

Michael Eskin, Karen Leeder, Christopher Young (Eds.)  
**Durs Grünbein**

# **Companions to Contemporary German Culture**



Edited by  
Michael Eskin · Karen Leeder · Christopher Young

## **Volume 2**

# Durs Grünbein

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A Companion

Edited by  
Michael Eskin · Karen Leeder · Christopher Young

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## A Note on Translations

Quotations are generally given only in English, except where a particular linguistic or formal point is being made, or where a reader who has German might particularly benefit from having the original. In the case of quotations from Durs Grünbein himself quotations are given in German and English. Contributors have, where appropriate, cited poems from Durs Grünbein, *Ashes for Breakfast. Selected Poems*, trans. by Michael Hofmann (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005). Translations of prose have generally been cited from the three recent volumes of Grünbein's essays: *Descartes' Devil. Three Meditations*, trans. by Anthea Bell (New York: Upper West Side Philosophers, 2010); *The Bars of Atlantis. Selected Essays*, ed. by Michael Eskin, trans. by John Crutchfield, Michael Hofmann and Andrew Shields (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010); *The Vocation of Poetry*, trans. by Michael Eskin (New York: Upper West Side Philosophers, 2011). These, and any adaptations to them, are all acknowledged in the notes to the individual contributions. Some contributors have provided new translations where none exist, or in order to make a particular linguistic point. These follow the relevant German in square brackets and the primary aim is to provide an accessible working translation. Unless otherwise specified, all other translations are by the author of the chapter.

To avoid unnecessary repetition, however, the titles of Durs Grünbein's main works are given in German only. The titles of individual essays and poems are given both in German and English throughout. For ease of reference a list of translations of these main works is included here, and a fuller Select Bibliography is given at the end of the volume. In Helen Vendler's contribution we maintain the English translations as used in her original article.

### Poetry

*Grauzone morgens. Gedichte* (1988)

[Gray Zone in the Morning. Poems]

*Schädelbasislektion. Gedichte* (1991)

[Skull Crash Course. Poems]

*Von der üblen Seite. Gedichte 1985–1991* (1994)

[From the Bad Side. Poems 1985–1991]

*Falten und Fallen. Gedichte* (1994)

[Folds and Traps / Folding and Falling. Poems]

*Den Teuren Toten. 33 Epitaphe* (1994)  
[The Dear Departed. 33 Epitaphs]

*Nach den Satiren. Gedichte* (1999)  
[After the Satires. Poems]

*Una Storia Vera. Ein Kinderalbum in Versen* (2002)  
[A True Story. A Children's Album in Verse]

*Erklärte Nacht. Gedichte* (2002)  
[Night Explained. Poems]

*Vom Schnee oder Descartes in Deutschland* (2003)  
[Of Snow, or Descartes in Germany]

*An Seneca. Postskriptum. Die Kürze des Lebens* (2004)  
[To Seneca. Postscript. The Brevity of Life]

*Porzellan. Poem vom Untergang meiner Stadt* (2005)  
[Porcelain. Poem about the Downfall of My City]

*Der Misanthrop auf Capri. Historien / Gedichte* (2005)  
[The Misanthrope of Capri. Histories / Poems]

*Gedichte. Bücher I–III* (2006)  
[Poems. Books I–III]

*Strophen für übermorgen. Gedichte* (2007)  
[Strophes for the Day after Tomorrow. Poems]

*Liebesgedichte* (2008)  
[Love Poems]

*Lob des Taifuns. Reisetagebücher in Haikus* (2008)  
[In Praise of the Typhoon. Diary of a Journey in Haikus]

*Germanischer Komplex. Gedichte und Szenen* (2009)  
[Germanic Complex. Poems and Scenes]

*Libellen in Liberia. Gedichte und Berichte* (2010)  
[Dragonflies in Liberia. Poems and Reports]

*Aroma. Ein römisches Zeichenbuch* (2010)  
[Aroma. A Roman Drawing Book]

*Limbische Akte. Gedichte* (2011)  
[Limbic Acts / Files. Poems]

*Koloss im Nebel. Gedichte* (2012)  
[Colossus in the Fog. Poems]

## Prose

*Den Körper zerbrechen. Rede zur Entgegennahme des Georg-Büchner-Preises 1995. Mit der Laudatio 'Portrait des Künstlers als junger Grenzhund' von Heiner Müller* (1995)  
[Breaking the Body. Speech on Receipt of the Georg Büchner Prize 1995. With the Laudatio 'Portrait of the Artist as a Young Border Dog' by Heiner Müller]

*Galilei vermisst Dantes Hölle und bleibt an den Maßen hängen. Aufsätze 1989–1995* (1995)  
[Galileo Measures Dante's Hell and Gets Stuck on the Measurements. Essays 1989–1995]

*Das erste Jahr. Berliner Aufzeichnungen* (2001)  
[The First Year. Berlin Notebooks]

*Warum schriftlos leben? Aufsätze* (2003)  
[Why Live without Writing? Essays]

*Antike Dispositionen. Aufsätze* (2005)  
[Antique / Antic Dispositions. Essays]

*Gedicht und Geheimnis. Aufsätze 1990–2006* (2007)  
[The Poem and its Secret. Essays 1990–2006]

*Ein kleines blaues Mädchen. Zu Rainer Maria Rilke 'Das Karussell'* (2007)  
[A Little Blue Girl. On Rainer Maria Rilke's 'The Carousel']

*Der cartesische Taucher. Drei Meditationen* (2008)

[The Cartesian Diver. Three Meditations]

*Die Bars von Atlantis. Eine Erkundung in vierzehn Tauchgängen* (2009)

[The Bars of Atlantis. An Exploration in Fourteen Dives]

*Vom Stellenwert der Worte. Frankfurter Poetikvorlesung 2009* (2010)

[The Importance of Words. Frankfurt Poetry Lectures 2009]

*Dream Index / Aus der Traum (Kartei)* (2012)

Michael Eskin  
**Preface**

Since he first broke onto the literary scene with the publication of *Grauzone morgens* in 1988, aged twenty-six, Dresden-born Durs Grünbein has emerged as Germany's most prolific, versatile, successful and internationally renowned contemporary poet and essayist. With upwards of twenty books of poetry and prose that have been translated into many languages (including Russian, Italian, English, Spanish, Swedish and Japanese), dozens of national and international honours and awards (among them, the Georg Büchner Prize, the Friedrich Nietzsche Prize, the Premio Internazionale di Poesia Pier Paolo Pasolini, the Berlin Literature Prize, and the Pour le Mérite for Sciences and Arts), a pocketful of fellowships, visiting positions and reading tours across the globe, recurring TV and radio appearances on matters poetic, cultural and political, and even a double-page spread in a 2007 issue of *Vanity Fair* under his belt, Durs Grünbein is truly, as he himself has recently put it, somewhat of an 'aberration' – a sociological anomaly – when it comes to the poet's overall insignificance and lack of public exposure in the contemporary world. Certainly, no other former GDR poet, or any other German poet of his generation, for that matter, has managed to become a global player on Grünbein's scale.

What is Grünbein's recipe for literary stardom above and beyond sheer luck and the fortuitousness of being in the right place at the right time? What is it about him and his work that has attracted readers, audiences and institutions alike to him, at home and abroad, for the past quarter of a century? While these questions can obviously not be speculated upon – let alone answered – on a personal level within the confines of a book such as this, a close, multi-faceted critical-historical look at his wide-ranging oeuvre may well provide a good, if necessarily incomplete, sense of his trans-cultural import and appeal. And that is precisely what this early volume in De Gruyter's new series, *Companions to Contemporary German Culture*, aims to achieve.

The first-ever anthology of essays in English on the works of Germany's premier contemporary poet – accompanied by an extensive interview – *Durs Grünbein. A Companion* features a range of in-depth readings by an international group of scholars and critics, touching on Grünbein's many artistic themes, motifs and agendas: from growing up and coming of age behind the Iron Curtain to finding his place in a cosmopolitan post-reunification world; from the relationship between science and poetry to the significance of the past (not least antiquity) for our understanding of the present; from the intricacies of the poet's craft to poetry's vital role in the face of mortality; from the question of the poet's

responsibility in view of past (and present) political atrocities to the problem of memory, historical understanding and the preservation of tradition, more generally; from the presumed age-old quarrel between philosophy and poetry to the inseparability of the two in the actual life of the (poet's) mind; from the cultural expectation of artistic originality to the artist's inexorable rootedness and participation in a multitudinous concert of voices, styles, traditions and visual images.

What the reader can expect, then, from the present volume is a variegated, yet clearly focused, introduction to the world, life, times and poetic thought of Durs Grünbein – both a 'little man in Germany' as he refers to himself, *and* a seasoned 'cosmopolite' – geared toward both the professional and the general reader interested in aesthetics, literary history or, more broadly, German, European and global cultural matters.

Documenting Grünbein's achievements to date in mid-flight, so to speak, and illuminating them squarely from each contributor's perspective and in light of the particular interests of each (while nonetheless endeavouring to maintain a bird's-eye view on the subject), the present volume is but the first – albeit foundational – effort toward nurturing the emergent body of international Grünbein criticism. As such it will have fully met its own expectations if it succeeds in stirring further interest in Grünbein's and other, related writers' works as well as German culture at large.

Christopher Young

## Durs Grünbein and the *Wende*

Durs Grünbein is widely recognized as the most important German poet since reunification. While a citizen of the GDR, he published his first volume of poems (*Grauzone morgens*) with Suhrkamp in 1988, producing at the age of twenty-six a collection that – as Wolfgang Emmerich notes in his extensive, and deceptively titled, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* – ‘blew away 40 years of East German lyric’.<sup>1</sup> Three volumes and a mere seven years later,<sup>2</sup> Grünbein became the second youngest recipient of Germany’s premier literary award, the Georg Büchner Prize (Peter Handke was 31 when he won in 1973, Hans Magnus Enzensberger 34 in 1963); and in 2008, he was inducted as the youngest member of the Ordre Pour le Mérite in Berlin. As the other essays in this volume clearly demonstrate, Grünbein is a poet of world significance. Nonetheless, his rise to fame occurred in Germany and in circumstances that were uniquely German in nature. This chapter sets out to revisit these and to outline the poet’s positioning of himself within them.

Grünbein is a stand-out poet – no other German poet of his generation acquired quite such an elevated reputation or followed even remotely his intellectual trajectory over twenty years – but he also exemplifies in some ways the poetry produced by a new cohort of authors since the *Wende*. Periodizations and the step-changes they imply are always subject to analeptic hedging, but there is a certain indisputability about Hermann Korte’s observation that the changing of the guard around 1990 was as marked as that of the early 1960s when Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Günter Grass, Günter Kunert and others swept tradition aside to revolutionize the poetic scene.<sup>3</sup> Despite a distinct heterogeneity of styles and ideologies,<sup>4</sup> the outputs of the 1990s cohort, born in the 1950s and 1960s, have several key characteristics in common.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1996), p. 394.

2 A full list is given in the Bibliography at the end of this volume.

3 Hermann Korte, *Deutschsprachige Lyrik seit 1945*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2004), p. 257.

4 Hermann Korte, “Wenn ein Staat ins Gras beißt, singen die Dichter”. DDR-Lyrik der neunziger Jahre’, in *DDR-Literatur der neunziger Jahre*, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Munich: Text + Kritik, 2000), pp. 122–44 (p. 122).

5 The following paragraphs draw on: Hermann Korte, *Deutschsprachige Lyrik seit 1945*; Hermann Korte, ‘Energie der Brüche. Ein diachroner Blick auf die Lyrik des 20. Jahrhunderts und ihre Zäsuren’, in *Lyrik des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Munich: Text + Kritik, 1999), pp. 63–106; Hermann Korte, ‘Säulenheilige und Portalfiguren? Benn und Celan im Poetik-Dialog mit der jüngeren deutschsprachigen Lyrik seit den 1990er Jahren’, in *Schaltstelle. Neue deutsche Lyrik im Dialog*, ed. by Karen Leeder (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 109–37; Karen Leeder, “Schreiben am Schnittpunkt”. The Place of Contemporary German Poetry’, in *ibid.*, pp. 1–30.

First, they share a complex relationship to reality. If the giants of the 1960s kept reality in close range in order to critique and ameliorate contemporary society, their successors in the 1990s held it at a distance:

For them, the poet's role at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is bound up in his or her understanding of the process of lyric writing as a practice to which they were *not* called: not as an act of prophesying or the cry of Cassandra, not as a means of salvation, or poetic message in a bottle; nor as some sort of historical-philosophical 'sundial' that in a few lines indicates the 'state' of the era on the eve of the new millennium. Rather, there is a new understanding of writing as a state of permanent, exploratory flux, and not (or no longer) as a medium for messages, expressions of sadness, or sensitivities.<sup>6</sup>

This general agnosticism about poetry's responsibility or ability to produce binding models of broad social applicability goes hand in hand with a marked self-reflexive stance. Language and voice (picking up the thread from poets such as Ernst Jandl and Friederike Mayröcker) and perceptual processes (adding a highly mediatized dimension to the 1970s occupation with the everyday) are constantly stretched, scrutinized and unsettled.

Second, they are fascinated by early European modernism. Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rilke, Pound, Eliot and Mandelstam roam the imagination of the 1990s, sharpening poetological positions and underscoring a belief in the autonomous nature of poetry at a time of ideological diversity.<sup>7</sup> While the 1990s poets effectively bracket out the Enzensberger generation,<sup>8</sup> two German poets – Benn and Celan – assume great importance.<sup>9</sup> For all their obvious differences, both had connected with European modernism – Benn, most notably, in his seminal essay 'Probleme der Lyrik' and Celan consistently in his poetic practice – and both championed poetry's unique strength as a realm of experience and expression

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**6** Korte, 'Energie der Brüche', pp. 97–98.

**7** A challenging account of this aspect of the period, which uses Grünbein in an innovative way, can be read in Jonathan Monroe, 'Avant-Garde Poetries after the Wall', *Poetics Today*, 21.1 (2000), 95–128.

**8** 'Bleib steh'n, Wanderer, und lies', Germany, dir: Alexander Kluge, 2007, features death-related poems by Grünbein and Enzensberger and gives an immediate sense of the difference between both poets.

**9** For Grünbein, Brecht is much more absent. In a recent interview he stated 'I can rarely remember a Brecht quotation'. Hans-Jürgen Heinrichs and Durs Grünbein, 'Gespräch mit Durs Grünbein. Hinweise auf ein Stück Gedankenmusik', *Sinn und Form*, 60.1 (2008), 47–59 (p. 55). For a rare example of his possible engagement with this particular poet, see Jörg Döning, 'Von den Nachgeborenen. Brechts "Ballade von den Seeräubern" und Durs Grünbeins "O Heimat, zynischer Euphon"', in *Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956)*, ed. by Jörg Döning and Walter Delabar (Berlin: Weidler, 1998), pp. 355–77.

which resists assimilation to the outside world.<sup>10</sup> Their work is used freely and eclectically, Celan revered more as a theoretical muse than as a poet of the Holocaust.<sup>11</sup>

And third, the 1990s cohort follow Benn's admonition that 'the lyric poet can hardly know enough; he cannot work enough; he must be close to everything; he must position himself according to where the world is today, under whatever sign the earth stands this noon'.<sup>12</sup> New poets of the last two decades bring a vast range of reading and learning, primarily from the natural sciences and philosophy, to bear on their poetry. Their work is complex and, more often than not, difficult. Almost certainly as a result, the trend in twentieth-century German poetry to publish poetological reflections has reached a climax over the last twenty years. An abundance of meta-writing, ranging across the issues touched on briefly in these paragraphs, has appeared, and it is a hallmark of the period that without it readers might struggle to grasp the essence of the poems.

Generalizations inevitably level local differences. One need only read Franz Josef Czernin's vitriolic review of Grünbein's *Falten und Fallen* to realize how turbulent these can be.<sup>13</sup> (At stake in this case was nothing less than poetic language itself, Czernin accusing Grünbein of ignoring decades of rupture, scepticism and experimentation.<sup>14</sup>) Nonetheless, most emergent poets of the 1990s could be situated broadly within the contours just outlined. Arguably, however, none falls more squarely within them than Grünbein. *Grauzone morgens* – with its links to classical modernity, the testing of the subject position, its distanced attitude to society and the unsettling play of voice and intertextual reference<sup>15</sup> – displayed many of the above-mentioned characteristics, and others (such as the accretion

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**10** Korte, 'Säulenheilige und Portalfiguren'.

**11** For the main differences between Benn and Grünbein, see Helmut Böttiger and Durs Grünbein, 'Benn schmort in der Hölle. Ein Gespräch über dialogische und monologische Lyrik', *Text + Kritik*, 153.1 (2002), 72–84.

**12** Cited in Korte, 'Säulenheilige und Portalfiguren', p. 120.

**13** Franz Josef Czernin, 'Falten und Fallen. Zu einem Gedichtband von Durs Grünbein', *Schreibheft. Zeitschrift für Literatur*, 45 (1995), 179–88. Reprinted as 'Falten und Fallen. Zu Durs Grünbeins Gedichtband', in Franz Josef Czernin, *Der Himmel ist blau. Aufsätze zur Dichtung* (Weil am Rhein: Engeler, 2007), pp. 29–56.

**14** See Grünbein's reply, 'Feldpost', *Schreibheft. Zeitschrift für Literatur*, 46 (1995), 191–92; Michael Braun's critical stock-taking in the same issue, 'Kleine, verwunderte Fußnote zu einer Polemik von Franz Josef Czernin', pp. 192–95; and Grünbein's debate with Czernin and others in 'Kosmologischer Irrläufer. Fünf Dichter im Gespräch über die Möglichkeit der Poesie', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Sonntagsausgabe*, 11 / 12 April 1998, *Literatur und Kunst*, pp. 49–50.

**15** Thomas Irmer, 'Durs Grünbein', in *Deutschsprachige Lyriker der 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Ursula Heukenkamp and Peter Geist (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2007), pp. 711–21 (p. 712).

of knowledge and scientific discourse) were in evidence no later than the second published volume, *Schädelbasislektion* (1991). As Grünbein noted variously in this period and in the years directly following: the individual's perception of reality and its linguistic transformation is grounded in the physiological / neurological; the function of the subject in this perceptual process is conditioned and stripped of its individuality by a fullness of voices and stimuli, which ultimately lead to the dissolution of any notion of the self based on wholeness or complete identity; the collapse of the self and neurological conditioning bring radical consequences; and the brain in its materiality of nerves and grey matter assumes the position occupied over the last several centuries by the soul.<sup>16</sup> 'Mein babylonisches Hirn' ['My Babylonish Brain'], as the programmatic essay of the same title suggests, replaces Baudelaire's 'babylonisches Herz' [Babylonian heart].<sup>17</sup>

The intensity with which Grünbein influenced and embodied the poetic criteria of his age has already secured him a central position in future literary histories and anthologies. Indeed, a key characteristic of his complex and fractured voice(s) is precisely the intention to write and speak for the future. Such sentiments might be commonplace in modern writing, but they recur in Grünbein's thinking with particular verve and frequency. In 2002, he wrote:

Das Dichterwort strebt in die Vertikale wie eine Rakete, sein Betriebsgeheimnis ist die ballistische Kürze. Keiner kann sagen, wo es landen wird. Es strebt fort vom Augenblick und hält ihn gerade deshalb streng fest als eine Art planetarischer Botschaft, die an die Zukunft gerichtet ist oder vielleicht sogar an die Außerirdischen.

[The word of the poet shoots into the air like a missile, its trade secret is its ballistic brevity. No one can say where it will land. Its aim is beyond the present moment, and for precisely that reason it holds the present tight as a sort of planetary message directed at the future, or perhaps even at the extraterrestrial.]<sup>18</sup>

And in 2007, he programmatically entitled his new collection *Strophen für übermorgen*. These ambitions certainly captured the imagination of Grünbein's admirers. In his laudatio at the 1995 Büchner Prize ceremony, Heiner Müller noted 'Eine Frau sagte mir, nach der Lektüre eines Gedichts von Durs Grünbein: "Das muß ich in fünfzig Jahren noch einmal lesen"' [A woman said to me after reading

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<sup>16</sup> See in particular, Durs Grünbein, *Den Körper zerbrechen. Rede zur Entgegennahme des Georg-Büchner-Preises 1995. Mit der Laudatio 'Portrait des Künstlers als junger Grenzhund' von Heiner Müller* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1995); Durs Grünbein, *Galilei vermißt Dantes Hölle und bleibt an den Maßen hängen. Aufsätze 1989–1995* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> Durs Grünbein, 'Mein babylonisches Hirn', in *Galilei vermißt Dantes Hölle*, pp. 18–23.

<sup>18</sup> Böttiger and Grünbein, 'Benn schmort in der Hölle', p. 72.

a poem by Durs Grünbein: ‘I must read that again in fifty years time’].<sup>19</sup> Müller’s plaintive ‘Ich wollte, ich könnte das’ [I wish that was something I could do] has added poignancy since the doyen of East German theatre, already struggling with throat cancer, would be dead before the year was out.

Durs Grünbein is worth reading today, in other words, because he will be read tomorrow. Future editors and scholars, however, will turn to Grünbein not just because of his representative role at the head of a new poetic cohort, nor simply because his desire to speak at some temporal remove might guarantee his work enduring freshness. These are important factors. But Grünbein’s future readership is assured, equally, because his rise through the literary establishment captures a significant cultural moment of the first decade after German reunification. From the cusp of unification through the winter of 1993, the German literary establishment smouldered in a series of debates that threw off a plume of political toxin. More vituperative than the 1980s *Historikerstreit* to which it was soon compared – poets, novelists and intellectuals have a way with words when riled – literary polemic expressed deep-seated anxiety, anger and uncertainty about the political responsibilities of culture on both sides of the border since the Second World War. Known as the Christa Wolf debate or the *Literaturstreit*, these arguments form the essential backdrop to Grünbein’s phenomenal early success.

Grünbein enjoyed considerable coverage from the moment of his first appearance at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1988. In 1991, the literary editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), Frank Schirmmacher, picked him out as the young poet to watch, following up a year later with a positive review of *Schädelbasilektion*.<sup>20</sup> By 1995, Schirmmacher had anointed Grünbein ‘the first genuine voice of the new Republic’, but not before Gustav Seibt announced in *Die Zeit* that ‘[n]ot since the early days of Enzensberger, indeed, perhaps not even since Hugo von Hofmannsthal came on the scene has poetry in the German language seen such a favourite of the gods (*Götterliebling*) who spellbinds all attendant’.<sup>21</sup> No poet so extravagantly christened can escape the ire of critics and fellow writers for long, but by the new millennium Grünbein was being hailed as ‘the most suitable can-

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<sup>19</sup> Heiner Müller, ‘Portrait des Künstlers als junger Grenzhund’, in Durs Grünbein, *Den Körper zerbrechen*, pp. 25–29 (p. 29).

<sup>20</sup> Frank Schirmmacher, ‘War da irgendein Mythos?’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 March 1992, cited in Sylvia Heudecker, ‘Durs Grünbein in der Kritik’, in *Schreiben am Schnittpunkt. Poesie und Wissen bei Durs Grünbein*, ed. by Kai Bremer, Fabian Lampart and Jörg Wesche (Freiburg i. Br.: Rombach Litterae, 2007), pp. 37–56 (p. 43).

<sup>21</sup> See also, however, Fritz J. Raddatz’s sharp and sustained critique of Grünbein’s poetry in the same paper: ‘Nicht Entwurf der Moderne, sondern Faltenwurf der Mode’, *Die Zeit*, 22 September 1995, Feuilleton, pp. 65–66.

didate for the position of Germany's national poet' (*Die Zeit*) and found himself mentioned in the same breath as Goethe and Grass as a 'a modern-day classic poet' (Deutschlandradio).<sup>22</sup> Sylvia Heudecker, in her examination of Grünbein's early press, sees all roads leading directly to the poet. Grünbein, Heudecker argues, appeared in the right place at the right time. Personifying the German division, he was the ideal surface onto which the literary public and establishment could 'project their desires' for a 'poet from the nation of poets and thinkers'.<sup>23</sup> The phrase 'Durs Grünbein, born in 1962 in Dresden', she concludes, echoed through the media as a statement of biographical fact and mantra of national longing.

But this is a little too neat, and it is worth pausing to recall the wider literary-political climate in more detail. The bare facts of the years 1990–1993 are well known. In June 1990, two reviews of Christa Wolf's short novel *Was bleibt* [*What Remains*] by Ulrich Greiner (*Die Zeit*) and Frank Schirrmacher (*FAZ*) started an avalanche of criticism that sucked in supporters and detractors from across the literary-political spectrum before cascading again on the eve of unification with the condemnation of the literature of the old Federal Republic. The controversy rolled into a second phase in October 1991, when GDR dissident Wolf Biermann used his Büchner Prize acceptance speech to denounce fellow poet Sascha Anderson (or 'Sascha arschloch', as he famously called him) as a Stasi informer, thus casting doubt on the integrity of the autonomous poetic enclave associated with the alternative Prenzlauer Berg scene in 1980s East Berlin. And it continued with somewhat lesser force, when Heiner Müller and Christa Wolf both admitted involvement with the Stasi in 1993, the former claiming he had merely sought to open channels of communication when party functionaries had become unreachable, the latter arguing her case lay so far in the past that she had repressed it.

This is not the place to revisit the arguments aired on all sides – not least since these are documented in full elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> But some salient points have emerged, many of them expertly made by Andreas Huyssen. Although written as the debacle was still unfolding in 1991, Huyssen's analysis of the first phase of the

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22 Katharina Döbler's article, from which the quotation is taken, gives an excellent account of some of the main features of Grünbein's poetry up until 2002: 'Von Zeit zu Zeit nach Pompeji', *Die Zeit*, Literatur, 11 July 2002, p. 42.

23 Heudecker, 'Durs Grünbein in der Kritik', pp. 41–42. For a bibliography of literary criticism on Grünbein from 1988–2002, see Hermann Korte, 'Durs Grünbein', in *Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, 72. Nachlieferung (Munich: Text + Kritik, 2002), pp. C-H.

24 'Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf'. *Der Literaturpreis im vereinten Deutschland*, ed. by Thomas Anz (Munich: Spangenberg, 1991); Heiner Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht. Leben in zwei Diktaturen* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1992).

*Literaturstreit* remains its outstanding account.<sup>25</sup> Rarely for an article composed at such proximity to events, it combines an immediate sense of turmoil with lucid and perspicacious analysis that still bears scrutiny twenty years on. Huysen attributed the centripetal impact of Wolf's book to a crisis of left-liberal intellectuals after the collapse of socialism. Wolf's semi-autobiographical piece, which detailed a day in the life of a writer under Stasi surveillance, was widely seen as an opportunistic move on the part of the author to portray herself as a victim of the state. But the vehemence with which its ramifications were discussed raises further questions. Political and moral issues stood thinly veiled behind literary and aesthetic arguments. As Biermann noted himself before the Sascha Anderson affair: 'Es geht nicht nur um Christa Wolf' [It's not just about Christa Wolf].

Indeed the Wolf debate, as Huysen argued, merely served as the lightning rod for tensions that had been waiting to spark since left-wing intellectuals and authors made the wrong call when socialism began to crumble around them. Christoph Hein, Christa Wolf and Stefan Heym had stood together in the name of reformed socialism at the massed demonstration on the Alexanderplatz on 4 November; Heym and Wolf joined Volker Braun to urge for preservation of GDR independence and values ('Für unser Land' ['For Our Country']); and Grass had held up the Holocaust as a reminder to Germans that they did not yet deserve a unified state. After East Germans ignored them and voted overwhelmingly for the end of German division in March 1990, intellectuals and authors were left fighting, all the more rabidly, over the cultural-political heritage and future of the nation. As Greiner, whose review had helped trigger the debate, famously remarked: 'Those who determine what has happened also determine what is to come. The row about the past is a row about the future'.<sup>26</sup> In the East, intellectuals faced the sudden disappearance of the cultural institutions and customs that had guaranteed their previous existence. And in the West, their left-leaning counterparts had to address the loss of the GDR as the "other" of capitalist Germany',

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<sup>25</sup> Andreas Huysen, 'After the Wall. The Failure of German Intellectuals', in Andreas Huysen, *Twilight Memories. Marking in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 37–66 (originally in *New German Critique*, 52 [1991], 109–43.) See also H. J. Hahn, "'Es geht nicht um Literatur". Some Observations on the 1990 Literaturstreit and its Recent Anti-Intellectual Implications', *German Life and Letters*, 50.1 (1997), 65–80; Frank Finlay, 'Literary Debates and the Literary Market Since Unification', in *Contemporary German Fiction. Writing in the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 21–38; and more generally, Stephen Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> Cited in Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p. 465.

a ‘potentially utopian space’ with a long subliminal hold.<sup>27</sup> (The West German Left, most notably Grass, Walter Jens and Peter Rühmkorf, supported Wolf.) The cultural aftershocks of unification were immense, the discourse corrosive and remarkably undiscerning. While Heiner Müller railed against ‘the Stalinism of the West’, others reached for the thesaurus of National Socialism, throwing about with wild abandon terms such as ‘Vernichtungsfeldzug’ [campaign of extermination], ‘Liquidierung’ [liquidation], ‘Pogrom’ [pogrom], ‘Endlösung’ [final solution], the ever popular ‘Anschluß der DDR’ [annexation of the GDR] and ‘Auschwitz in den Seelen’ [Auschwitz in their souls] (Jürgen Fuchs).<sup>28</sup> In the eye of the second storm that engulfed her two years later, Wolf, on a trip to California, likened her treatment in the Federal Republic to the hounding of Jews and Communists between 1933 and 1945.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the cultural fall-out from reunification is the turn it took, in certain circles, towards aesthetics. The aestheticization of the debate, however, merely served to politicize it further. Already in his review of Wolf in the spring, Schirmmacher had projected his critique onto the literary culture of the Left in the Federal Republic. As Huysen recorded: Schirmmacher read *Was bleibt* as ‘an apocryphal act of resistance against the Stasi which was then compared to the ethos of a belated resistance to fascism that supposedly prevailed in the post-war culture of the FRG (Grass, Böll, Walser, Weiss et al.)’.<sup>29</sup> There are rights and wrongs to this argument, and none of it was particularly original. But by the eve of reunification in October 1990, Schirmmacher was back with a full-frontal onslaught on the left-literary culture of the post-war period. Joined by Greiner again, and augmented by senior literary critic and scholar Karl Heinz Bohrer, the Right bade farewell to what they saw as the arid literary scene of the 1980s and called for an end to the ‘Gesinnungsästhetik’ [aesthetics of morals] associated with the Gruppe 47 that had supposedly fostered it over a forty-year period.<sup>30</sup> The literature of the new Republic, hoped the *FAZ*, *Die Zeit* and Bohrer’s journal *Merkur*, would decouple literary aesthetics from political and moral utopianism and re-energize a flagging national literature. As Huysen signed off in 1991, he predicted a wave of *Ostalgie* (well before the term was invented) and noted ‘a new *Nullpunktthese* [proclamation of a zero hour] [...] in the making which [could] be expected to play a major role in the foundational myths that

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<sup>27</sup> Huysen, ‘After the Wall’, p. 43.

<sup>28</sup> Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p. 465.

<sup>29</sup> Huysen, ‘After the Wall’, p. 59.

<sup>30</sup> More generally on Bohrer, see Jan-Werner Müller, ‘Karl Heinz Bohrer on German National Identity. Recovering Romanticism and Aestheticizing the State’, *German Studies Review*, 23.2 (2000), 297–316.

[were] bound to spring up around the years 1989 and 1990'. Huyssen was broadly correct on both counts, but – not surprisingly since even the clearest crystal balls cloud over – less accurate on the details of the latter. This *Nullpunktthese*, Huyssen argued, would be 'constructed differently from that of 1945, but it [would] similarly be based on denial of the past and serve to legitimize the new state and the desired and anticipated new culture';<sup>31</sup> and around the third anniversary of unification, Iris Radisch was indeed proclaiming 'Die zweite Stunde Null' [the second zero-hour] in *Die Zeit* with the rejection of 'Gesinnungsästhetik' writ large again: 'In this zero-hour', she noted, 'the younger generation no longer seeks to write epoch-making works, and that is their strength'; a new chapter in literary history was opening 'free from any burdens, free from limitation, free from obligation – as free as art has always wanted to be and seldom has been'.<sup>32</sup> And sure enough, in 1995, Grass's *Ein weites Feld* [*Too Far Afield*] was lacerated in the press. But with the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that things were more complicated.

And this brings us back to Durs Grünbein, the 'national poet' in waiting. For the vital fact about Grünbein's rise to prominence is not, as has been claimed, that he was a handy projection figure for a new aesthetic or, by dint of birth-date or ideological innocence, an acceptable personification of German division,<sup>33</sup> but rather that he represented *both* a new, aesthetically orientated poetry *and* a continued engagement with the past. Grünbein's success, after all, was founded on the support of the both the *FAZ* and Heiner Müller. Müller, having encountered Grünbein through the East Berlin theatre scene in the 1980s, secured his literary success in the West (and indeed his first ever publication) with a recommendation to Suhrkamp, and developed a friendship with him that the younger poet would later compare to the relationship of loyalty, trust and mentorship between Joyce and Beckett.<sup>34</sup> Grünbein still describes Müller as the last great 'poet intellectual'.<sup>35</sup> The *FAZ* and Frankfurt publisher Suhrkamp pushed Grünbein's career from 1988 – so much so that detractors denounced the awards of the Darmstadt Academy in 1995 as a stitch-up by the paper, *Die Zeit* launching a particularly embittered and high profile attack. Sharing the honours with Grünbein were *FAZ*

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31 Huyssen, 'After the Wall', p. 52.

32 Iris Radisch, 'Die zweite Stunde Null', *Die Zeit*, 7 October 1994, cited in Thomas Anz, 'Epochenumbbruch und Generationenwechsel? Zur Konjunktur von Generationenkonstrukten seit 1989', in *Schreiben nach der Wende. Ein Jahrzehnt deutscher Literatur 1989–1999*, ed. by Gerhard Fischer and David Roberts (Tübingen: Stauffenberg, 2001), pp. 31–40 (p. 35).

33 See Helmut Böttiger, 'Durs Grünbein. Auf dem Olymp', in Helmut Böttiger, *Nach den Utopien. Eine Geschichte der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Vienna: Zsolnay, 2004), pp. 112–25.

34 Heinrichs, 'Gespräch mit Durs Grünbein', p. 55.

35 Interview with Alexandra Kedves, *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 9 November 2006, p. 38.

staff critic Gustav Seibt, who won the Sigmund-Freud-Preis für wissenschaftliche Prosa, and regular contributor Michael Maar, who took the Johann-Heinrich-Merck-Preis für Kritik und Essay. Müller and the *FAZ* make strange bedfellows, and not surprisingly they read Grünbein differently. But that is the point.

Schirmmacher's interpretation of Grünbein represented a nuanced approach. On the one hand, he valued his direct, non-metaphorical engagement with the GDR and the collapse of socialism.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, he appreciated Grünbein's distanced stance, collapsing two later commonplaces of the poet's self-understanding (the future and archaeology) into a single vector: 'His poems put the transition into words, but in such a way that the reader feels as though he is looking back on it, as if on an archaeological discovery, from the distant future'.<sup>37</sup> Gustav Seibt, however, took a less circuitous route. Grünbein, as he wrote in 1994, represented 'a new era [as] the first poet to overcome the division in German literature', and showed that 'at least part of the public has had enough of literature that is almost solely concerned with wrangling and pique in matters German'.<sup>38</sup> 'Grünbein is the first young author from East Germany', Seibt concluded, 'to whom readers from the West can also listen, not in the spirit of awkward obligation, of embarrassed exchange between the two Germanies, but as one of their own'. The desire of many in the literary media to bury the fabled 'Gesinnungsästhetik' of the old Republic and herald a new beginning could hardly have found clearer expression.

Heiner Müller, when delivering his laudatio on the evening of Grünbein's prize ceremony, was equally unambiguous. In one of the last public appearances before his death, the poet's mentor used the cycle 'Portrait des Künstlers als junger Grenzhund' ['Portrait of the Artist as a Young Border Dog'] from *Schädelbasislektion* to consider the role of the younger generation of poets. Müller's opening serves as an eloquent reminder of the shock effect Grünbein's work induced in the early 1990s: 'Die Texte von Durs Grünbein liegen nicht, nach Goethes Definition von Kunstwerk, wie Kühe auf der Weide. Eher gleichen sie den Tieren, vielleicht sind es Maschinen, die Kafka gegen die Schöpfung gestellt hat' [Contrary to Goethe's definition of the work of art, Durs Grünbein's writings do not rest like cows on a meadow. They are nearer to the animals, or perhaps they are machines, that Kafka set against creation]. Equally important, however, is Müller's elegant and piercingly formulated understanding of Grünbein's poetic mission, or at least of what it ought to be:

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<sup>36</sup> Schirmmacher, 'War da irgendein Mythos?'

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Gustav Seibt, 'Mit besseren Nerven als jedes Tier', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 March 1994, cited in Heudecker 'Durs Grünbein in der Kritik', p. 45.

In Grünbeins Gedicht ist eine Generationserfahrung Form geworden, die sich bislang eher als Verweigerung von Form artikuliert hat. Es ist die Generation der Untoten des kalten Krieges, die Geschichte nicht mehr als Sinngebung des Sinnlosen durch Ideologie, sondern nur noch als sinnlos begreifen kann. [...] Die Bilder wechseln, und die Fremdheit bleibt. Diese Generation hat kein Vaterland und keine Muttersprache. Für sie gilt der Brechtsatz: 'Die Situation sind die Mütter der Menschen'. [...] Nach dem Verschwinden der Mütter das Trauma der zweiten Geburt. Der Ichverlust im Spiegel, genauer: der Zerfall des Ich in Spiegelscherben, die es als Mauerkrone verwenden kann oder zur Öffnung von Adern. Die Verszeile 'Und was ich sah war mehr als ich ertrug' formuliert das Trauma. [...] Der Blick ist lidlos. Es ist nicht nur ein Glück, niemandes Schlaf zu sein, unter wieviel Lidern immer. [...] Der Teufel sprach Russisch, nicht, wie Bulgakow noch geglaubt hat, Italienisch mit russischem Akzent, aber wir sind nicht aus dem Auge des Todes, wenn wir die ost-europäische Erfahrung zu den Akten legen, und der Teufel ist sprachbegabt. [...] Das Geheimnis [von Durs Grünbeins] Produktivität ist die Unersättlichkeit seiner Neugier auf die Katastrophen, die das Jahrhundert im Angebot hat, unter den Sternen wie unter dem Mikroskop.

[In Grünbein's poem, the experience of a generation has become form, an experience which until now has expressed itself rather as a refusal of form. It is the generation of the undead of the Cold War, who can no longer understand history by making sense of the senseless through ideology, but can only now understand it as senseless. The images change, but the alienation remains. This generation has no fatherland and no mother tongue. For them Brecht was right when he said: 'Situations are the mothers of people'. [...] After the mothers disappear, comes the trauma of second birth. The loss of the self in the mirror, or rather, the disintegration of the self into shards of mirror that it can use as wall coping, or to slit the wrists. The line 'And what I saw was more than I bore' expresses that trauma. [...] It is a lidless gaze. Being no one's sleep is not all pleasure, no matter how many eyelids one is sleeping under. [...] The devil spoke Russian – not, as Bulgakov thought, Italian with a Russian accent – but by filing away the eastern European experience we have still not escaped the stare of death, and the devil is a gifted linguist. [...] The secret of Durs Grünbein's productivity is his insatiable curiosity about catastrophes, of which this century has plenty to offer, under the stars and under the microscope.]<sup>39</sup>

Müller replaces the 'second zero hour' with the 'trauma of second birth'; the cosy arrangement of West German appreciation of an East German poet with the lack of a 'fatherland and mother tongue'; and the 'spirit of awkward obligation, of embarrassed exchange between the two Germanies' with the notion of history as 'senseless'. Müller remained vague about whether the 'generation of the undead of the Cold War' straddled both sides of the old divide: the grain of the text and his own recent experience of a failed cross-German venture at the Brecht Ensemble – by 1995, his front-line collaborators had disappeared back to the West, one of them accusing him of 'fascist tendencies'<sup>40</sup> – suggest rather not. But he left little

<sup>39</sup> Müller, 'Portrait des Künstlers als junger Grenzhund', pp. 26–29.

<sup>40</sup> Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p. 508.

else to the imagination, his reformed socialist convictions resounding throughout, crowned with a thumping claim of Russian culpability. As these polarized interpretations of the mid-1990s show, Grünbein could be read either as a representative of a new aesthetic, or as a child of the Cold War with the ability and moral duty to dissect the Kafkaesque worlds of totalitarian regimes. Or rather: he could be read *both* as the one *and* as the other.

Similarly distinct positions taken up since in scholarship suggest there was indeed something intrinsically open about the way Grünbein was writing in the 1990s. Although neglecting the literary debates described in this chapter, Fabian Lampart surveys Grünbein's poetry and essays from *Grauzone morgens* to *Nach den Satiren*, with a particular focus on the 'Novembertage' ['November Days'] cycle, which treats the murder of Rosa Luxemburg in 1919, the Hitler Putsch in 1923 and the fall of the Wall in 1989. Describing the mix of biographical background and distanced, observer perspective that many see as a hallmark of Grünbein's poetry, Lampart concludes that the *Wende* had a decisive but delineated effect on the poet:

The effect of this manifests itself in Grünbein's work more in the way he reflects on the conditions of writing poetry, in an aesthetic, poetological discourse, in which the socio-political factors affecting the writings of an individual are only secondary considerations, as possible variables in the production and exploration of the experience and the writing experience of an individual. [...] If Durs Grünbein has a specific *Wende* experience, then it expresses itself in his poetry not so much as the taking up of a political and social position; rather, the *Wende* provides the backdrop for a new formulation of the fundamental principles of poetics.<sup>41</sup>

Judith Ryan, by contrast, reads the central neurological metaphor of *Schädelbasislektion* as overt political reflection:

In Grünbein's poetry, the cranial sutures stand in for the 'wall in the head', those traces of the division between former West and East Germany that persist in the psyches of German citizens even after the unification of the two countries in 1991. The brain-stem metaphor [the brainstem being the remnants of the fetal nervous system which is otherwise trans-

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<sup>41</sup> Fabian Lampart, "'Tropismen an den Rändern alter Formen". Annäherungen an Durs Grünbeins Lyrik aus den Jahren der Wende', in *Engagierte Literatur in Wendezeiten*, ed. by Willi Hunte-mann and others (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), pp. 113–47 (pp. 135, 144). Andrea Payk-Heitmann, 'Der 11. September im (fiktionalen) Tagebuch. Überlegungen zu Durs Grünbein und Max Goldt', in *Nine Eleven. Ästhetische Verarbeitungen des 11. September 2001*, ed. by Ingo Irsigler and Christoph Jürgensen (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008), pp. 49–66, argues that Grünbein's responses to the events of 9/11 were, equally, primarily rooted in aesthetics. On Grünbein's wider aesthetics of 9/11, see Volker Mergenthaler, 'Coventry und Dresden, Ninive und Sodom. Durs Grünbeins Koordinaten mythologischer Sinnstiftung nach dem 11. September 2001', in *In the Embrace of the Swan. Anglo-German Mythologies in Literature, the Visual Arts and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Rüdiger Görner and Angus Nicholls (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), pp. 168–86.

formed into the adult brain or the spinal cord] represents subconscious attachments to the former East Germany and a more primitive way of life.<sup>42</sup>

Like Heiner Müller, Ryan understands Grünbein's poetry as 'a continual attempt to expose the roots of creativity in trauma, and thus to accord to poetry a privileged role in bearing witness to suffering', suggesting that *Schädelbasislektion* and *Nach den Satiren* (in particular) are a conscious response to the debate about *Was bleibt* – artistically, socially and culturally – across the rupture of the *Wende*.<sup>43</sup> The fact that the 'Novembertage' cycle in *Nach den Satiren* directly follows two poems devoted to the memory of Heiner Müller ('Heiner Müller, auf dann ... Drei Blätter' ['Heiner Müller, Until Then ... Three Sheets'] and 'Brief an den toten Dichter' ['Letter to the Dead Poet']) speaks for itself.<sup>44</sup>

The legitimacy of both interpretations is confirmed by what Grünbein later had to say about the poems himself. In 2006, when Suhrkamp re-issued *Grauzone morgens*, *Schädelbasislektion* and *Falten und Fallen* in a single volume, the poet furnished his career-defining middle collection with the afterword it had lacked in 1991.<sup>45</sup> In the space of just several pages, his retrospective gives traction to both readings. Fifteen years after first publication, Grünbein noted that aesthetics had formed a crucial component in the life change introduced by the events of 1989:

[D]er Übergang von der einen Welt in die andere erzwang nicht nur eine völlig veränderte Lebensweise, sondern auch eine neue Ästhetik. Eine der Folgen war der Wechsel von der Monochromie zu einer plötzlichen Farbigkeit, und damit das Ende der eigenen *Grauen Periode*.

[The transition from one world to the other compelled me not only to a completely different way of life, but also to a new aesthetic. One of the consequences was the shift from the monochrome to a sudden burst of colour, bringing to an end my own *Grey Period*.]<sup>46</sup>

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42 Judith Ryan, 'The Skull beneath the Skin', in *A New History of German Literature*, ed. by David E. Wellbery and others (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 959–64 (p. 961).

43 Ibid., p. 963. See also Judith Ryan, 'Das Motiv der Schädelnähte bei Durs Grünbein', in *Schreiben nach der Wende. Ein Jahrzehnt deutscher Literatur 1989–1999*, ed. by Gerhard Fischer and David Roberts (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2001), pp. 301–15. In a further essay, Ryan reads the later collection *Vom Schnee* as a reflection of the changed conditions of poetic production since 1989. Judith Ryan, "'Spurlose Frühe". Durs Grünbeins "Vom Schnee" und das Problem der Wende', in *Weiterschreiben. Zur DDR-Literatur nach dem Ende der DDR*, ed. by Holger Helbig and Kristin Felsner (Berlin: Akademie, 2007), pp. 163–81.

44 For a detailed discussion of these poems, see Alexander Müller, *Das Gedicht als Engramm. Memoria und Imaginatio in der Poetik Durs Grünbeins* (Oldenburg: Igel, 2004), pp. 151–216.

45 From the 'Schlußwort zur *Schädelbasislektion*', as written for the publication of Durs Grünbein, *Gedichte. Bücher I–III (Grauzone morgens, Schädelbasislektion, Falten und Fallen)* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2006), pp. 385–95.

46 Ibid., p. 388.

However, despite the poet's best efforts, the historical magnitude of 1989 and subsequent years had punctured the autonomy to which his work would naturally gravitate:

Den Gedichten der 'Schädelbasislektion' merkt der Verfasser noch heute ihre Grunderschütterung an. Was müssen das für Zeiten gewesen sein, fragt er sich, in denen solches entstand, und blickt verstohlen auf manche grimmige Verszeile. [...] Riskiert aber nicht viel, wer im Schreiben sich zu sehr auf die äußeren Umstände einläßt? Und doch übersteigt die Anziehungskraft historischer Momente zuweilen sogar den Drang nach Autonomie, wie auch der Leser weiß.

[The profound shock at the heart of the poems of the *Schädelbasislektion* strikes their author even today. What times must these have been for such poems to have come about, he wonders, stealing a glance at some particularly wrathful lines. [...] But is it not a great risk to lay oneself too open in one's writing to external circumstances? And yet, as the reader will also know, the attractive force of historical moments can at times exceed even the drive for autonomy.]<sup>47</sup>

In 2006, Heiner Müller seemed close at hand too: 'Soviel ist sicher, der entschiedene Ton, mit dem ein weitgehend Unbekannter da vors Publikum hintrat, kam aus der Kälte. Es war der transsibirische Sound des entblößten Herzens' [This much is certain: the decisive tone with which the virtual unknown came to public attention came from the cold. It was the Trans-Siberian sound of the heart laid bare].<sup>48</sup> Most striking about Grünbein's self-commentary, however, is the way he allows these statements to inhabit the same space without any sense of their possible contradiction. Interviewed shortly afterwards about his essay-writing technique, Grünbein noted that he argues 'sehr stark eidetisch, nicht logisch oder paralogisch' [in a markedly eidetic fashion, not a logical or paralogical one],<sup>49</sup> a view underscored by critics of his work in general.<sup>50</sup> These creative tensions – which are not remotely recognized as such – recur throughout the 2006 afterword. He portrays the natural scientific metaphors of *Schädelbasislektion*, for instance, both as a means of capturing the radically different ideological world he had just entered and as a way of augmenting the exploration and enrichment of

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 386.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Silvia Ruzzenenti and Durs Grünbein, 'Poesie und Essay. Ein Interview mit Durs Grünbein', *Euphorion*, 102.4 (2008), 503–13 (p. 507).

<sup>50</sup> On *Nach den Satiren*, for instance, see Helmut Böttiger, 'Das Ich und seine Verstärker', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 24 March 1999, p. 3. See also the excellent essay by Hinrich Ahrend, 'Essayistische Lyrik. Grünbeins Grenzgänge zwischen Poesie und Poetik', in Bremer, Lampart and Wesche, *Schreiben am Schnittpunkt*, pp. 135–68.