

Introduction

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A significant cultural and political development of recent years has been the emergence of memory as a key concern in Western societies. This has entailed a looking toward the past, says Andreas Huyssen, “that stands in stark contrast to the privileging of the future so characteristic of earlier decades of twentieth-century modernity.”¹ This special issue defines its starting point as an exploration of one aspect of this paradigm shift, namely, the memory cultures that have evolved around particular traumatic historical events. So conceived, we have narrowed the project to three distinct points of orientation. First, on the historical side of the equation, is a focus on collective, familial, or individual memories of specific catastrophic events occurring within Germany or German-occupied territories between 1939 and 1989.

A second focus is on *how* memory is constructed, preserved, circulated, redirected, framed, and manipulated via specific medial technologies. This means in the present context accounting for the role of visual media such as film, photography, television, painting, or even postcards in the construction

The articles in this special issue had their genesis in a six-week Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst summer seminar, “Technologies of Memory: Collective Traumatic Remembrance in Modern Germany,” which David Bathrick led at Cornell University in the summer of 2008 and in which each contributor participated. As the leader of the seminar in which these articles began (David) and the editor of this special issue who shepherded the articles to completion (Sven-Erik), we thank the contributors for their intellectual companionship, exceptional engagement, and humor.

1. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 11.

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of memory, or equally that of print media such as journals and newspapers, school textbooks, archives, and “literature” (prose fiction, film script). Frequently, the ambivalence of the memory sites explored in the following articles is reflected in various forms of fraught intermediality, as for example the relationship between photograph and caption (Yuliya Komska), the translated script of a film within a film (Eric Kligerman), the rich visual intertextuality of the TV movie *Dresden* (Elke Heckner, and in terms of its intertextuality especially Susanne Veas-Gulani), or the ekphrastic activity of “translation” of a Renaissance painting according to the chaotic coordinates of twentieth-century violence (Anna M. Parkinson).

A third focus, which emerged out of this interface of catastrophic events and the media in which they are remembered, concerns itself with the sorts of political, cultural, bureaucratic, linguistic, or even “imagined” communities (great and small, conformist and disruptive) that are created, sustained, or challenged via the (technologically mediated) circulation of various memory cultures. We characterize as “ambivalent sites of memory” the spatial, temporal, and medial loci of specific traumatic events that have elicited diverse memorial activities both within anamnestic communities and between (comfortably and uncomfortably) coexisting communities down to the present day. Since 1989, in primary cultural production, public discourse, and new scholarly approaches to postwar memory formation, the memories of traumatic events have increasingly moved beyond the parameters of what Michael Rothberg astutely critiques as “the zero-sum thinking that underwrites the logic of competitive memory” into acknowledging and even accepting what Aleida Assmann defines as “a human right to one’s own memories, which cannot be negated by taboos and censorship.”² Yet to accept such a right to memory is not to imagine that everyone’s memories will coexist in pluralistic harmony. On the contrary, it is to accept that the field of memory (even, indeed, “one’s own memories”) will necessarily be structured by ambivalence in the form of an irreducible multiplicity of memory narratives that entertain relationships not only of adjacency but, frequently, of uneasy intimacy and entanglement.

2. Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 18; Aleida Assmann, “On the (In) Compatibility of Guilt and Suffering in German Memory,” *German Life and Letters* 59 (2006): 196. For important work on new directions in German memory discourse since unification, see this special issue of *German Life and Letters*, edited and introduced by Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove, and the related volume with an introduction by Fuchs and Cosgrove: Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and Georg Grote, eds., *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006).

The contributors to this volume explore such ambivalence in memory sites where it is intensely and complexly operative.

In “The Antigone Effect: Reinterring the Dead of *Night and Fog* in the German Autumn,” Kligerman critiques the complex and literally explosive relationships that figures of the 1970s radical German Left entertained with the victims of the Nazi genocide of the Jews in their own statements and self-representations and, in particular, in works of the New German Cinema. If Antigone served as the figure through which the New German Cinema meditated on violence, law, and the symbolic process of burying and disinterring various symbolically charged corpses, Kligerman’s analysis unfolds as a critical contrast between two meditations on Sophocles’s heroine: G. W. F. Hegel’s famous reflections in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and Friedrich Hölderlin’s idiosyncratically Kantian thoughts occasioned by his engagement with the Greek text as its German translator. Kligerman focuses on how Alain Resnais’s *Night and Fog* (1955) becomes aurally or visually embedded in, and haunts, Alexander Kluge’s film *The Patriot* (1979) and, especially, Margarethe von Trotta’s *Leaden Times* (1981). He asks what it would mean to move from a critical paradigm that privileges memory and psychoanalysis to one that sees the opposite of forgetting not in memory but in justice. His nuanced engagement with von Trotta’s film unpacks it as a richly ambivalent text whose relationship to *Night and Fog* points both in the direction of Hegelian *Aufhebung* (sublation) and appropriative identification with Jewish victims, and toward a more “Hölderlinian” concern with what he calls “uncanny justice.”

Parkinson’s contribution, “Aptitudes of Feeling: Ekphrasis as Prosthetic Witnessing in Anne Duden’s *Judas Sheep*,” explores Duden’s book as a text that both is difficult to read and models a practice of difficult reading. The female protagonist “feels” Germany’s traumatic history as a diffusely powerful, violent, yet elusive affect that “occupies” her very body. She is consciously able, however provisionally, to structure the erratic affective economy of inarticulate violence that has not so much defined as devastated her “self” only when she finds a representational form sufficiently symbolically rich to begin to manifest and “frame” her unnarrativizable somatic memory. That she finds such an image capable of figuring the violence of Germany’s recent past, which was directed overwhelmingly at Jews, in Vittore Carpaccio’s *Preparation of Christ’s Tomb* is something that Parkinson acknowledges to be obviously problematic. The great value of her essay lies in the fact that she does not summarily condemn Duden’s book, but instead tries to read it in its considerable complexity. It is not as a repository of received Christological meaning that the protagonist can begin to “work over” (Theodor W. Adorno) the past in relation

to the painting. Rather, through an active, provisional, and arguably subversive ekphrastic operation, the protagonist forges meaningful connections between Carpaccio's scene and the chaotic phenomenology of her own "seen." This ekphrastic labor performed on a demanding readable text constitutes it as what Parkinson theorizes as a site of prosthetic witnessing.

In "Televising Tainted History: Recent TV Docudrama (*Dresden, March of Millions, Die Gustloff*) and the Charge of Revisionism," Heckner maps the terrain of a new, specifically postunification third-generation televisual discourse on the suffering of German civilians at the end of World War II. Her initial step involves a critique of Bill Niven's powerful dismissal of those very same films, which assails them for rehearsing the exculpatory aims of certain earlier representations of German wartime trauma. While underscoring the danger that revisionist projects continue to pose today, Heckner argues that the charge of revisionism ironically forecloses on the significant "new rules for engaging with the tainted war experience of German civilians" that productively dislodge the representation of such events from precisely the exculpatory function it long served in right-wing revisionist narratives.

In Heckner's bold reading, the new blockbuster TV melodramas have ironically advanced beyond the paradigm of the critics who charge them with being revisionist. While remaining open to the innovations and achievements of the popular televisual discourse of German wartime memory, Heckner both calls for and performs incisive criticism of its anachronisms, blind spots, gender politics, and even occasionally revisionist tendencies (she points specifically to a scene in Joseph Vilsmair's film *Die Gustloff* that draws a visual analogy between German civilian refugees and Jewish Holocaust victims). Yet she insists that such criticism will be of little value unless it takes into account and situates itself within the twenty-first-century transnational moment to which the new TV docudramas respond and in which they intervene; one defined by a specifically postunification Germany, a well-established memory of Holocaust, a new Europe engaged in projects of international reconciliation, and a generationally mediated German memory of the war.

In "The Ruined Picture Postcard: Dresden's Visually Encoded History and the Television Drama *Dresden*," Veas-Gulani unearths a rich history of culturally saturated visual representations of Dresden that Roland Suso Richter's German TV blockbuster miniseries *Dresden* (2006) deftly quotes in a feat of iconic intertextuality. Veas-Gulani's survey of the construction of Dresden as a symbolically invested icon reaches back to a classic 1748 painting by Canaletto and continues via nineteenth-century tourist postcards to fin de siècle photography (Otto Richter) to Nazi propaganda to postwar photographs

(Kurt Schaarschuch, Richard Peter, Axel Rodenberger) of Dresden as paradigmatic ruinscape. This long history reveals how Dresden's visual encodings, surprisingly from their inception, have been structured by nostalgia and the desire to preserve the city's (always) already lost innocence. If Canalotto "beautified" the city, Dresden's subsequent visual encodings preserved the industrializing city's innocent image of itself. Vees-Gulani traces how Dresden's peculiar prewar visual history fed into the city's postwar visual discourse, which offered Germans "a subtle way to share experiences in a national and public sphere that seemed less objectionable than public debates or national commemorations." She reads *Dresden* in terms of both break and continuity with Dresden's postwar visual discourse. On the level of plot the film participates in a paradigm shift toward a more-layered public sphere of memory in Germany in which multiple memory narratives can today coexist without having to compete for space according to "a logic of scarcity."³ Yet Veeg-Gulani lays bare how the film does not articulate the long-taboo issue of German suffering only or primarily in an open way, as one might expect, but also and most powerfully in the form of a visual subtext that in many ways undermines and overpowers the more-nuanced plot. Structured by the peculiar legacy of Dresden's postwar visual discourse, *Dresden* seems curiously unable to speak of Dresden's destruction other than as an open (indeed *spectacularly* open) "secret."

One of the most compelling aspects of Susanne Luhmann's article on films that make public the private family secrets of a family member's Nazi past, "Filming Familial Secrets: Approaching and Avoiding Legacies of Nazi Perpetration," is how it illuminates the archive as a contested site between historical fact and familial affect. If the films Luhmann explores seek to bring to light difficult familial secrets, her analysis focuses on the complex ways that these films' attempts to recover family secrets unwittingly involve the protagonists in charged family dramas that re-cover the same secrets. Luhmann's readings point to how memory both circulates and is disrupted in the familial economy, in which mothers emerge as particularly crucial gatekeepers of the memory of the father. Indeed, it is often loyalty to the mother as much or more than to the father (the memory of whom is frequently more abstract and woven together out of the mother's stories) that makes crossing the threshold to difficult knowledge impossible. Given the subtle secretion of knowledge and affect in the very process of unearthing family secrets, Luhmann concludes that the generational stories these films tell will likely be continued.

3. Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 2.

Brian M. Puaca's "Teaching Trauma and Responsibility: World War II in West German History Textbooks" adds to recent work by scholars such as Wulf Kantseiner, Robert Moeller, and others that contests the popular consensus that Germans remained largely silent in the first postwar decades about the uneasily connected issues of Nazi criminality and German responsibility, on the one hand, and German wartime suffering, on the other. To gauge what was, and was not, said about these issues, Puaca surveys one of the most important, and largely neglected, media of collective German memory: school textbooks. Read by young Germans between the ages of twelve and nineteen throughout West Germany, these books, Puaca argues, helped constitute a "collective memory for postwar Germans that often transcended class, socioeconomic, religious, and regional barriers." Puaca finds that even the earliest postwar textbooks spoke openly about German wartime suffering. Textbook accounts of German responsibility for the Holocaust took longer to appear, and the earliest accounts were frequently evasive, inadequate, or even sought to establish an equivalency between German and Jewish victimhood. Yet by the early 1960s—some fifteen years before what is widely seen as the crucial turning point of the late 1970s for West German school instruction about the Holocaust—West German textbooks dealt frankly with the scope and process of, and German responsibility for, the genocide of European Jews.

In "Ruins of the Cold War" Komska teases apart the often interchangeably used historiographical terms *postwar* and *Cold War*. It is her considerable achievement to repose the question of their relationship no longer as only or chiefly one of periodization but as one of political semiotics. Komska's heuristic and essentially inductive exploration of the tensions between these overlapping terms aims to trace how actors in the 1950s deployed and contested the entangled terms to define themselves and advance their own causes. Komska looks to 1950s photographic chronicles of destruction as the particular site at which to analyze the semiotic and aesthetic contestation of Cold War versus postwar at work. If urban rubble immediately became the signature signifier in postwar cultural production, it became "ambivalent rubble," as a Cold War semiotics eventually tried to harness and redirect its symbolic power. In Komska's subtle reading, a little-known photographic chronicle of the decay of Sudeten Egerland published by Sudeten expellees in 1959 reveals the political treachery of photographic images and the contest involved in their "captioning" (Walter Benjamin). Komska elaborates a self-conscious attempt to recode and press the central postwar signifier—rubble, the ruin—into the service of the expellees' Cold War cause. The Egerland photo-ruins become in this way exemplary as "sites of friction between the memory of the postwar period and

the ongoing project of attempting to capture . . . visual vignettes of the new conflict in the offing.”

Sven-Erik Rose’s article traces the vexed reception of one document from the vast underground Oyneg Shabes archive assembled in the Warsaw Ghetto under the historian Emanuel Ringelblum’s leadership, which was buried and largely recovered after World War II (one cache in 1946, a second in 1950). Yehoshue Perle’s *Khurbn Varshe* (*Destruction of Warsaw*) proved the most shocking text of the second Oyneg Shabes cache for the way it vehemently alleges Jewish complicity in the systematic murder of the Jews of Warsaw, and even harshly criticizes the victims themselves. Rose analyzes the Cold War polemic over Holocaust memory that erupted around *Khurbn Varshe* after its publication in a Stalinist-era Warsaw journal. The reception history of Perle’s chronicle illuminates how the Oyneg Shabes archive became a quintessentially ambivalent site of (Jewish) memory of the Holocaust, and why the most important Holocaust archive and its tireless organizer are only now, and only perhaps, moving to a more central position in Holocaust discourse. Unlike the other articles in this volume, Rose does not deal with postwar German memory. Instead, Germany itself looms large as one ambivalent site of Jewish memory in the polemics over how to receive ghetto writings charging Jewish council “collaboration” with Nazis that played out in the early 1950s context of the highly contentious issue of negotiations with Konrad Adenauer’s Germany over “reparations” payments.

