

<b>Institution:</b> University of Oxford
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28 Modern Languages and Linguistics
<b>Title of case study:</b> Developing public understanding of the literature of the GDR and its legacy post-1990
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Leeder has played a significant role in developing public understanding and appreciation of the culture of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and its contested legacy after the unification of Germany in 1990. She has over many years promoted the understanding of culture from the former East through publications, translations, public events, work with writers and frequent radio broadcasts. This active work to engage a broad range of audiences, underpinned by high-quality research, has increased awareness of East German culture, has played a role in processes of commemoration, and has supported new forms of literary expression by bringing new works by established and emerging authors, filmmakers and artists to the forefront in public debate on these issues in the UK and beyond.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Karen Leeder is a Professor of Modern German Literature. Since arriving in Oxford in 1993 she has carried out pioneering research establishing her as one of the UK's leading specialists on GDR literature and the legacy of the East German state.</p> <p>Leeder's early research at Oxford addressed the last generation of poets to emerge from the former East Germany. She was among the first to analyse the interplay of official and underground culture, and the infiltration of the samizdat scene by the secret police. Her <i>Breaking Boundaries</i> (1996) was the first book in English or German to present an account of this generation of writers who (in the phrase of GDR poet Uwe Kolbe) were 'born into' really existing socialism and how they sought to extend its aesthetic possibilities [see §3.1]. It offered first accounts of writers (e.g. Durs Grünbein) who would go on to be key figures in the united Germany, and has been widely reviewed as 'pioneering', 'indispensable', 'a standard on the topic'.</p> <p>Leeder's research on the aesthetic and political legacy of German socialism has continued in various ways, both examining the nostalgia for the state's utopian promise that brought a new word into the German language ('Ostalgie') and the traumatic aftershock of its totalitarian reality. The twentieth anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall (2009) crystallised these tensions and her <i>From Stasiland to Ostalgie: The GDR – Twenty Years After</i> (ed. and Intro. Leeder) appeared in November 2009 itself as one of the first volumes to mark this anniversary [§3.2]. Reviews (unusual for an edited journal) have uniformly praised it as 'sophisticated', 'stimulating' and 'invaluable'. In related projects she has also examined the trajectory of key GDR writers - from controversial classic Brecht to major icon of the Berlin Republic Durs Grünbein. The widely-reviewed <i>Brecht &amp; the GDR</i> (contrib. and co-ed. with Bradley 2011), for example, addresses the cultural management of Brecht's legacy in and after the GDR. Leeder's own chapter innovatively examines Brecht's 'late work' in the GDR [§3.3] and has been singled out for praise in reviews (e.g. <i>Dreigroschenheft</i>). <i>Durs Grünbein: A Companion</i> (ed., and contrib., 2013), the flagship first volume of a new series on Contemporary German Culture, of which Leeder is a founding editor, examines this key writer in and after the GDR, offering the first comprehensive account of him in English. Leeder's own contribution explores his engagement with science explicitly as a vehicle to leave behind GDR ideology and invent a 'new grammar of being' in the West [§3.4].</p> <p>Leeder has also sought to chart and theorize the cultural legacy of the GDR as a whole, proposing innovative readings of the 'death and afterlife' of the GDR through the exploitation of medieval 'danse macabre' motif, for example, the fascination with <i>Hamlet</i>, or the symbol of the vampire, in literature, films and art. This research led to her symposium <i>Re-reading East Germany</i> which united a 'dream team' of international scholars (CUP reader's report) in 2012 to offer fresh critical (and often controversial) re-readings of the state (reassessing the canon beyond the charged political debates, proposing new ways of approaching the legacy) and will, astonishingly, furnish the first volume in English to chart GDR culture and its demise as a whole. It also led to a major, AHRC-supported interdisciplinary project on <i>Spectres of the GDR: The Haunting of the Berlin Republic</i> [§3.5]. This examines the 'afterlife' of the GDR in the Berlin Republic through the striking topos of ghosts and highlights the importance of a 'spectral turn' in contemporary German art, film,</p>

and culture in which the unaccommodated memories of the spectre of German communism are manifested. Several articles in refereed journals (e.g. *NGC* article 2012 on spectres in Volker Braun [**\$3.6**]) and invited lectures address the topic with reference to different authors: e.g. lecture on 'Christa Wolf's phantom pain' in Harvard, Julia Schoch's 'unheimliche Heimat' in Nottingham and 'Visitations in Contemporary German Culture' at Victoria University, Wellington (all 2011-12).

This research collectively addresses the cultural implications of one of the most important historical events of the twentieth century and stresses the vital contribution that culture can make towards understanding, interpreting and influencing political and cultural change.

### 3. References to the research

- [1] Karen Leeder, *Breaking Boundaries: A New Generation of Poets in the GDR* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). Available on request.  
Reviews: *German Studies Review*, 21 (1998) 'a significant contribution to scholarship'; *Monatshefte* 91 (1999) 'a standard on the topic'; *Seminar* (1998) 'an indispensable introduction'; *World Literature Today* (1997) 'a pioneering study, without which continued research and scholarship will not be possible'.
- [2] Karen Leeder, ed. *From Stasiland to Ostalgie: The GDR – Twenty Years After*, a special edition of *Oxford German Studies*, No. 38.3 (November 2009) ISSN 0078-7191. Available on EBSCOhost via institutional account. Reviews: *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 18 (2010), 418-20: 'This volume is invaluable in pointing the way forward, out of unproductive polarities'. *German Studies Review*, 34 (2011), 205-6: 'those looking for an up-to-date assessment of the forces behind the recent spread of Ostalgie would be well advised to examine this volume'; *Modern Language Review*, 106 (2011), 1195-6: 'This excellent volume ... promotes a sophisticated understanding of key phenomena such as Ostalgie'.
- [3] Karen Leeder, 'Lateness and Late Style in Brecht's last poetry', in *Brecht and the GDR: Politics, Culture, Posterity*, ed. Karen Leeder [with Laura Bradley], *Edinburgh German Yearbook*, 5 (2011), 45-64. Available on request. Reviews: Peter Hutchinson, *Journal of European Studies* 42 (2012), 399-400: '[A] reliable source of information on aspects of [Brecht's] complex life and work in the GDR, the way in which his legacy was "managed," and his influence on posterity. . . the result is therefore authoritative and often new'. Other reviews: *The German Quarterly*, 85.4 (Fall 2012), 482-83; *Brecht Yearbook*, 37 (2012), pp. 268-70; 'Begutachtung eines gespaltenen verhältnisses: Brecht in der DDR', *Dreigroschenheft*, 3 (2012), pp. 70-71.
- [4] Karen Leeder, ed. [with Christopher Young and Michael Eskin] *Durs Grünbein: A Companion* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2013). Available on request.
- [5] *Spectres of the GDR: The Haunting of the Berlin Republic* (draft MS for submission December 2013 – AHRC fellowship interrupted by one year's medical leave). Available on request.
- [6] Karen Leeder, "After the Massacre of Illusions": Spectres of the GDR in the work of Volker Braun', in *Transformations of German Cultural Identity 1989-2009*, ed. by Anne Fuchs and Kathleen James Chakraborty, special edition of *New German Critique*, 116 (2012), 103-118.

#### Grants awarded

2011: £107K - AHRC Fellowship for 'Spectres of the GDR' Oct 2011-June 2012 (interrupted because of medical leave). 2009-2012 16K of internal competitive grants on GDR projects; various small grants from British Academy (1999 Australia, and 2002 Canada for invited papers at GDR conferences), and from Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (2006 x 2) and Deutsch-italienisches Hochschulzentrum (2007) for invited keynote lectures on GDR legacy themes.

### 4. Details of the impact

Leeder's work has been disseminated to a wide variety of audiences through symposia, public events, broadcasts, podcasts, close work with writers and translation work in UK and abroad. Impact can be gauged by increased public interest, positive audience feedback and also by the fact that events have generated sustained support from external public bodies. The 20 year anniversary of German Unification offered a unique opportunity for mediation of a major political and cultural event which brought notable dissemination of Leeder's work in national media and repeated invitations to work with organisations such as the BBC and Goethe Institute (GI).

Leeder's research on GDR poets (§3:1) is now a standard on university reading lists in UK, USA and Germany, and is positively reviewed on trade blogs (e.g. 'Very well written and very well informed', Shearsman<sup>[i]</sup>). Her work has led to a longstanding engagement to bring these authors to the attention of an English-speaking audience and to air the continued legacy of German socialism with a lay public. She has introduced many East German writers to UK audiences at a wide variety of venues over the years (South Bank, Edinburgh Festival, etc.), creating awareness of the issues involved and the contextual background, and helping to create a market for their work (e.g. Volker Braun in Oxford in 2008 to an audience of 85). Leeder's translations of these writers (often the first publications of their work in English) have also served to reach new English audiences outside the academy<sup>[1]</sup>. She has undertaken translation commissions of GDR writers for commercial publishers e.g. of Volker Braun, for *International Poetry Review* (USA April 2012), the Goethe Institute-sponsored volume *Kalendergeschichten* (New Zealand, 2012) and for the prestigious UK poetry magazine *Poetry Review* (June 2013). Her translations of Uwe Kolbe were presented at a public event for school teachers, students, poets and cultural workers, 'Poetry under pressure' with GDR poets Richard Pietraß and Uwe Kolbe, Cardiff, June 2012<sup>[ii]</sup>. Feedback demonstrated that the event had helped people to better understand the context behind GDR poetry, heightening their appreciation and interest in the history and poetry in this area. Her translation of Durs Grünbein's 'Childhood in the Diorama' (on his GDR childhood) won *The Times* Stephen Spender Trust Prize 2013<sup>[iii]</sup>.

*From Stasiland to Ostalgie* (§3:2) emerged from a seminar series in 2009 organized by Leeder, with international speakers, including Timothy Garton Ash. All events were in English, open to the public and attracted wide public participation (audiences of 40-85) from outside the academy, especially among the expatriate community<sup>[iv]</sup>. Uniquely for such a venture, the German Embassy chose to promote it in their public anniversary programme for 2009 and the series was visited by the German Cultural Attaché. The high quality, timeliness and public impact of the whole led to an invitation from the Embassy to launch the volume at the Embassy-sponsored arts festival 'Divided Skies 60 40 20', in January 2010 at The Soho Theatre, London, and to advise on and participate in a specially commissioned panel discussion with GDR writer Anne Rabe, the German Ambassador to London, David Tushingham (theatre practitioner), and Hans Kundnani (journalist) among others (ticket sales of 60)<sup>[v]</sup>. The organizer of the festival commented: 'I am very grateful to [...] you for your valuable advice and help along the way. And thank you - combining the performative arts with intellectual thought was exactly my aim'<sup>[2]</sup>. Such impact was not confined to UK. The publicity for the *Stasiland* volume led to an invitation to speak on the legacy of the East German past in the cultural landscape at 'The Changing Face of Berlin', with Don Markwell, Peter Millar and Hartmut Meyer, Berlin, 7 November 2009 (to a public audience of 200) and a unique invitation to take part in BBC *Night Waves* 'Berlin Wall Twentieth Anniversary Debate', live from Berlin on 9 November 2009 with Philip Dodd, Stefan Aust, and Ingo Schulze (2.1 million listeners). The BBC commissioning editor commented 'She has been a vivid, informed and passionate speaker in many of my programmes including a live special broadcast from Berlin to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wall coming down. Her advice and expert knowledge of the literature of the GDR was invaluable in our preparations.'<sup>[3]</sup>

'Re-reading East Germany' (§3:3) involved a public symposium organized by Leeder on 24-25 March 2011, with twelve international speakers<sup>[vi]</sup>. The symposium included a bi-lingual public reading with Durs Grünbein (§3:4) and Michael Eskin chaired by Leeder to launch the trade book Grünbein, *The Vocation of Poetry*, trans. Michael Eskin (New York, 2011) and to showcase the premiere (outside Germany) of *Oktoberfilm* (2009) with a libretto by Grünbein (audience of 70 - c. 50 from outside the academy). Feedback questionnaires on this event were uniformly positive underlining the 'exceptional quality' of the events citing Leeder's paper and Grünbein's reading as highpoints that caused attendees to change their views. Impact can be gauged from the fact that the South Bank and GI organized a repeat performance of the reading at the Royal Festival Hall on 29 March (ticket sales of c. 200).

The *Spectres of the GDR* project (§3:6 and 7) has already generated numerous opportunities for Leeder to collaborate in different ways with artists, writers and thinkers interested in haunting: including the Berlin avant-garde music and arts festival 'CTM:12 - Spectrality' in February 2012, a public conversation with philosopher John Gray at the Purcell Room, London (audience of 700) on the way contemporary thought is haunted by the legacy of Nazism and German totalitarianism<sup>[vii]</sup>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

and the 'Readers and Writers Festival' of New Zealand for a GI-sponsored public event with GDR author Jenny Erpenbeck, discussing 'Europe's Ghosts' (March 13, 2012)<sup>[viii]</sup> which generated ticket sales of 200. Leeder's event was one of a handful of the 50 festival events written up for the local media and led directly to a radio spot on NZ radio ('Buried Secrets' 28 March). Leeder's work on spectres was further exploited in interdisciplinary public event 'Giving up the Ghost: The Haunting of Modern Culture', which took place in Oxford in March 2012 and included talks by high profile public figures from outside the academy (e.g. the artist Sarah Sparkes, the cultural commentator 'k-punk', aka Mark Fisher, and the UK poet David Constantine), and at which Leeder gave a talk on the haunting of the Berlin Republic in theatre, performance, and photography of the GDR. Attendance included schoolteachers, photographers, artists, curators.

Her GDR expertise means that Leeder is the 'go to' person for BBC radio and television on aspects of GDR and contemporary German culture ('a brilliant reviewer, a reliable source of advice and inspiration [...] her advocacy of German writers has brought neglected and new works to the attention of me and my colleagues at BBC Radio Arts' - statement by BBC radio editor).<sup>[3]</sup> She is regularly invited to comment in the national print media (e.g. her research is cited by name in Boyd Tonkin, 'The Art Of Memory', in the *Independent*, 2 January 2009, pp. 18-19, and she was also commissioned by the *Independent* to write an obituary of controversial GDR writer Christa Wolf (7 December 2011)<sup>[ix]</sup> and in person (e.g. on the cold war and poetry and on the end of the GDR at *The Rest is Noise* Southbank Centre), she was 'In conversation' with Anne McElvoy on the Stasi, *Night Waves* 10 February 2010 (1.9 million listeners); gave an interview for a BBC News Channel on 'the end of German war payments', 3 October 2010; and her *Spectres* project led to an invitation to appear on *Start the Week*, 26 November 2012 with Andrew Marr (2.4 million listeners)<sup>[x]</sup>.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

### Testimonial evidence:

- [1] Email statement from an East German poet
- [2] Email statement from Curator and Director of Divided skies 60 40 20
- [3] Email statement from Commissioning Editor BBC Radio 3

### Other sources of corroboration

- [i] Trade blogs on Breaking Boundaries:  
[http://www.shearsman.com/pages/editorial/recomm\\_ger2.html](http://www.shearsman.com/pages/editorial/recomm_ger2.html);  
<http://germanpoetry.blogspot.co.uk/2005/06/some-of-best-books-about-german-poetry.html>
- [ii] Poetry under Pressure, University of Cardiff, 24 and 25 May 2012, including feedback  
<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/europ/newsandevents/events/underpressure.html>
- [iii] *The Times* Stephen Spender Trust Prize 2013 [http://www.stephen-spender.org/spender\\_prize.html](http://www.stephen-spender.org/spender_prize.html)
- [iv] Symposium 'From Stasiland to Ostalgie: Remembering the GDR Twenty Years on':  
<http://www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/files/rememberthegdr/programme.pdf>
- [v] Arts Festival Soho Theatre, London, 'Divided Skies 60, 40, 20'  
[http://www.suite42.org/produktionen/divided\\_skies](http://www.suite42.org/produktionen/divided_skies)
- [vi] Symposium Re-reading East Germany: <http://www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/gdrculture/>.
- [vii] Podcast of John Gray discussion <http://therestisnoise.southbankcentre.co.uk/explore/berlin-in-the-20s-and-30s>
- [viii] Readers and Writers Festival, 2012 Wellington, New Zealand <http://festival.co.nz>;  
write up of Leeder's event 'Europe's ghosts' at Embassy Theatre Wellington:  
<http://books.scoop.co.nz/2012/03/13/jenny-erpenbeck-europes-ghosts/>;  
radio: <http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/nights/audio/2514082/buried-secrets>
- [ix] Obituary of Christa Wolf, *Independent*, 7 December 2011.  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/christa-wolf-writer-whose-hardwon-reputation-suffered-when-her-stasi-links-surfaced-6273105.html>
- [x] Start the Week November 26 2012, with Andrew Marr, Katinka Barysch, Douglas Carswell, Karen Leeder and Gisela Stuart: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01p09p0>