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The Past Under Erasure? History, Memory, and the Contemporary

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Abstract

This article seeks to explore some particularities of history writing in the present. It considers in turn the meanings of the contemporary interest in memory, the different ways in which ideas about and images of the past circulate through the mass-mediated public sphere of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the complexities of publicness and the public sphere, and the shifting boundaries between popular ideas of the past and changes in the discipline of history. It then turns to the example of (West) Germany between the 1960s and now. The article concludes with some reflections on changing perceptions of the overall character of the twentieth century.

Keywords

Germany, historiography, nostalgia, postnational, publicness, public sphere

In the wider public arena of historical representations – in the public sphere where ideas and images about the past are produced, mediated, reworked, fought over, fashioned into ideology, and put into collective circulation; where the pastness of a society's presence can be either unsettled or secured – the times since the 1960s have seen a series of transformations in both the infrastructure and modalities of *publicness*.¹ In that larger than personal or individuated range of contexts we

As should be clear from the general cast of my exposition, the remarks that follow were offered explicitly as suggestive starting points for further thought and debate. While based on extensive research and reading, much of which is published elsewhere, any attempt to provide detailed references or thicker contextualizing would have burst the bounds of my allowable space. The footnote citations provide some means of carrying the discussion further.

1 There is a great deal more ambiguity to Jürgen Habermas's concept of *Öffentlichkeit* than the English-language discussions usually allow. An unwieldy aggregation of terms such as *publicness*, *publicity*, *public culture* and *public opinion* would translate the term more accurately than the customary 'public sphere', which manages a rather clumsy approximation of the German meaning. Thus *Öffentlichkeit* connotes something more like 'the quality or the condition of being public', making space for a set of ethico-philosophical desiderata in addition to the more distinctly institutional arena of political articulation foregrounded by the English discussions. See Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel*

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become increasingly bombarded with all manner of citations to history and appeals to the past. These days, for example, it is impossible not to be impressed by the salience of all forms of public memory work, remembrance, and commemoration. Gathering pace during the 1980s, the interest in such matters burgeoned, country by country, into a veritable ‘boom in memory’. Its presence has become palpable, an inescapable feature of the landscape of ideas for anyone interested in grasping the dynamics of social change at the turn of the new century. Historians themselves are hardly any exception, with ‘history and memory’ becoming one of the leading preoccupations of the academic discipline during this very same period.² But the interest in memory massively exceeds that professionalized discourse, saturating large areas of entertainment, popular reading, commercial exchange, and many other parts of the public culture. What is going on here?

In one dimension this becomes a ‘nostalgia for the present’.³ In Fredric Jameson’s notation, that bespeaks an anxiety about the loss of bearings, a response to the speed and extent of change, for which the narrating and visualizing of the present as history promises a surrogate architecture of continuity. Representations of the past, personal and collective, private and public, commercial and uplifting, become both therapy and distraction, a source of familiarity and predictability, even as the actual ground of the present ceases to be reliable. Such nostalgia spells the desire for holding onto the familiar, for fixing and retaining the lineaments of worlds disconcertingly in motion, of landmarks that are disappearing and securities that are unsettled.

In these terms ‘memory’ offers a crucial site of identity formation under this contemporary predicament, a way of deciding who we are and of positioning ourselves in time, given the hugeness of the structural changes now so palpably and destructively remaking the world in the present – in the new era of capitalist restructuring defined by neoliberal globalization, end of communism, and ‘post-Fordist transition’ – and the consequent damaging of older narratives of science, industry, progress, and improvement that previously performed such work. It became a commonplace of the 1990s to speak of the ‘postmodern

der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft (Newied 1962), transl. as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA 1989); Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA 1992). For my own writings, see Geoff Eley, ‘Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century’, in Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas*, op. cit., 289–339; Idem, ‘Politics, Culture, and the Public Sphere’, *positions*, 10, 1 (spring 2002), 219–36.

2 In this regard Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, ‘A Looming Crash or a Soft Landing? Forecasting the Future of the Memory “Industry”’, *Journal of Modern History*, 81 (March 2009), 122–58, provides the most recent detailed guide to the plenitude of the literature. Central has been the impact of Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 7 vols (Paris 1984–93), anthologized in English as *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, 3 vols (New York 1996–98), and *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols (Chicago 2001–9). See Hue-Tam Ho Tai, ‘Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory’, *American Historical Review*, 106, 3 (June 2001), 906–22; Peter Carrier, ‘Places, Politics, and the Archiving of Contemporary Memory in Pierre Nora’s *Les Lieux de mémoire*’, in Susannah Radstone (ed.), *Memory and Methodology* (Oxford 2000), 37–57.

3 This phrase is the title of a chapter focused around film in Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC 1991), 179–96.

condition', while another claim placed us more tendentiously at the 'end of history'. Whatever the merits of these particular arguments, the memory boom is related in a variety of complex ways to the working through of this 'cultural logic' of a contemporary transition.⁴ The new information technologies and electronic mass media also play their part. Processes of commodification and the commercialization of culture, in the consumer economies of entertainment and stylistic display, produce a postmodern economy of signs in which the mobile arbitrariness of historical imagery and citation becomes impossible to escape. In that way, too, the contemporary sensibility becomes a memorializing one. We are constantly being invited to place ourselves in relation to one kind of 'past' or another, one hardly more grounded in actual experiences than the next. Contemporary publicness issues constant incitements to memory in that sense.

This is one way of making more intelligible the endless and accelerating procession of anniversaries that began structuring the public culture in Europe during the later 1980s. Here the national referents have varied, but the great extravaganza of 1989 in France which sought to declare the French Revolution finally 'over' was only the most dramatic of such culturally particular events.⁵ The most spectacular cross-national commemorations involved the extended and ramified remembering of the second world war, beginning with the fortieth anniversary of the European peace in 1985 and continuing through the sequence of fiftieth anniversaries from the outbreak of war in 1939 to the D-Day celebrations and the Liberation six years later. That public calendar spawned an extraordinary degree of commemorative excess, overrunning the spaces of public representation and the television screens in particular, while triggering a plethora of private recollections.⁶ Yet the meaning of all this activity, of so much obsessional public remembering, lies beyond the formal occasions and the immediate contents themselves. In Europe, surely, it is the sense of an ending – both *internationally* with the end of the Cold War, the strengthening of the European Union, and the transnational shrinkage of the globe, and *domestically* with the definitive dissolution of the postwar settlement, the spatial reordering of the everyday ecology of the country and the city, and the re-composition of

4 This paragraph is deliberately patched together from the relevant buzzwords. See in particular David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford 2005), and *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford 1989); Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London 1992); Alain Lipietz, *Towards a New Economic Order: Post-Fordism, Ecology, and Democracy* (Oxford 1992). 'The postmodern condition' originates with Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester 1984); the phrase 'the end of history' was launched by Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York 1992). For general commentary, see Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (eds), *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s* (London 1991); Ash Amin (ed.), *Post-Fordism: A Reader* (Oxford 1994); Geoff Eley, 'Historicizing the Global, Politicizing Capital: Giving the Present a Name', *History Workshop Journal*, 63 (spring 2007), 154–88.

5 See especially Steven Laurence Kaplan, *Farewell Revolution: Disputed Legacies, France, 1789/1989*, and *Farewell, Revolution: The Historians' Feud, France, 1789/1989* (both Ithaca, NY 1995). Pertinent here is also Reinhart Koselleck, "'Space of Experience'" and "'Horizon of Expectation'": Two Historical Categories', in Koselleck (ed.), *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA 1985), 255–76.

6 See also Geoff Eley, 'Finding the People's War: Film, British Collective Memory, and World War II', *American Historical Review*, 106, 3 (2001), 818–38.

the social landscape of class – that sends us to those earlier moments. In effect, we are returning home, revisiting the origins, reopening the stories that previously described the contemporary world, even as the latter turns out to be lost.⁷ This creates an unease with history, inviting a different historical sensibility, while shifting our receptiveness to the past as a field of meaning.

Such unease notwithstanding, the main logic or direction of commemorative politics (the politics of anniversaries) seems an affirmative one, working with the grain of the status quo and strongly to the advantage of the powers that be, often conceived and orchestrated deliberately as such.⁸ In another form of memorial politics, however, the potentials have been more commonly oppositional or democratic, drawing on a language of human rights to appeal for ‘retroactive justice’ or sustain a claim to citizenship.⁹ In this regard, ‘memory’ serves as a substitute ground for enunciating a political demand for recognition, now that the appeal of earlier collectivism (feminism, the class-based identifications of the socialist tradition, a democratic ideal of citizenship per se) has become so unpersuasive and impaired: demonstrable claims to the traumatic wound of a past injustice – slavery, colonial dispossession, expulsions, genocide, any form of discrimination, collective suffering, or violations of rights – replaces the appeal to more classical universalist ideals. In the historiographies of memory this supplies much of the impetus for the now-familiar ‘prefixing’ of the term – as ‘cultural’, ‘public’, ‘collective’, ‘popular’, or ‘social’. As Susannah Radstone says, this de-individualizes or de-personalizes memory and helps us to explore ‘the complexities of past/present relations as they are mediated through the materialities and processes of public, social, and cultural institutions and practices’.¹⁰ Yet at the same time, this recourse to a memorial language of traumatized identity easily spectacularizes suffering and injustice, so that any dramatic or large-scale experience of exceptional violence becomes implicitly privileged as the principal ground from which legitimate and effective political claims may now be filed. In the process other grounds of democratic action – positive ideals of human self-realization and social emancipation,

7 Here it is worth remembering how confidently one emblematic historical text of the 1960s sought to imagine the present of modernity as part of a progressive continuum running between a superseded past and a future that seemed manageably within reach. But if Peter Laslett’s extraordinarily influential *The World We Have Lost* (New York 1966) presumed the veracity of a yet-to-be completed grand narrative of progressive and attainable improvement, the 1990s flattened the relationship of present and future into a story of globalization already containing its own end.

8 Here the ‘politics of the spectacle’ is certainly relevant. See Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit 1983); and for a recent restatement, RETORT (a group based in San Francisco), *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London 2005), 16–37. For two differing applications, see Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy* (Berkeley, CA 1997), and Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge 2007).

9 See especially Istvan Rev, *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Post-Communism (Cultural Memory in the Present)* (Stanford, CA 2004).

10 Susannah Radstone, ‘Memory Studies: For and Against’, *Memory Studies*, 1, 1 (2008), 33.

for instance, or the mundane suffering of everyday poverty and exploitation – can become much harder to find. To that degree a memorial politics can constrain as much as it enables.¹¹

Developments within history as a specialized activity – as a discipline and a field of professional knowledge – also help explain this salience of memory as a kind of thematics. The opening of the postwar era for scholarly historical work has played its part here, belatedly claiming the period since 1945 for both teaching and research, so that during the last decade larger numbers of historians have now begun writing about a context in which they were themselves biographically formed. Until very recently, 1945 acted as a limit of the present in an extremely resilient way.¹² ‘Contemporary history’ in those disciplinary and curricular terms has only slowly established its credentials and emancipated itself from the tutelage of political science, gradually acquiring the necessary apparatus of discussion and publication through the launching of journals, societies, institutes, the holding of conferences, and so forth. In the United States at least, courses on the postwar world are now being taught conventionally by history departments, rather than only in sociology and political science, in a quite new way.

Oral history’s gradual emergence into acceptability since the mid-1970s, passing from a marginal practice of amateurs and mavericks into a legitimate bundle of methods and a properly credentialed sub-disciplinary area, has also made a difference, again with its own journals, professional associations, conferences, institutional bases, individual classics, agreed methods, technologies, and evolving traditions. The power of interdisciplinarity, with its early institutional bridgeheads from the 1960s and more recent flourishing, likewise created homes for sophisticated intellectual work on memory. Until historians’ suspicions against anthropology, psychology, psychoanalysis, and other theoretical traditions became allayed, discussions would stay within a narrow range of technical and naively classical debates about the difficulties of using oral sources.¹³

In this last respect, cultural studies certainly provided the main framing and impetus for the growth of memory as a priority of intellectual inquiry. Treating memory as a complex *construct* shaped within and by the prevailing public fields of

11 For brilliant reflections to this effect, see Lauren Berlant, ‘The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics’, in Jodi Dean (ed.), *Cultural Studies and Political Theory* (Ithaca, NY 2000), 42–62; and Idem, ‘Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)’, *Critical Inquiry*, 33, 4 (2007), 754–81. For cognate arguments differently inflected, Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London 2004).

12 For example, my own department offered no lecture course on ‘Europe since 1945’ until January 1989.

13 See here Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (2nd edn, London 2006). The new journal *History and Memory* was launched in 1988. The earliest systematic reflections on the history–memory complex included Patrick Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover, NH 1993); James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford 1992); and Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge 1989). The classic texts were those by Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York 1980), and Idem, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago 1992). See Jeffrey K. Olick, ‘“Collective Memory”: A Memoir and Prospect’, *Memory Studies*, 1, 1 (2008), 23–29. By far the best single starting point is now Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (eds), *Memory: History, Theories, Debates* (New York 2010).

representation, needing therefore to be approached by means of interdisciplinary collaboration, owes everything to the analytical languages developed in cultural studies during the past three decades.¹⁴ Those languages have recast our perceptions of how the past carries meanings in the present, pointing us to all the subtle and disguised ways in which history becomes evoked and addressed. They alert us to the wide range of sites and media through which remembering (and forgetting) proceed in a public sphere, consciously and unconsciously, through film and television, photographs and advertisements, radio and song, theater, museums and exhibits, tourist spots and theme parks, fictions, ceremonial, school curricula, political speeches, and more. In this way, the wider domain of ideas and assumptions about the past in a society has been claimed for historical study, so that the historian's customary ground – that is, the boundaries of acceptable historical analysis, the definition of what counts as a legitimate source and an acceptable subject – falls more and more into question.

The resulting possibilities are either extremely unsettling or extremely exciting, depending on the defensiveness of one's disciplinary predilections. They confuse many of the older ways of defining the historian's distinctive practices and identity, freeing up the established disciplinary constraints, and opening the imagination to a far more mobile agenda, with a much wider repertoire of legitimate approaches and methods. This produces an extremely fruitful indeterminacy. It upsets an older approach to conceptualizing the boundary between 'memory' and 'history', where the one used to be straightforwardly the professional organizing and contextualizing of the other. History literally 'disciplined' memory in that older understanding. It shaped and educated the raw and unreliable rememberings of individuals as it called into action the superior languages of objectivity, facing their partial and subjective accounts with the truth of the archive, the 'reality' of the historical record, and just the 'facts'.

To the contrary, in that regard, a certain de-professionalizing of historical knowledge has recently been at work. We are now used to finding historical thinking and historical research in places other than university history departments, encountering them partly elsewhere in the academy, but partly in the culture at large in various kinds of amateur or lay pursuits. For Raphael Samuel, one of the most eloquent and creative chroniclers and theorists of that contemporary process of redefinition, this made history 'an organic form of knowledge', 'one whose sources are promiscuous, drawing not only on real-life experience but also memory and myth, fantasy and desire; not only the chronological past of the documentary record but also the timeless one of "tradition"':

History has always been a hybrid form of knowledge, syncretizing past and present, memory and myth, the written record and the spoken word. Its subject matter is

¹⁴ For helpful commentary, see Radstone, 'Memory Studies', op. cit., 31–9; and Idem, 'Reconceiving Binaries: The Limits of Memory', *History Workshop Journal*, 59 (spring 2005), 134–50; Wulf Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies', *History and Theory*, 41, 2 (2002), 179–97.

promiscuous . . . In popular memory, if not in high scholarship, the great flood or the freak storm may eclipse wars, battles and the rise and fall of governments. As a form of communication, history finds expression not only in chronicle and commentary but also ballad and song, legends and proverbs, riddles and puzzles. Church liturgies have carried one version of it – sacred history; civic ritual another. A present-day inventory would need to be equally alert to the memory work performed (albeit unintentionally) by the advertisers, and to the influence of tourism . . . As a self-conscious art, history begins with the monuments and inscriptions, and as the record of the built environment suggests, not the least of the influences changing historical consciousness today is the writing on the walls. The influence of video-games and science-fiction would be no less pertinent in trying to explain why the idea of chronological reversal, or time travelling, has become a normal way of engaging with the idea of the past.¹⁵

Some of the favorite subject matters of cultural studies – museums and exhibitions, cinema and photography, magazines and popular fictions – have provided the best ground for historians to begin reconceptualizing the relationship between history and memory, and indeed to respond more generally to the porousness of the boundaries between academic history and the wider universe of knowledges about the past that Samuel describes.¹⁶ The journal *History and Memory* itself, the main flagbearer for work on memory inside the profession, displays exactly this range of influences. Film, both as a visual record of the past and as a form for the production of history in its own right, is attracting widening attention. The critical and eclectic appropriation of psychoanalytic theory of various kinds has played a key role, too, whose potentials historians have begun only slowly to explore, while photography likewise affords rich opportunities, particularly for the social and cultural history of the family and personal life.

Finally, in all of these areas, within history as a discipline if not in the larger domain of historical representations, the impact of feminist theory and politics has been simply enormous, clearing the path for new initiatives and directly inspiring many of the most creative departures. The dynamics and consequences of women's history inside the profession have been extraordinarily important in their own right, but more broadly feminism's challenge has legitimized the study of subjectivity, forcing historians over the longer term to deal with such questions too. The analytical uses of autobiography and various combinations of cultural theory, psychoanalysis, and history have been especially exciting.

Acknowledging these multiple registers of an interest in history allows us to see the many different ways in which coherent and compelling images of the past can

15 Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, vol. I, *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London 1994), 443–4. Equally pioneering have been the writings of Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London 1985); and Idem, *A Journey Through Ruins: The Last Days of London* (London 1991), each reissued in new editions by Oxford University Press in 2009.

16 See especially Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London 1995); Barbara Kirchenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley, CA 1998); Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szewaja and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (eds), *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations* (Durham, NC 2006).

circulate through a society's public and personal worlds. It also alerts us to the contemporary porousness of the boundaries between the inside and outside of history as an academic discipline.¹⁷ In these terms, historians have become far more receptive to what would previously have been seen as intrusions, either from other disciplines and fields of knowledge, or from non-academic sources in popular culture, everyday life, the arts, and unexpected parts of the public sphere. For many historians this double broadening of history's horizons – towards other disciplines and towards non-academic culture – can be a source of damage and dismay. For others it can be an excitement, a basis both for professional innovation and for thinking about the democratizing of historical culture.

This release of historical meanings into wider public circulation also reflects changes in the character of the public sphere and in the associated influence of academic intellectuals, a process which the history of Germany, in its passage from postwar dividedness into the unified Federal Republic, reveals especially clearly. The unsettling disarrangement of historical signification and all the attendant cultural changes – Jameson's 'nostalgia for the present' suggested above, the organized memorializing and public memory work, the relentless logics of commercialization and commodification, the promiscuous deployment of historical citations in advertising and entertainment, the growth of historical tourism and the heritage industry, the fitting of history into collage and pastiche, the ransacking of the past in an endless desire for mix and match – have shaped a very different discursive environment from the one which the pre-1990 Bonn Republic's progressive intellectuals had taken for granted. As Greg Eghigian and Paul Betts have argued:

... the conventional sites of German memory production – namely, the state, universities, and the world of high *Kultur* – no longer enjoy their former virtual monopoly on determining what counted as the collective past; so much so that German history has increasingly become the stuff of mass-media fascination and pop-culture make-overs over the last twenty years. But however one evaluates this mass production of history, it is undeniable that the German past – much like its capital [city] – is under radical reconstruction.¹⁸

There are two dimensions of this process that interest me here: one *structural*, concerning the changing character of publicness between the West Germany of the 1960s and the unified Germany of now, and the other *cultural*, involving a shift in the valencies of the German nation form. When Habermas originally published his *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* in 1962, it becomes increasingly clear, that book's lament for an earlier version of the public sphere that had supposedly become

17 This is a main theme of Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor, MI 2005).

18 Greg Eghigian and Paul Betts, 'Introduction: Pain and Prosperity in Twentieth-Century Germany', in Betts and Eghigian (eds), *Pain and Prosperity: Reconsidering Twentieth-Century German History* (Stanford, CA 2003), 3.

degraded actually bespoke the far broader contemporary desire of an emergent liberal intelligentsia that such an ideal of publicness be properly institutionalized in the first place.¹⁹ So far from originating in a golden age of classical nineteenth-century liberal modernity, as the narrative in Habermas's book implied, the ideal of the public sphere actually acquired its resonance from a discourse of reform in the early 1960s themselves, as the pressure of a rising intellectual generation for democratization against the Adenauer era's stifling conformities became more and more insistent. These were the so-called '1945ers' identified by Dirk Moses and Christina von Hodenberg – journalists, writers, social commentators, television pundits, academics, and other public intellectuals born roughly between 1921 and 1933, who as teenagers or young adults had experienced 1945 as their decisive life-defining event, and who now complained about the limited forms of liberal democracy actually operative in the Federal Republic. Bridling against the political culture of the authoritarian 'CDU state' as a kind of democracy-constricting claustrophobia, this postwar cohort strove from the end of the 1950s for a new climate of polite pluralism, national civility, and reasoned public exchange. For them, creating the public sphere in this programmatic sense had become an urgent political desideratum.²⁰

During the earlier 1960s this broadly based debate about the desirable meanings of publicness, for which Habermas's *Strukturwandel* became an emblematic vector, recorded some modest and demonstrable gains in the direction of a fragile but functioning pluralism. But these possibilities were radicalized immeasurably by the events of 1967–8. In a nutshell: the passion of the 1968ers' critique was leveled against precisely the more limited aspirations of the new culture of public civility – now so easily dismissed for its hollowness and hypocrisy – which the 1945ers had been trying so assiduously to implant. The outrage of the West German student movement was fueled not only by the excesses of Franz-Jozef Strauß, the CDU, and the far Right, after all, but also by the equally crude authoritarianism of the West Berlin SPD – that is, precisely the core of the political grouping on whom Habermas and other liberal advocates of the public sphere necessarily relied for advancing their hopes.

Thus both of Willy Brandt's successors as Mayor of West Berlin, Heinrich Albertz and Klaus Schütz, responded to the student movement with a rigid and provocative intransigence that was especially inflammatory, stoking the anti-SDS hysteria, endorsing police illegalities, and generally demonizing the exercise of the civil freedoms which the *Grundgesetz* had supposedly made sacrosanct. Indeed, once politics was taken out of doors, with all the resulting din, theatricality, unpredictability, shocking experimentation, physical transgressions, stylistic excess, and

19 See Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, op. cit.; and Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas*, op. cit. Interestingly, the Calhoun volume contains no essay situating *Strukturwandel* in the West German political context of the time.

20 A. Dirk Moses, 'The Forty-Fivers: A Generation between Fascism and Democracy', *German Politics and Society*, 17, 1 (1999), 94–126; and Idem, *German Intellectuals and the German Past* (Cambridge 2007), 55–73; Christina von Hodenberg, *Konsens und Krise: Eine Geschichte der westdeutschen Medienöffentlichkeit, 1945–1973* (Göttingen 2006), 229–92.

rampant disrespectfulness increasingly associated with the student movement, the resulting dynamism inevitably broke through the frameworks of decorum and civility the 1945ers were seeking to protect. In that sense, while the proceduralism of formal parliamentary democracy in Habermasian terms certainly needed to be upheld, an effective defense of those values urgently required the new participatory energies too. Conversely, it was the completely unbending refusal of liberal and Social Democratic proceduralists to acknowledge the force and legitimacy of this case that for New Leftists exposed the self-serving narrowness of the given parliamentary practice. For the New Left, in other words, the democratic potential of public sphere proceduralism was always-already circumscribed by the given rules of the polity.

To establish genuinely democratic publicness, in other words, radical extensions were needed. Thus the late 1960s initiated that continuous dialectic between parliamentary realism and extra-parliamentary excess, sometimes operating through limited and ambivalent reciprocities, as in the years 1968–72, but more commonly in angry and impatient contention, that secured the decisive and lasting gains for West German democracy. The classical framework of proceduralist *Öffentlichkeit* was notably ill-fitted for the new types of publicness that erupted in the 1960s and 1970s, a disjunction poignantly illustrated by the conflicts Habermas directly solicited with the West German New Left.²¹ During the ensuing three decades, those fields of tension between the defense of communicative and proceduralist reasoning and the new direct-action militancies became edgily re-negotiated, with one strand running through the *Bürgerinitiativen*, the new social movements, and the Greens, a second through feminism and the new women's activisms, and a third through the bohemian and hedonistic subcultures of major cities like Munich, Frankfurt, Hamburg, and West Berlin. In Dany Cohn-Bendit's words: 'A society that claimed to be democratic was made to confront its authoritarian structures, the authoritarian personality was challenged, society's smooth running profoundly shaken.'²²

Throughout these processes of change, the desirable difference between Germany's democratic present and its authoritarian past was constantly invoked by each side of the debates; whether by the defenders of proceduralist decorum, or the proponents of participatory action. 'History', meaning the admonitory presence of the Nazi stain, was a central and continuous term in the political languages that both structured and enabled those conflicts. 'Coming to terms with the past' implied a discursive formation whose exigencies and entailments powerfully organized the public culture of West German democracy in the period between the 1960s and 1990s. Public life during those years became centered to a remarkable degree around the challenge that each respective cohort of West German

21 See Oskar Negt (ed.), *Die Linke antwortet Jürgen Habermas: Mit Beiträgen von Wolfgang Abendroth et al.* (Frankfurt am Main 1969); Jürgen Habermas, *Protestbewegung und Hochschulreform* (Frankfurt am Main 1969); Idem, *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics* (Boston 1970).

22 Dany Cohn-Bendit, in Ronald Fraser et al., *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt* (New York 1988), 361.

intellectuals who experienced the Third Reich was required to confront: namely, how could democratic political culture be reconstituted in a society severed from the normal resources of continuity and tradition, in which the national past *per se* had lost its authorizing legitimacy, indeed, seemed entirely to have been disqualified? During the 1980s, Jürgen Habermas and the generations of ‘critical’ historians entering their maturity by the start of the 1970s – Hans and Wolfgang Mommsen, Martin Broszat, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, the slightly younger Jürgen Kocka, and so forth – acquired a distinctive moral-political authority as the trustees of this responsibility.²³

Yet by the 1990s, as a result of generational transition, the consequences of unification and other geopolitical changes, and the shifting presence of history in a public sphere itself undergoing transformation, that old discursive environment no longer held. Following fast on the outpouring of public emotion associated with the German release of the film *Schindler's List* (Stephen Spielberg, 1993), the extraordinary theater of the public panels surrounding Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* could scarcely have made this more painfully clear: as Goldhagen's simplified moral indictment of pre-1945 German culture swept the cool and patient dissections of ‘polycratic rule’ and ‘cumulative radicalization’ abruptly from the stage, the senior generation was left bemused and spluttering before the new manifestations of a far less familiar public.²⁴ The old repertoire of relations to the past could no longer be relied upon. The stakes for performing, speaking, and imagining the German nation were clearly changing. The valencies of national history were becoming slippery and less fixed. Control over the image of the national past was drifting away from Habermas and the other high-cultural guardians of national memory whom the protocols of West German publicness had seemed to authorize so impressively during the previous two decades.²⁵

Let me be clear about my argument here. At one level the ‘Goldhagen effect’ seemed powerfully to affirm that indissoluble ethico-political unity between Germany's democratic vitality and a willingness to continue taking responsibility for the crimes of nazism, which principled liberal intellectuals like Habermas had been consistently arguing for since the early 1980s and before. In that sense, this controversy of the mid-1990s stood in full continuity with earlier ones around the

23 See Stefan Berger, *The Search for Normality: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Germany since 1800* (Providence, RI 1997), 77–108; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, ‘Historiography in Germany Today’, and Hans Mommsen, ‘The Burden of the Past’, in Jürgen Habermas (ed.), *Observations on ‘The Spiritual Situation of the Age’: Contemporary German Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA 1984), 221–59, and 263–81; Rüdiger Hohls and Konrad H. Jarausch (eds), *Versäumte Fragen: Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart 2000).

24 See Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York 1996); Geoff Eley (ed.), *The ‘Goldhagen Effect’: History, Memory, Nazism – Facing the German Past* (Ann Arbor, MI 2000).

25 See Aleida Assmann and Ute Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit der deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart 1999), 21–52, 53–96, 272–92; Jan-Werner Müller, *Another Country: German Intellectuals, Unification, and National Identity* (New Haven, CT and London 2000); Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York 1995).

Bitburg fiasco in 1985 and the *Historikerstreit* in 1986–7. In those terms it made complete sense for Habermas to applaud *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, as he did in the ceremony awarding Goldhagen the Democracy Prize of the *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* in March 1997. But by commending the ‘urgency, the forcefulness, and the moral strength’ of the book, which gave ‘powerful stimulus to the public conscience of the Federal Republic’, he upheld not the excellence of Goldhagen’s history and its quality of argument, but rather the public awareness it had aroused.²⁶ For the affective spectacle of Goldhagen’s triumphal impact on the massed German lecture halls, where the mainly younger audiences booed his senior critics, revealed a different dynamic from before, one of impatient disregard for the sober and objective argumentation of that older generation of the historians of nazism. Goldhagen may have practically re-galvanized the German public’s anti-nazi conscience, but his disarmingly straightforward story of good and evil allowed the nazi past all too easily to be set aside as being now at last beyond reach. As Dirk Moses astutely observed: ‘In order to divest themselves of their grandparents’ moral pollution, young Germans embraced the endearing young American who could pronounce absolution and offer redemption: if you accept my book then you are a good German.’²⁷ This was history not as reasoned communication in the Habermasian ideal, but as the vector of guilt and shame in a glib and unmoored celebrity form.

The aspiration toward a ‘postnational’ version of civic patriotism grounded in the terms of the 1949 Constitution, in which the claim to being German was understood to reside in conscious and consistent adherence to liberal democratic values (the ‘free democratic basic order’) and affiliation with the political community of ‘the West’, rather than any depth of history or authentic culture, had been a key feature of the outlook fashioned by West German progressive opinion since the 1960s. The institutionalizing of the division of the country from 1945–9 had also encouraged a further backing away from the previously prevailing ethno-cultural forms of national identification, whose legitimacy and purchase the trauma of the nazi catastrophe had done so much to disqualify and then undermine. Developing around the central fact of the redefinition of German sovereignty, new axes of identification – with ‘the West’, with European integration, with economic prosperity, with the *Grundgesetz*, with the absence of war, and with a past that had now been refused – gradually made ‘constitutional patriotism’ into a persuasive West German narrative that seemed to work.²⁸

In light of the plentiful evidence behind that reading of West German public culture during the 1970s and 1980s, the emotional resilience of the cultural

26 Jürgen Habermas, ‘Goldhagen and the Public Use of History: Why a Democracy Prize for Daniel Goldhagen?’, in Robert R. Shandley (ed.), *Unwilling Germans? The Goldhagen Debate* (Minneapolis, MN 1998), 263. For my fuller version of this argument, see Geoff Eley, ‘Ordinary Germans, Nazism, and Judeocide’, in Eley (ed.), *Goldhagen Effect*, op. cit., 29–31.

27 Dirk Moses, in a review of Goldhagen’s *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, *Journal of Modern History*, 75 (2003), 997.

28 See Geoff Eley, ‘Nazism, Politics and the Image of the Past: Thoughts on the West German *Historikerstreit*, 1986–87’, *Past and Present*, 121 (November 1988), 171–208.

conception of German national belonging revealed through the euphoria of unification took many commentators by surprise, suggesting that ‘constitutional patriotism’ had remained a contested outlook constantly in need of being affirmed, rather than a solidly secured default consensus. Popular belief in the continuity and undividedness of the German nation had evidently outlasted the postwar partitioning of the country, or had at least become surprisingly quickly re-enabled. Older assumptions regarding the naturalness of the ethno-cultural principle of nationality whose efficacy for state organization became generalized in Europe between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1920s could now be reclaimed. Beneath the emotional steamroller of the political dynamics of unification, conversely, the appeals of a postnational identity no longer seemed enough. Faced with an unanticipated and unpalatable re-legitimizing of nationalist sentiment, West German progressive intellectuals fell into evident disarray, vainly reaffirming principles of political alignment whose suppositions had abruptly fallen away. After the disappearance of the GDR, of course, East German intellectuals likewise found themselves marooned, extruded from their familiar contexts and speaking languages that no longer applied.²⁹

This was where changes in the character of the public sphere and shifts in the discourse of the nation converged. Even as unification brought the intended completion of the old Federal Republic, whose ‘horizon of expectation was firmly lodged in an imaginary that pictured the present as a natural extension of the West German past,’ Michael Geyer has argued, ‘West Germany itself was caught in an accelerated process of transformation,’ as a result of which ‘the state and the economy the East Germans wanted to join were disappearing.’³⁰ Not only that, but the previously reliable cultural bearings were also being cast adrift. As everywhere else in the consumption-driven late capitalist world, apparently unstoppable logics of commercialization were dislodging an older model of the public sphere and its machinery of public commentary, whose West German advocates had always aspired in principle to the Habermasian ideal of reasoned communication. Partly through the changing structure of public communication, partly through a decline in the cultural authority of academic intellectuals, and partly through a general ‘post-modernizing’ of cultural life, ‘history’ was being loosened from the firm locations in which the political ethics of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* had always sought to anchor it. During the spectacle of the Goldhagen affair, this was the shift that could be glimpsed.

Just as unified Germany became ‘the “truly normal” country’ after which its advocates had yearned, ironically, that normalcy was turning into something different, ‘an entirely unpredictable, market-driven, and consumption-oriented state of affairs’.³¹ In this new Germany, globalization and Europeanization were

29 Geoff Eley, ‘The Unease of History: Settling Accounts with the East German Past’, *History Workshop Journal*, 57 (spring 2004), 173–99.

30 Michael Geyer, ‘Introduction: The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany’, in Geyer (ed.), *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany* (Chicago 2001), 3–4.

31 *Ibid.*

the twin coordinates of the normalcy unification had *actually* brought: 'The old Republic was slipping and with it went a way of life and, more slowly, a way of thinking of and perceiving the world.'³² Whatever guidance the old moral compass of 'coming to terms with the [nazi] past' had provided – and both the Goldhagen affair and the *Wehrmacht* Exhibit plus a slew of additional controversies confirmed its continuing amplitude – a new agenda also needed to come into focus.³³ For West German public intellectuals the 1990s were dominated to a great extent by the dilemmas of integrating the former GDR, which imposed their own difficult forms of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. But this sense of historical passage, of entering unfamiliar new times, was heavily compounded by a growing sense of their own displacement. The publicness of reasoned exchange was being trumped by the rapid-fire sensationalism of an entertainment and information society indifferent to the ethico-political protocols of the past. This produced 'panic in the face of a meaningless world; fear that media-capitalism will usher in a yet more banal culture'.³⁴

But despite such feelings of estrangement, Geyer argues, this marks a decisive transition. In this view, German futures might now be disengaged from the 'shattered past' that previously impeded and skewed the possibilities for political debate, understandably 'covering the present with shame and burdening the future with its detritus'.³⁵ Rather than facing backwards, called constantly to the rendering of anti-nazi account, Germans may now turn properly to the challenge of *Gegenwartsbewältigung* ('coming to terms with the present'), as half a century of peaceful democratization, the structural resolution of the national question, and the superordinate consequences of Europeanization have all freed them for that purpose:

Easterners and Westerners confronted the demons of their respective pasts just at the moment when the familiar maps of animosity began to collapse. What all the debates had in common is that they should have been resolved twenty or thirty years ago, when they were fresh and new. Now, they became the baggage of a disappearing age. Rather than having West German culture affirmed, 'traditions' that had been accrued in East and West during the long postwar era were challenged.³⁶

32 Ibid., 5.

33 Sponsored by the non-university Hamburg Institute for Social Research, the *Wehrmacht* Exhibit ('War of Extermination: Crimes of the Wehrmacht, 1941 to 1944') opened in Hamburg in March 1995 to great controversy and huge attendances, totaling 550,000 in 27 cities in Germany and Austria during 1995–8. See Hannes Heer, 'The Difficulty of Ending a War: Reactions to the Exhibition "War of Extermination: Crimes of the Wehrmacht, 1941 to 1944"', *History Workshop Journal*, 46 (autumn 1998), 187–203; Omer Bartov, Atina Grossmann and Mary Nolan (eds), *Crimes of War: Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century* (New York 2002).

34 Thomas Assheuser, 'Was ist deutsch?', *Die Zeit*, 30 September 1999, quoted by Geyer, 'Introduction', op. cit., 5–6.

35 Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, NJ 2003), vii.

36 Geyer, 'Introduction', op. cit., 10, 7.

Thus unification marked the opening of a yet-to-be clarified transition: 'It was the disappearance, dissolution and, indeed, collapse of a common space, of meaningful structure within which to act, that marked first the East Germans' and then the West Germans' rite of passage.'³⁷ As Europe opened via Enlargement more drastically to the east, and thence toward Turkey, that older space of identification became less relevant still. The politics of migrancy, anti-Islamic anxieties, the consequences of 9/11, and the crisis of multiculturalism then further shifted the ground. The watchword of the early 2000s was less 'constitutional patriotism' than *Leitkultur*.³⁸

However seriously we take the argument for a contemporary transition between the 1970s and 1990s, the Third Reich will surely keep its salience for how we think about the twentieth century overall, whether for German history or for Europe as a whole. Most obviously, the years 1933–4 and 1945–9 remain compelling instances of the biggest and most eventful of historical breaks, when constitutions and state forms are made and destroyed. The nazi era also comprised one of the most brutally centered experiences of a whole society imaginable – measured, that is, by the forms and degree of centralization of state power, by the institutional machineries of the resulting dictatorship, by the priority of coercion over consent, by the concentrating of allowable affiliations or identifications in the *Volksgemeinschaft*, by the banning and persecution of dissent, by the killing and violence deployed by the state center, and by the erasure of the margin as an available place from which inhabitants of Germany were any longer able to speak.

As such, the nazi period will continue to command our attention. The sheer enormity of the Third Reich – the scale of its violence and destructiveness as an exceptional state – justifies the 'centering' of German historiographical interest around this particular period and its priorities, and the import of the nazi imperium for the entirety of the continent then extends the argument to Europe as a whole. In other words, allowing the meanings of the Third Reich to structure our perceptions of what constitutes a significant question for the twentieth century more generally seems entirely appropriate. Both ethically and empirically, the Third Reich's enormity *requires* the attention of specialists working on other periods; it *imposes* a certain order of historiographical business, filtering the kinds of questions it makes sense for us to ask, whether these concern the 1920s or the 1950s and later. Given the new centrality of the Judeocide to the consciousness and practice of German historians, this has become perhaps even less avoidable than ever before.

37 *Ibid.*, 4.

38 *Leitkultur* translates as 'guiding national culture'. See Jürgen Habermas, 'Leadership and *Leitkultur*: The Search for Democratic Identity in Germany', *New York Times*, 29 October 2010. For an earlier skirmish in this continuing rearguard action, see Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, 'February 15: Or, What Binds Europeans Together: Plea for a Common Foreign Policy, Beginning in a Core Europe', in Daniel Levy, Max Plensky and John Torpey (eds), *Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe: Transatlantic Relations after the Iraq War* (London 2005), 7. For general context, Geoff Eley, 'The Trouble with "Race": Migrancy, Cultural Difference, and the Remaking of Europe', in Rita Chin, Heide Fehrenbach, Geoff Eley and Atina Grossmann, *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe* (Ann Arbor, MI 2009), 137–81.

In this respect, the ‘boom in memory’ has had some pervasive and distorting effects. Under its impact the history of the twentieth century has become increasingly and to a remarkable degree ‘traumatic’ history, for which the sensibility and conceptual framing of Mark Mazower’s justly admired *Dark Continent* affords an eloquent demonstration.³⁹ In that book the palpable trauma of the first half of the century – the impact of both world wars, but the second in particular – is taken to impose a threefold meaning for the century overall: by the sheer scale of its violence and destruction; by its ‘nightmarish revelation of the destructive potential in European civilization’; and by the logics of repression, dissociation, repetition, memory, and fantasy through which the consequences became unevenly and incompletely worked through. As the growing volume of publication on collective memory elsewhere in Europe shows, the German discourse of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* certainly does not stand alone. Indeed, the German case was distinguished in 1945 mainly by the far more limited availability of reparative strategies. As Mazower puts it very well:

The city council of Bologna melted down its bronze statue of Mussolini on horseback and recast it as a noble pair of partisans; France canonized the memory of a united opposition to Vichy, while Austria shamelessly milked its status as Hitler’s first victim and erected memorials to its anti-Nazi ‘fighters for Austrian freedom’. These were the foundation myths of a Europe liberated from history; they expunged awkward memories and asserted the inevitability of freedom’s triumph.⁴⁰

But despite all the uneven protractedness of exposing and working the unresolved difficulties through, which only since the 1980s has begun to be accomplished, country by country, in some more open and sustained way, it remains important to acknowledge the diminishing efficacies through which the consequences of traumatic events, however unmanageable, may be transmitted down the generations. The modalities of such transmission – institutionally, politically, culturally, personally, discursively in myriad small and insidious ways – may or may not have consequences at the level of a society’s organized and conscious meanings, whether in political processes, through all the forms of pedagogy and cultural exchange, or in the changing contexts of the publicness discussed in this essay. Even at a level of individualized subjectivities, the possibilities for the transference of trauma across generations remain highly contentious and unclear, as

39 Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (Harmondsworth 1998).

40 *Ibid.*, xiii–xiv. However, by making memory its primary organizing principle, Tony Judt’s *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York 2003) creates major problems. If ‘memory’ is taken to provide the balefully underlying continuity of the terrible burden of the past (as the nightmare sent from ‘the house of the dead’ to weigh on the minds of the living), it can obscure the non-traumatized optimisms moving Europe’s histories during some key moments of the long postwar. See Geoff Eley, ‘Europe after 1945’, *History Workshop Journal*, 65 (spring 2008), 206–9; and Eley, ‘A Disorder of Peoples: The Uncertain Ground of Reconstruction in 1945’, in Jessica Reinisch (ed.), *Displacement and Replacement in the Aftermath of the Second World War* (forthcoming).

contemporary controversies among psychologists, psychoanalytic theorists and practitioners, and cultural critics make so abundantly plain.⁴¹

Here, the importance of generations deserves forceful reiteration. Since the end of the 1960s and with ever-expanding effect, cohorts of German and European adults have been born for whom the second world war can no longer function as *the* defining twentieth-century event. For those born in the late 1940s, public and private memories of the war certainly provided the decisive touchstone of social, cultural, and political identification, irrespective of the banal detail of being born after the war itself was over. For those born in the 1950s, creating the conditions of personhood was also inseparable from working those legacies through, often in a turmoil of family discord and passionately conducted broader generational conflicts. But for those born later, the distinctive contexts descending from the war have come to possess an ever-receding pertinence. By the 1980s, it must be conceded – and despite the dramatic salience of all the public memory work discussed earlier above – political attitudes could be formed inside an imaginative landscape owing very little consciously and directly to that earlier twentieth-century time.

A workable narrative for twentieth-century German and European history no longer presents itself automatically in terms of the two world wars, or even in terms of the polarities of fascism and communism and the Cold War. From right and left-wing points of view, Ernst Nolte and Arno Mayer might serve as the emblematic advocates of that way of writing the history of the twentieth century, an approach most recently reiterated in Mayer's *The Furies*, following his earlier *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken*, and going back to the foundational *Dynamics of Counter-Revolution in Europe* of 1971.⁴² Yet once we seek to historicize the transnational political settlements accompanying the successive upheavals of 1914–18 and 1939–45 as the processes through which the overall landscape of the continent – territorially, constitutionally, legally, socially, culturally – became lastingly transformed, the differences between those earlier times and the last third of the century compellingly emerge. For neither of the primary fields of socio-political divisiveness that intersected so virulently during the so-called 'European civil war' – those of nationality and class – have continued to exert the same kind of pervasively determinative power since the 1970s. Events in former Yugoslavia notwithstanding, the big violence running through the center of the older narrative has not been repeated inside Europe itself. Europe's long-term stabilization on the basis of the recovery of the 1950s and 1960s has changed the starting point for a general history, especially

41 See for example Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton, NJ 1995); also Janice Haaken, 'The Seventh Veil: Feminism, Recovered Memory, and the Politics of the Unconscious', in Radstone and Schwarz (eds), *Memory*, op. cit., 428–41.

42 For Ernst Nolte: *Three Faces of Fascism* (London 1965); *Marxism, Fascism, Cold War* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ 1982); *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917–1945* (Berlin 1987); with Francois Furet, *Fascism and Communism* (Lincoln, NE 2001). For Arno J. Mayer: *Dynamics of Counter-Revolution in Europe, 1870–1956: An Analytic Framework* (New York 1971); *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken: The 'Final Solution' in History* (New York 1988); *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ 2000).

in light of the contemporary transformations also now under way. This is most apparent of all in the case of Germany, which was the source of so much of the volatility disturbing the history of Europe before 1945.

I have tried in this essay to explore the complicated valencies of the contemporary fascination with memory and memorializing, whether inside the academic profession of history or among publics at large. Some of those meanings grow from the consequences of large-scale societal transformations, whether in *global*, integratively and transnationally *European*, or boundedly *national* terms, which have been unsettling, disarranging, and reconfiguring the possible grounds from which the past may be viewed. Those changes affect how images of the past may be fashioned for a wide array of purposes – pedagogical, aesthetic, commercialized and commodified, recreational and privately pleasurable, but also propagandist, spectacular, and very directly and explicitly political. That process concerns not just historical knowledge in the stricter empirical and professionalized forms, but also common-sense ideas of history, the entire repertoire of official and everyday stories about a society's provenance and development, and all manner of assumptions about how things came to be, indeed the complex and mysterious processes that determine exactly *which* pasts become selected for knowledge and which not. During this same period, between the 1970s and 1990s, partly reflecting changes in the world and partly working reflectively upon them, far-reaching shifts also occurred inside the discipline of history itself, now commonly summarized as the linguistic and cultural turns. Much of the interest of being a historian during this time – and one of the principal challenges now facing 'contemporary history' – is in seeking to understand these complicated synergies between changes in the world and changes in the discipline.

The *past* is made into *history* – constructed into analysis, narrated into interpretation, fashioned into stories, made serviceable as assumptions and ideas, which are then released into public circulation – in many different ways, only some of which remain susceptible to the professional historian's influence or control. Indeed, the legitimacy of the latter's authority has arguably become far less secure and generally acknowledged than before. As images of the recent and more distant past teem ever more chaotically across the public sphere, emanating from all manner of sites of cultural production (for example from television, advertising, magazines, museums, cinema, exhibitions, reenactments), which only rarely include universities, then the academic historian's particular voice easily becomes drowned out, a fate which the performative successes of a few celebrity exceptions tend only to confirm. Using the particular case of Germany, I have suggested how academic intellectuals' access to the public sphere has been changing, as an earlier pattern of political engagement with the past, defined by *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, legacies of nazism, and the long-lasting consequences of the second world war, loosens its hold on the political imagination. What exactly will succeed it remains anything but clear, as the self-consciously *European* version of those possible futures now seems far less compelling than before. But if my argument holds, then the political territories of a collectively remembered

past – the changing ‘memory regimes’ or ‘memory formations’, as we might call them – will certainly remain vital for the politics ahead.

Biographical Note

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