate about youth and generations also had a strong pro-democratic and liberal current that has often been ignored by historians. These findings suggest a fundamental openness of the generational discourse in the Weimar Republic that does not allow for direct conclusions about its political influence.

Das Konzept der ‚Generation‘ wird in der Forschungsliteratur oft als Erklärung für die antidemokratische und reaktionäre Haltung der Jugend der Weimarer Republik verwendet, die wiederum häufig als ein Grund für das Scheitern der ersten deutschen Demokratie gilt. Am Beispiel der Tageszeitung *Tempo*, die 1928–33 mit einer explizit generationellen Ausrichtung veröffentlicht wurde, soll gezeigt werden, dass es in der zeitgenössischen Debatte über Jugend und Generation durchaus auch eine starke prodemokratische und liberale Strömung gab, die in der Forschung oft ignoriert wird. Dieser Befund weist auf eine grundsätzliche Offenheit des Generationsdiskurses in der Weimarer Republik hin, die keine Aussagen über eine zwangsläufige politische Wirkung zulässt.

With the renaissance of the concept of ‘generations’ in recent years, generational research has also made a comeback in the historiography of the Weimar Republic.¹ In fact, Weimar has taken on something of a prototype status in the study of historical generations: when historians employ a generational paradigm, it is most often used to explain the collapse of the first German democracy.² Arguably, this approach has been applied most successfully by Ulrich Herbert and Michael Wildt in their respective studies about the leadership ranks of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, the headquarter of political and criminal

¹ The generational concept has enjoyed particular popularity in Germany; for an overview of recent research see Beate Fietze, *Historische Generationen. Über einen sozialen Mechanismus kulturellen Wandels und kollektiver Kreativität* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009), pp. 13–22.

² See Andreas Schulz and Gundula Grebner, ‘Generationen und Geschichte. Zur Renaissance eines umstrittenen Forschungskonzepts’, in *Generationswechsel und historischer Wandel*, ed. by A. Schulz and G. Grebner (= *Historische Zeitschrift*, Beiheft 36) (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003), pp. 1–23, here p. 10.

police in the Third Reich.³ Both authors argue that the leaders of this organization were bound by a shared generational consciousness formed by their experiences during the First World War and the subsequent struggles in the Weimar Republic: a certain steeliness and cool detachment mixed with a sense of moral elitism that made it possible for them to abandon the bourgeois values of their upbringing and justify the mass murder of millions.⁴ These comprehensive studies have rightfully acquired the status of standard works in their field. However, with their success, the view of the generational discourse in the Weimar Republic has been narrowed mostly to ‘a conservative act of political rejection and self-ostracism against certain phenomena of modernity’ by radical, anti-democratic right-wing groups of young men.⁵ This interpretation ignores, in my opinion, the diversity of the contemporary debate and effectively feeds the cliché of a republic doomed from the outset by an extremist, nationalist youth.⁶ In this chapter, I want to offer a re-evaluation of the role of ‘generation’ in the Weimar Republic and its historical interpretation. My central argument is that we have to view ‘generation’ as a highly ideological narrative that was used for political ends by many different groups and, thus, that the meaning and the use of the generational concept was far more open and varied in the Weimar era than often described.⁷ I will illustrate this argument with an analysis of the newspaper *Tempo*, published from 1928–33 and explicitly designed with a generational focus.

One of the principal characteristics of the generational concept is the differentiation between ‘generation’ as an analytical category of classification and as a narrative of collective self-identification, in other words, between an ex-

³ Ulrich Herbert, *Best: Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft 1903–89* (Bonn: Dietz, 1996); Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten. Das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002). See also Ulrich Herbert, ‘Drei politische Generationen im 20. Jahrhundert’, in *Generationalität und Lebensgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Jürgen Reulecke (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003), pp. 95–114. A similar approach is applied in Werner Kurzlechner, ‘Die Gestapo-Elite als Generationseinheit. Eine biographische Analyse der politischen Sozialisation Himmlers, Heydrichs und Bests’, in *Generationswechsel und historischer Wandel*, ed. by Schulz/Grebner, pp. 121–47.

⁴ See Herbert, *Best*, pp. 42–50; Wildt, *Generation*, pp. 23–26, 41–71.

⁵ ‘Es war ein konservativer Akt der politischen Verweigerung und Selbstausgrenzung gegen bestimmte Erscheinungen der Moderne.’ Schulz/Grebner, ‘Generationen und Geschichte’, p. 9.

⁶ A recent example is Carsten Kretschmann, ‘Generation und politische Kultur in der Weimarer Republik’, in *Politik, Kommunikation und Kultur der Weimarer Republik*, ed. by Hans-Peter Becht, Carsten Kretschmann and Wolfram Pyta (Heidelberg: Verlag Regionalkultur, 2009), pp. 11–30.

⁷ For the view of generation as a narrative, see also *Generation als Erzählung: neue Perspektiven auf ein kulturelles Deutungsmuster*, ed. by Björn Bohnenkamp, Till Manning and Eva-Marie Silies (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009).

ternal and an internal point of view.⁸ It is part of the nature of the generational concept that these two components are hard to separate. Especially in the historiography of the Weimar Republic, they have often been conflated, leading to generational manifestos by small circles being taken as evidence for the political expression of whole age groups and, more importantly, as an explanation for their actions. Therefore, I will limit my scope to generational narratives for the purpose of this article, as this approach puts the focus on the 'narrator', meaning the source of a particular generational definition, including their political agenda and economic interests.⁹ Most importantly, it avoids the often fruitless act of defining and labelling different 'generations' and allows us to concentrate on the ways in which and the reasons why some groups choose to define themselves or others in generational terms.

1. THE PROBLEM OF GENERATIONS IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

The inter-war era was a high time of generational self-identifications, not only in Germany, but there in particular. This stemmed from a perceived rift between old and young that first manifested itself in the revolutionary habitus of the pre-war *Jugendbewegung* and, after the lost war and the years of inflation had undermined the moral authority of older generations, seemed to widen considerably during the Weimar Republic.¹⁰ The important role generational conflict played in the public discourse of the time is reflected in the plethora of publications on the topic: fierce declarations of youthful self-determination – from literary interpretations like Ernst Glaeser's *Jahrgang 1902* to pseudo-philosophical manifestos like Frank Matzke's *Jugend bekennt: So sind wir!* and political pamphlets like Gregor Strasser's *Macht Platz, ihr Alten!* – in turn provoked concerned observations by members of older age groups, like Peter Suhrkamp, Heinrich Mann and Ernst Niekisch.¹¹ Inevitably, this phenomenon

⁸ See Ulrike Jureit, *Generationenforschung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), pp. 40–52.

⁹ There are many reasons to be sceptical towards the usefulness of generation as a sociological category; see Ohad Parnes, Ulrike Vedder and Stefan Willer, *Das Konzept der Generation. Eine Wissens- und Kulturgeschichte* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), p. 20.

¹⁰ See Frank Trommler, 'Mission ohne Ziel. Über den Kult der Jugend in modernen Deutschland', in *Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit. Der Mythos Jugend*, ed. by Thomas Koebner, Rolf-Peter Janz and Frank Trommler (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), pp. 14–49.

¹¹ Ernst Glaeser, *Jahrgang 1902* (Potsdam: Kiepenheuer, 1928); Frank Matzke, *Jugend bekennt: So sind wir!* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1930); Gregor Strasser, 'Macht Platz, ihr Alten!', in G. Strasser, *Kampf um Deutschland* (Munich: Franz Eher, 1932), pp. 171–74; Peter Suhrkamp, 'Söhne ohne Väter und Lehrer. Die Situation der bürgerlichen Jugend', *Neue Rundschau*, 43 (1932), 681–96; Ernst Niekisch, *Hitler, ein deutsches Verhängnis* (Berlin: Widerstands-Verlag, 1932); Heinrich Mann, 'Jugend früher und jetzt', *Die literarische Welt*, 4.48 (30 November 1928).

also influenced the academic discourse, both directly (as an object of scientific study) and indirectly (by informing its argumentation).¹²

One of the publications most commonly used in historical research as a representative example of this generational debate is Ernst Günther Gründel's book *Die Sendung der jungen Generation*, published in 1932.¹³ In this 458-page manifesto, Gründel identified three distinctive youth generations in Weimar society whose world-view had been formed by their experiences of the Great War and its aftermath: firstly, the 'front generation', born around 1890, who spent their formative years of adolescence in the trenches; secondly, the 'war youth generation', born between 1900 and 1910, too young for military service, but nevertheless profoundly influenced by their experiences at the home front, and lastly, the 'post-war generation', born during or after the war and without memory of the lost Empire.¹⁴ Gründel, born in 1903, described his own group, the 'war youth generation', as sober, austere and sometimes even harsh, yet idealistic and emotional young men.¹⁵ The experience of the demise of the old bourgeois order, Gründel argued, made his generation unsentimental, flexible and quick-witted, with a world-view characterized by materialistic rationality and economic principles.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, he saw his 'war youth generation' as the pivotal group that would overcome Germany's crisis.

However, as mentioned above, Gründel was far from the only voice in the polyphonous generational debate of the Weimar Republic. An example of a very different, but nevertheless equally important actor is the newspaper *Tempo*, an afternoon tabloid newspaper published by the Ullstein company, owner of many influential publications including the *Vossische Zeitung*, the *BZ am Mittag* and the *Berliner Morgenpost*.¹⁷ In contrast to these papers, *Tempo* has

¹² For an overview, see Parnes, Vedder and Willer, *Konzept*, pp. 235–48. The best-known and most influential example is Karl Mannheim's seminal essay 'Das Problem der Generationen', *Kölner Vierteljahreshefte für Soziologie*, 7 (1928), 157–84 and 8 (1928), 309–30.

¹³ E. Günther Gründel, *Die Sendung der jungen Generation: Versuch einer umfassenden revolutionären Sinndeutung der Krise* (Munich: Beck, 1932). For a historical contextualization of Gründel's work, see Daniel Siemens, 'Kühle Romantiker. Zum Geschichtsverständnis der "jungen Generation" in der Weimarer Republik', in *Die Kunst der Geschichte. Historiographie, Ästhetik, Erzählung*, ed. by Martin Baumeister, Moritz Föllmer and Philipp Müller (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), pp. 189–214.

¹⁴ See Gründel, *Sendung*, pp. 22–63.

¹⁵ Gründel, *Sendung*, pp. 82–83. It is important to note that Gründel is writing only about young, educated, middle-class men. Women do not feature much in his book.

¹⁶ Gründel, *Sendung*, p. 85.

¹⁷ For the history of the Ullstein company, see *100 Jahre Ullstein*, ed. by Joachim W. Freyburg and Hans Wallenberg, 4 vols (Berlin: Ullstein, 1977); *50 Jahre Ullstein*, ed. by Max Osborn (Berlin: Ullstein, 1927); Peter de Mendelssohn, *Zeitungsstadt Berlin. Menschen und Mächte in der Geschichte der deutschen Presse* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1982). All of these books were directly commissioned by Ullstein. There is no comprehensive company history from an independent source as yet.

been largely forgotten and has not been investigated in any detail to date.¹⁸ However, it can tell us a great deal about Weimar society and the role of the generational concept in particular.

2. *TEMPO*, A NEWSPAPER FOR THE YOUNG GENERATION

It is important to emphasize at this point that *Tempo* was not a generational self-definition in the way Gründel's book was. Although some of its writing staff belonged to the same age group as Gründel, *Tempo* has to be interpreted as an external attempt to influence the youth and its generational self-awareness. However, under the terms in which generational groups are looked at in this article, this difference is negligible: both Gründel and *Tempo*'s journalists were taking part in the same generational discourse. In any case, my aim is not the definition of a 'Tempo generation', a new generational group next to the 'war youth generation', but to reveal the narrative nature of both generational concepts and their political-ideological foundations.¹⁹

Not only by its name, but by its whole design and content, *Tempo* was aimed at a busy, young, metropolitan readership of white-collar workers. It had an extraordinarily high frequency of publication – three editions between four pm and seven pm – to suit the hectic lifestyle of the young city-dweller, it boasted many more and much larger photographs than rival newspapers, and its design exuded urban style and speed. The typical *Tempo* reader was described as being 'around 30',²⁰ the same age group Gründel later labelled the 'war youth generation'. Ullstein described *Tempo*'s audience in the same terms Gründel used:

The modern male and female youth, whose education has been limited or even wholly disrupted by the war and the inflationary breakdown, have been pushed into professional life prematurely, and in this sudden and tough struggle they have become modern and objective, maybe even a little too soberly materialistic and technical, but also very clear-thinking and perceptive.²¹

¹⁸ The only study taking a more detailed look at *Tempo*, albeit limited to its political coverage, is Bernhard Fulda, *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁹ I agree with Schulz and Grebner that generational concepts were always political in the Weimar era, but I question their claim that this only comprised conservative or reactionary politics: see Schulz/Grebner, 'Generationen und Geschichte', pp. 8–9. *Tempo* shows that the concept was also used for progressive, liberal politics.

²⁰ Alexander Roda Roda, 'Die großen Kaliber', *Tempo*, 20 December 1928, p. 3.

²¹ 'Die moderne Jugend männlichen und weiblichen Geschlechts, deren Bildungsgang durch den Krieg und durch den Vermögenszusammenbruch der Inflation beeengt oder ganz unterbrochen wurde, hat sich vorzeitig in den Beruf und Erwerb stürzen müssen, und ist in

Soberness, objectivity and cool detachment, affinity to rationality and technology: the similarities of Gründel's definition and this description are striking. *Tempo's* political tendency, however, could not be more different.²² As mentioned above, the national-conservative Gründel drew a pessimistic image of the present political and cultural order and saw the Weimar Republic as a provisional stage – a crisis – that would be overcome by the 'war youth generation'. *Tempo*, on the other hand, wholeheartedly supported the new order and promoted democracy, parliamentarianism, pacifism and a peaceful relationship with Germany's former enemies. The paper's political stance was already sketched out in the leader comment of its first issue, published on 11 September 1928:

What is the meaning, the intellectual purpose of this new paper? The answer lies in our name. We offer information and entertainment succinctly in the tempo of modern life. Only to the ageing may this seem like breathless hurry. For the busy, striving, young person, tempo means the sweep of their ambition, their urge to move forward. Tempo doesn't reside in the legs, it lives in the heart. We address the German generation who no longer groan under the tempo of our lives, but see it as a reflection of their positive outlook on life.²³

Tempo tried to create the image of a forward-looking generation of young male and female professionals, who had accepted the new political, social and cultural circumstances of the Weimar Republic and wanted to help build the new democratic Germany. The paper's point of reference was less rooted in the past of the war, but in the present of the new democratic order. Accordingly, the references it used in its attempt to create generational awareness were not dominated by the world-changing events of the Great War, but by contemporary popular culture and the social issues of its time: sport, cinema, fashion, the changing relationship between the sexes, the legal status of abortion and female independence.

diesem jähren und harten Lebenskampf "neuzeitlich sachlich", vielleicht sogar etwas zu nüchtern technisch-materialistisch, aber doch auch sehr klardenkend und schnellauffassend geworden.' Anon., 'Tempo. Die Zeitung der Zeit', *Ullstein-Berichte*, October 1928, p. 3.

²² For the use of the concept of *Sachlichkeit* across Weimar's political spectrum, see Willibald Steinmetz, 'Anbetung und Dämonisierung des "Sachzwangs"'. Zur Archäologie einer deutschen Redefigur', in *Obsessionen. Beherrschende Gedanken im wissenschaftlichen Zeitalter*, ed. by Michael Jeismann (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), pp. 293–333.

²³ 'Was ist der Sinn, die geistige Absicht der neuen Zeitung? Die Antwort gibt unser Name. Wir vermitteln Unterrichtung und Unterhaltung knapp in dem Tempo, in dem der moderne Mensch lebt. Nur Alternen erscheint dies als atemlose Hetze. Dem tätigen, strebenden, jungen Menschen ist Tempo der Schwung seines Ehrgeizes, seines Vorwärtsdranges. Tempo sitzt nicht in den Beinen, sondern im Herzen. Wir wenden uns an die deutsche Generation, die unter unserem Lebenstempo nicht mehr ächzt, sondern es schon als Ausdruck ihrer Lebensbejahung empfindet.' Anon., 'Eine neue Zeitung', *Tempo*, 11 September 1928, p. 2.

It is important to note that women are explicitly mentioned in Ullstein's above-quoted description of *Tempo's* target audience. Its content did very much cater to a young, professional female audience – and not just with fashion columns and recipes, but with articles designed to raise women's self-awareness as a politically and economically important social group. For example, *Tempo* published several features on the living conditions of female employees, gave advice to single women on matters of daily life from travelling to living arrangements, ran a series on female pioneers in male-dominated jobs, reported on women's sports, argued for the abolition of abortion laws and regularly presented role models of successful women from all over the world.²⁴ *Tempo's* stance on women's issues even extended to the regular fashion columns: in one example, the anonymous columnist criticizes the term 'Bubikopf' for the bob haircut popular during the Weimar Republic. Women, the author argues, appreciated the practicality and hygienic qualities of short hair just like men did, yet the derogatory term would keep many women from having it cut. However, gender equality should include the same rights to short hair: 'If we have to work like men, then we want to live as comfortably as men. Short hair [...] is not a matter of fashion, it is an issue of social progress.'²⁵

This stands in sharp contrast to the usual male-centred definition of 'generation' and especially to the political use of the concept by right-wing authors like Gründel.²⁶ In *Die Sendung der jungen Generation*, it is made clear that only men are part of the 'war youth generation'; women should only strive for fertility and motherhood. Gründel rejects 'emancipated viragos' and the changed relationship between the sexes in the Weimar Republic, supporting the conservative ideal of the 'soulfully devoted woman'.²⁷

²⁴ E. g. Maria Leitner, 'Schlichter Lebensbericht einer Stenotypistin', *Tempo*, 18 September 1928, p. 4; Charlotte Pol, 'Eine Dame allein in Berlin', *Tempo*, 18 December 1928, p. 7; Anon., 'Die Ersten und Einzigen. Blatt 1: Die Astronomin Dr. Margarete Güssow', *Tempo*, 25 March 1933, p. 6; H. H., 'Drei Siege – zwei Staatsbürgerschaften. Von den Frauen-Weltspielen', *Tempo*, 9 September 1930, p. 9; Anon., 'Der Skandal der §218-Verhaftung', *Tempo*, 21 February 1931, p. 1; Anon., 'Sie leitet das größte Reisebüro Japans', *Tempo*, 16 October 1928, p. 7.

²⁵ 'Wenn wir arbeiten müssen wie die Männer, so wollen wir es auch so bequem haben wie die Männer. Das kurzgeschnittene Haar [...] ist keine Sache der Mode – es ist eine Angelegenheit der Entwicklung.' Anon., 'Das gute Aussehen, die gute Haltung', *Tempo*, 29 October 1928, p. 7.

²⁶ See Christina Benninghaus, 'Das Geschlecht der Generation. Zum Zusammenhang von Generationalität und Männlichkeit um 1930', in *Generationen. Zur Relevanz eines wissenschaftlichen Grundbegriffs*, ed. by Ulrike Jureit and Michael Wildt (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005), pp. 127–58.

²⁷ 'Die "geistvoll Emanzipierte" hat heute für uns an Reiz verloren. An ihre Stelle tritt die "seelenvoll hingebende" Frau, die wieder ganz Frau ist und nichts mehr als dies sein will – womit sie wahrlich mehr ist als alle emanzipierten Mannweiber!' Gründel, *Sendung*, p. 136.

3. THE 'WAR YOUTH GENERATION' IN WEIMAR HISTORIOGRAPHY

As mentioned before, *Tempo* has been largely ignored by historians in the reconstruction of the contemporary discourse on generations. In contrast, Gründel's concept proved to be very influential in subsequent research: already in 1939, the exiled sociologist Sigmund Neumann used Gründel's terms to classify Germany's political landscape into different generations, including the sober idealists of the 'generation of a war youth', tracing back the Nazi takeover to the conflict of the young generation with their elders.²⁸ This analysis was adopted in 1971 by the psychohistorian Peter Loewenberg, who tried to draw up a psychological profile of the age group born between 1900 and 1910 in Germany.²⁹ He argued that their experiences at the home front – the prolonged absence of the father, the privations of hunger and the erosion of authorities – created a longing for a regression into early childhood, which manifested itself in an inclination towards collectivity and violence, a yearning for an omnipotent father figure and even in homosexual tendencies, which, Loewenberg claims, were all answered by the Nazi movement. Based on this study, the historian Michael H. Kater argued that the Weimar youth of all classes, buffeted by the economic crisis, equated the new democratic freedoms with disorder and chaos and were driven into the Nazi movement that offered structure and discipline.³⁰

From this viewpoint, the battle of anti-democratic forces against the Weimar Republic takes on the form of a 'generational project',³¹ with Gründel's book as its 'representative magnum opus'.³² Herbert and Wildt can be seen to be standing in this tradition: while both authors acknowledge the narrative nature of the 'war youth generation', they still assume an influence on subsequent political beliefs and actions. Herbert mostly relies on Gründel's book for the description of the mindset of the young middle class and emphasizes the significance of the image of the 'war youth generation' in coalescing a generational consciousness characterized by anti-democratic radicalism among this group.³³ However, the sources in which Werner Best, one of the leaders of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* and the object of Herbert's study, defines himself as

²⁸ See Sigmund Neumann, 'The Conflict of Generations in Contemporary Europe', *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 5 (1939), 623–28.

²⁹ Peter Loewenberg, 'The Psychohistorical Origins of the Nazi Youth Cohort', *The American Historical Review*, 76 (1971), 1457–502.

³⁰ Michael H. Kater, 'Generationskonflikt als Entwicklungsfaktor der NS-Bewegung vor 1933', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 11 (1985), 217–43.

³¹ Heinz Bude, 'Generationen im 20. Jahrhundert. Historische Einschnitte, ideologische Kehrwendungen, innere Widersprüche', *Merkur*, 54. 7 (2000), 567–79, here p. 569.

³² Schulz/Grebner, 'Generationen und Geschichte', p. 9, fn. 34.

³³ See Herbert, *Best*, pp. 42–45.

part of this generational group are almost all retroactive attempts to explain his actions by embedding them into a generational worldview, made at a time when Best was eager to conceal his personal guilt.³⁴ To interpret these sources as proof of the cohesive power of a generational idea means following Best's own argument. Wildt is more cautious: apart from Gründel, he also cites Klaus Mann and Sebastian Haffner, members of the same age group, but with decidedly anti-fascist convictions.³⁵ He also stresses the fact that generational cohesion alone is not enough to explain why the leaders of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* went on to organize the state terror of the Third Reich.³⁶

Even so, both authors have been criticized for overstating the representative character of the idea of the 'war youth generation' and for overestimating the importance of shared experiences of the war as an explanation for this group's convictions and actions.³⁷ The focus on early experiences ignores the influence of subsequent socialization by peer groups, society and professional environment, and, more generally, the view of National Socialism as a generational project runs the risk of interpreting historical events and individual decisions as biologically determined developments.³⁸ Thus, it may be more fruitful to ask why Gründel and *Tempo* chose to present these experiences in a generational narrative rather than to what extent these experiences informed the later decisions of this specific age group.³⁹

4. THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FOUNDATIONS OF GENERATIONAL NARRATIVES

In Gründel's case, the reasons why he described himself and his peers as a 'war youth generation' are explained relatively easily. As Robert Wohl has noted, the 'generational mode of interpreting and organizing social reality'

³⁴ See Herbert, *Best*, pp. 45–46.

³⁵ See Wildt, *Generation*, p. 25.

³⁶ See Wildt, *Generation*, p. 26.

³⁷ See Jureit, *Generationenforschung*, pp. 46–49; Bernd Weisbrod, 'Generation und Generationalität in der Neueren Geschichte', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 8/2005, 3–9, here pp. 5–7. In this context, see also Jürgen Reulecke, "'Hat die Jugendbewegung den Nationalsozialismus vorbereitet?'" Zum Umgang mit einer falschen Frage', in *Politische Jugend in der Weimarer Republik*, ed. by Wolfgang Krabbe (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1993), pp. 222–43. Steinmetz also explicitly criticizes Herbert's attribution of the concept of *Sachlichkeit* only to right-wing groups (see Steinmetz, 'Sachzwang', p. 310).

³⁸ See Schulz/Grebner, 'Generationen und Geschichte', p. 11; Jureit, *Generationenforschung*, pp. 47–48; Bernd A. Rusinek, 'Krieg als Sehnsucht. Militärischer Stil und "junge Generation" in der Weimarer Republik', in *Generationalität und Lebensgeschichte*, ed. by Reulecke, pp. 127–44, here p. 144.

³⁹ See Weisbrod, 'Generationalität', p. 6; Schulz/Grebner, 'Generationen', p. 11.

had been used by the bourgeoisie since the nineteenth century as an alternative for the idea of society as based on class:

It was part of a larger cluster of ideas that members of the middle class were using to break the iron grip of class interests, and it provided an ideological weapon with special appeal for intellectuals, who were resisting the onslaught of a mass, materialistic society in which they feared that heroic and aristocratic values would be lost, culture would be replaced by technology, and the sense of community would be destroyed.⁴⁰

Gründel's concept was part of the self-identification narrative of a relatively small circle of young national-conservative intellectuals that stood in this long tradition.⁴¹ This self-styled 'young generation' of reactionary thinkers included the above-mentioned writer Frank Matzke and members of the 'Tat-Kreis', a group of intellectuals loosely connected with the national-conservative journal *Die Tat*.⁴² Their ideological-political programme, draped in calls for generational solidarity, was a backlash against the Weimar Republic and, more particularly, the loss of social status of the young middle class.⁴³

The reasons why *Tempo* addressed its audience under a generational narrative are two-fold. On the one hand, *Tempo* must be interpreted as the attempt of a commercial venture, the Ullstein publishing house, to hitch their wagon to one of the most important cultural discourses of the Weimar Republic in order to gain access to the youth. Simply by their sheer number, the twenty- to thirty-somethings of the Weimar Republic were a new potent group of consumers: the years from 1900 to 1910 had seen the biggest population growth in German history.⁴⁴ According to the 1925 census, this age group made up over eighteen per cent of the population – over 735,000 inhabitants – in Berlin, and if the focus is extended to include adjacent age groups, to whom a youth-centred newspaper might also have appealed, *Tempo's* potential readership in its core market amounted to over a million people.⁴⁵ Ullstein naturally did not want to miss out on such a large section of the population – as a paying audience for their new publication and a target group for advertisements.

⁴⁰ Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980), p. 82.

⁴¹ See Siemens, 'Kühle Romantiker', pp. 191–92.

⁴² See Siemens, 'Kühle Romantiker', pp. 194–202; Hans Mommsen, 'Generationskonflikt und Jugendrevolte in der Weimarer Republik', in *Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit*, ed. by Koebner/Janz/Trommler, pp. 50–67, here pp. 59–60.

⁴³ See Schulz/Grebner, 'Generationen und Geschichte', p. 9.

⁴⁴ See Josef Ehmer, *Bevölkerungsgeschichte und historische Demographie 1800–2000* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004), p. 7.

⁴⁵ See Statistisches Amt der Stadt Berlin, *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Berlin* (Berlin: Grunert, 1928), p. 6.

On the other hand, the Ullstein company was also a powerful political force, a staunch supporter of liberal politics and, although the company generally shied away from party political partisanship, the *Deutsche Demokratische Partei* (DDP) in particular.⁴⁶ Thus, *Tempo's* attempt to construct a generational narrative must be interpreted with this political agenda in mind. The youth were generally not well represented in the established parties of the Weimar Republic, but by the end of the 1920s, their political importance became more and more evident, not least because this baby boomer generation reached the eligible age to vote. However, the middle-class parties of the Weimar Republic struggled to recruit young voters.⁴⁷ By the Reichstag election in May 1928, the need for these parties to address and activate the youth had become apparent: most of them, from the national-conservative DNVP to the liberal parties like the DDP, had lost votes. Their party executives were particularly over-aged compared to the youthful leadership of the NSDAP and the KPD and thus offered little appeal for young voters.⁴⁸ For the journalist Rüdiger Robert Beer, the bourgeois press's neglect of the youth was to blame for the poor results:

Without a doubt, the loss of votes for all bourgeois parties in the last election can be partly explained by the ignorance of their press regarding the youth and their problems, because, as is well known, around four million young voters exercised their noble right to vote in the elections this May.⁴⁹

It seems reasonable to assume that the same conclusions were drawn by the Ullstein management and that a mouthpiece for liberal politics catering especially to young voters was considered essential if centrist parties like the DDP should stand a chance in the next election. In fact, in an edition of the *Ullstein-Berichte*, a promotional magazine for its advertising customers, the company

⁴⁶ See Modris Eksteins, *The Limits of Reason. The German Democratic Press and the Collapse of Weimar Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 111–37; Joachim Stang, *Die Deutsche Demokratische Partei in Preußen 1918–1933* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1994), pp. 41–42; Bruce B. Frye, *Liberal Democrats in the Weimar Republic. The History of the German Democratic Party and the German State Party* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), p. 217.

⁴⁷ See Barbara Stambolis, *Mythos Jugend. Ein Aspekt der politischen Kultur im 20. Jahrhundert* (Schwalbach: Wochenschau, 2003), pp. 165–80; Mommsen, 'Generationskonflikt', pp. 58–59. For a detailed account of liberal youth politics, see Wolfgang Krabbe, *Die gescheiterte Zukunft der ersten Republik. Jugendorganisationen bürgerlicher Parteien im Weimarer Staat* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1995).

⁴⁸ See Stambolis, *Mythos*, p. 165–68; Krabbe, *Zukunft*, pp. 306–13.

⁴⁹ 'Der Stimmenrückgang aller bürgerlichen Parteien bei den letzten Wahlen kann zweifellos zum Teil mit der ungenügenden Aufmerksamkeit ihrer Presse für die Jugendfragen erklärt werden; denn bekanntlich hatten bei den Maiwahlen rund vier Millionen Jungwähler zum ersten Male ihre vornehmste staatsbürgerliche Pflicht auszuüben.' Rüdiger Robert Beer, 'Jugendfragen', *Die Tat*, 20 (1928/29), 793–95, here p. 794.

defined *Tempo* as a liberal bulwark against extremist forces of the left and the right:

Unfortunately, the younger generation, whose temperament didn't agree with the older newspapers, has all too often been the prey of a propaganda press of radicals and class warriors. *Tempo* hopes to lead this generation in large numbers towards a civic and productive mindset by showing them all the opportunities of real life.⁵⁰

This intention is clearly reflected in *Tempo's* content. For example, on New Year's Eve 1928, the paper published an appeal by Gustav Stresemann, Germany's foreign minister and a figurehead of liberalism, entitled 'For the German Youth!', that urged all 'politically young' people to join the work on the new German state.⁵¹ In other instances, *Tempo* argued for giving young representatives more time to speak in Parliament, defended the modern youth against accusations of moral decline, made fun of the beauty ideals of the parental generation, ran a photo series showing 'the face of the young generation' and generally argued for a more important role of young people in the new German democracy.⁵² The fusion of the DDP with the para-military organization *Jungdeutscher Orden* to form the *Deutsche Staatspartei* (DStP) in 1930 was greeted by *Tempo* as a step to put 'the youth to the front' and give the young generation the platform it deserved.⁵³

Tempo's courting of the youth vote provoked a dramatic reaction by Ullstein's rivals, most notably the so-called *Hugenberg-Konzern*, a nationalist media empire with close ties to the DNVP, whose owner Alfred Hugenberg had been elected the party's chairman shortly after the disastrous results in the 1928 elections.⁵⁴ A week before *Tempo's* launch, Hugenberg dropped the sales price of the tabloid *Nachtausgabe*, an immediate competitor on the afternoon newspaper market, by a third – from fifteen to ten pfennigs – to

⁵⁰ 'Die jüngere Generation, deren Temperament die älteren Zeitungen nicht zusagten, ist leider nur allzusehr die Beute einer überradikalen oder klassenkämpferischen Hetz-Presse geworden. *Tempo* hofft, indem es ihr alle Erfolgsmöglichkeiten des wirklichen Lebens zeigt, diese Generation in Massen zur staatsbürgerlichen, produktiven Denkweise führen zu können.' Anon., 'Tempo. Die Zeitung der Zeit', *Ullstein-Berichte*, October 1928, p. 4.

⁵¹ Gustav Stresemann, 'Der deutschen Jugend!', *Tempo*, 31 December 1928, p. 1.

⁵² E. g. Sky, 'Männer oder Parteien?', *Tempo*, 20 November 1928, p. 2; Anon., 'Stets dieselbe alte Geschichte ... von der schamlosen Jugend', *Tempo*, 24 September 1928, p. 7; Nanette, 'Der schöne Mann unserer Mütter', *Tempo*, 29 September 1928, p. 6; 'Das Gesicht der jungen Generation I: Maria Solveig', *Tempo*, 19 October 1928, p. 5.

⁵³ See 'Die Staatspartei der jungen Generation', *Tempo*, 28 July 1930, p. 1.

⁵⁴ See Stambolis, *Mythos*, p. 167. For Hugenberg, see John A. Leopold, *Alfred Hugenberg. The Radical Nationalist Campaign against the Weimar Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Dankwart Guratzsch, *Macht durch Organisation. Die Grundlegung des Hugenbergischen Presseimperiums* (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann, 1974).

match its price, and a new early edition was introduced. This move was clearly intended to pre-emptively stifle *Tempo's* impact, trying to seem even faster and more modern than its upcoming rival. But Hugenberg did not stop there: on 11 September, the day *Tempo* was published for the first time, the *Nachtausgabe* ran a full-page advertisement touting its own high circulation and popularity.⁵⁵ A week later, it again announced its rising sales figures and claimed it was 'still Berlin's liveliest newspaper'.⁵⁶ It is safe to assume that these attacks were not only a reaction to a new commercial competitor on the market, but also a reflection of the political struggle for the German youth.

The outcome of this struggle is well known, so it seems only logical to interpret *Tempo* as a failed attempt at politically influencing young voters. This conclusion would be backed up by its commercial performance: in its first month only around 166,500 copies of a print run of 250,000 were sold on average every day, and in the following three months these numbers even dropped to around 125,000 copies a day.⁵⁷ However, *Tempo's* performance has to be seen in relation to its competitors and the overall situation of the newspaper market: from the start, it sold more copies than the *8-Uhr-Abendblatt*, one of its major rivals, and its average circulation eventually rose to 145,450 by the end of 1930.⁵⁸ The Nazi tabloid *Der Angriff* sold just 50,000 daily copies on average in the same year and while the *Nachtausgabe* was more successful, selling over 206,000 copies each day in 1930, its circulation numbers are not so much higher as to rate *Tempo* a complete failure in comparison.⁵⁹ At a time when the global economic crisis started to take hold in Germany, *Tempo's* sales figures were respectable numbers.

5. CONCLUSION

Tempo's short existence raises several questions regarding the generational discourse of the 1920s and 1930s, and the historiography of the Weimar Republic in general. Despite its relatively limited circulation, *Tempo* did reach far more readers than Günther Gründel: his often-cited book *Die Sendung der jungen*

⁵⁵ *Nachtausgabe*, 11 September 1928, unpag.

⁵⁶ *Nachtausgabe*, 18 September 1928, unpag.

⁵⁷ All circulation numbers are taken from the folder titled 'Auflagen-Zahlen 1917–1937' to be found in the Ullstein folder at the *Springer Unternehmensarchiv* in Berlin. See also Fulda, *Press*, p. 24.

⁵⁸ *Ullstein-Berichte*, Januar 1931. The average circulation was always calculated for the past three months, so Eksteins errs in stating that *Tempo* reached this number in early 1931; see Eksteins, *Limits*, p. 122.

⁵⁹ See Fulda, *Press*, p. 24.

Generation had a print run of only 12,000 copies in three editions until 1933.⁶⁰ While this certainly is a high number for such a publication, its circulation numbers suggest that it was not read outside a relatively small circle of people. Thus, his work is far from representative for the generational discourse of the time and it seems reasonable to assume that its significance – and that of his concept of the ‘war youth generation’ – has been overstated by historians.

However, this raises the broader question of the informative value of historical media in general. It is very hard to retroactively discern the real influence of newspapers and books on their readers’ attitudes and actions, and even audience figures like the ones supplied above are not a very reliable proof for the real impact of any medium.⁶¹ In other words, the size of *Tempo*’s or Gründel’s audience is not that important in this context, because there is no way of quantifying to what extent the audience’s generational awareness was influenced by them. My approach therefore is to take the readers out of the picture entirely and concentrate on the ‘sender’, in other words, on the ways in which – and the reasons why – different groups operated with generational narratives during the Weimar Republic. This means that the scope of research on the generational conflict of the Weimar Republic shifts from explaining its role in Weimar’s collapse to identifying and analyzing a historical discourse. More particularly, in this view both Gründel’s ‘war youth generation’ and *Tempo*’s generation of optimistic and democratically-minded young citizens are not actual communities bound by shared experiences, but ideological narratives constructed by different actors using generational terminology – and the same vocabulary of soberness and materialism – to appeal to a wider audience and to influence it politically. The example of *Tempo* shows that these generational narratives were not always expressed in terms of cultural pessimism, doom and gloom, but also in positive and progressive terms.⁶² Thus, the polyphonic nature of this intellectual discourse further indicates the fundamental ‘openness’ of the contemporary experience of the Weimar Republic.

⁶⁰ See Albert Heinrich, *Bibliographie Verlag C. H. Beck 1913–1988* (Munich: Beck, 1988), p. 283.

⁶¹ For an innovative approach to this problem, see Frank Bösch, ‘Zeitungsberichte im Alltagsgespräch. Mediennutzung, Medienwirkung und Kommunikation im Kaiserreich’, *Publizistik*, 49 (2004), 319–36.

⁶² In this context, see also Larry E. Jones, ‘Liberalism and the Challenge of the Younger Generation: The Young Liberal Struggle for a Reform of the Weimar Party System, 1928–30’, in *Politische Jugend in der Weimarer Republik*, pp. 106–28; Krabbe, *Zukunft*, pp. 122–23, 275–313.