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Review Article

“Coming to Terms with the Past”: Illusions of Remembering, Ways of Forgetting Nazism in West Germany*

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Public attention to ways of coping with the Nazi past in Germany tends to focus on gestures or speeches by representatives of the state and society. However, this view “from above” ascribes nothing but a passive role to the audiences of such representational politics. The sentiments, opinions, and practices of “the masses” play no active role in these accounts. Therefore, the range and impact of messages from the seeming centers of the polity are not explored but assumed. More important, this approach ignores the stimuli affecting formal and public politics that originate from society and its classes, milieus, and groups.

Practices of remembering and forgetting both allow and preclude the reading of past experiences as history. However, distinct experiences intricately shape memory and, in turn, are shaped by ever-changing hindsight. Remembrance and forgetting cannot be disconnected from momentary feelings of physical pleasure or pain: notions and images inscribe their traces into one’s own body. Here, the recollections of two women may illuminate the intricate “bodily” connectedness that links past experiences with actual well-being or misery. They will also show the gulf that separates these experiences of suffering because one of the women was a member of the dominant “German *Herrenrasse*,” albeit in a subordinate position. “At the time of the liberation I was only a skeleton, lousy, with swollen legs and abscesses all over my body. After a while I overcame the physical illnesses. However, because of my experiences in the concentration camp [KZ] I had become another person. I was now a pessimistic, suspicious, and very nervous woman. I still have a lot of headaches and a lot of difficulty in focusing

* The quote refers to Theodor W. Adorno’s lecture on the same topic, on “working through” the past. The translation “coming to terms” is applied in accordance with the English/American publication of his piece “What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?” (in *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman [Bloomington, Ind., 1986], pp. 114–29); see editor’s note on the “colloquial yet inappropriate” translation (pp. 114–15). On the other hand, the translation “reappraisal” that is employed occasionally (cf. Helmut Peitsch, “Autobiographical Writing as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Mastering the Past),” *German History* 7 [1989]: 47–70) refers even less to the pain of consciously confronting one’s memory; this is, however, conveyed by the German term *Aufarbeitung*. This is the revised and enlarged version of a paper I presented to the conference “Forty Contentious Years—the Two Germanies, 1949–1989” held in March 1990 at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

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my thoughts. And I still have a lot of dreams in which I have to live through periods of persecution time and again. And if I get excited my heart starts to beat rapidly and I suffer from stomach spasms.”¹

This is a short quote from a longer report by a Hungarian Jewish woman who in 1944 had been taken to a German concentration camp. To be sure, her transfer to a powder mill in Hessisch-Lichtenau (Upper Hesse) had saved her from being killed in an Auschwitz gas chamber. However, like many other enforced laborers who were sent to Germany from occupied Eastern Europe, to this day she still receives no compensation: the applicable German law does not include victims who returned to their home countries and stayed there. But even those who were entitled to compensation under the law could claim only 1.50 deutsche marks (DM) for each day they spent in the KZ. Further, a permanent pension was granted only if the damage to one’s health had diminished one’s capacity to work by at least 25 percent. And even then the pension generally remained under 600 DM per month.

In 1944, while the Hungarian-Jewish women toiled in the powder mill, a German woman of about the same age (she was born in 1922) worked in Hessisch-Lichtenau as a nurse. In 1989 she recalled: “I would have taken an oath that I recognized none of these women here. Only in 1948 did it suddenly occur to me: ‘In fact, you did recognize them, but you immediately looked the other way!’ ”²

I

In January 1979 a soap opera moved millions of people in West Germany.³ At the same time, it demonstrated to professional historians how limited the impact of their research on nazism had been. On four consecutive evenings West German television showed the U.S.-made film *Holocaust*. This story of the fictitious German-Jewish family Weiss did not reveal dimensions or “facts” of historical fascism that had been unknown before. It merely reflected the consensus established by historians during the 1960s: the apparatuses of terror and annihilation, and in particular the SS, Gestapo, and SD, were the determined agents of the “destruction” of

¹ I owe this recollection to Jürgen Jessen from Hessisch-Lichtenau, who works with the local history workshop to set up a memorial for the ammunition workers of the powder mill. To a large extent the workers were inmates from Buchenwald being “sold” by the SS to the Dynamit Nobel Company that ran the mill. Since 1987 Jessen has written down what people have told him.

² Again, this recollection is due to Jürgen Jessen, Hessisch-Lichtenau.

³ It is open to question (or to research) how many East Germans watched the same program just in pursuing their daily or nightly routine: in the East millions openly and admittedly clung to Western television. So far, I have not found special studies on or even references to the particular topic of the *Holocaust* film in the files of the Central Committee of the governing party of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED). Obviously, this topic also did not arouse any special interest among the researchers at the Zentrale Institut für Jugendforschung, Leipzig, who proposed and carried out many empirical studies from the 1960s to 1989, i. e., extended surveys on various subjects of the East German society and modes of life; see their reports in *Archiv beim Institut für zeitgeschichtliche Jugendforschung*, Berlin.

millions of human lives.⁴ The film emphasized the sufferings of the Jews; its topic was, indeed, the Holocaust. Others who had been declared “enemies” of the “German *Reich* and people” and who, consequently, were tortured and murdered by Nazi authorities and their accomplices did not play any role. That is, communists, socialists, and Christian believers as well as other victims like homosexuals or, for that matter, Gypsies (hereafter, Sinti and Roma) remained excluded from this (re)presentation.

The *Holocaust* film displayed the drama of a single family. Thus, administrative discrimination and political repression were transposed into personal grief and individual struggle. In the (West) German context of the late 1970s this approach ventured onto new terrain. And the showing of the film accomplished much more than the extensive educational activities in schools and in the media had achieved during the previous years. For some hours or days, millions of viewers implicitly suspended the attitude most of them and their (grand)parents had pursued before 1945: that of bystanders. At least during these brief moments many tried to identify themselves with the anxieties, the misery, and the desperation of those who had been made victims by German Nazis.⁵

At this point it is not necessary to describe the film and its peculiarities in detail. Certainly scenes of horror, suffering, and, not to forget, resistance against nazism set the tone and bore a special appeal to the audience. In turn, societal processes—that is, social relations and social antagonisms and their ambiguities—remained vague. Personal experiences and personal emotions became decontextualized. However, what matters here are the immense and intensive responses by thousands of viewers.

The networks had prepared the ground for these responses. Weeks before the actual dates, preparatory broadcasts and press previews partially outlined the film and its story. Schools were provided with information packages; the network managers stirred public debate, although no immediate commercial success was needed. But in those days when the public television system still exercised an unchallenged monopoly, the sheer number of viewers whetted the appetites of the managers: new records would boost their status inside and outside the networks.

Originally the film consisted of twenty-four sequences broadcast separately. The German television managers combined these into four parts that were broadcast during prime time within a single week. After each part the viewers were offered open-ended opportunities to phone in and ask questions or offer comments. Panels of specialists were available; their role was to answer questions

⁴ The first edition of Raul Hilberg’s study *The Destruction of the European Jews* from 1961 was not translated into German until 1982 (Berlin): the much enlarged second edition (1985) was translated and published in paperback only in 1991 (Frankfurt).

⁵ Very different was both the treatment by the media and the public response to Claude Lanzman’s film *Shoah* (1985). The public television networks also broadcast it, and it was cut into four consecutive broadcasts, all aired during one week. However, no phone-ins or other activities (or surveys on viewers’ opinions and attitudes) had been prepared. But, of course, the film was very different: primarily, it did not offer the cover of a fictitious story. Note my phrase “had been made victims”: here I want to leave it open whether at all or to what extent such Nazi efforts were successful.

and exchange opinions on the film as well as on German fascism in general.⁶ One of the “specialists” was always a representative of the survivors; for instance, on one evening Hermann Langbein participated. He had survived Auschwitz and Buchenwald, and after 1945 he had written about concentration camp experiences and been active in organizing campaigns against forgetting and suppressing the Nazi past.⁷ Professional historians were also available: for instance, Wolf Scheller from West Berlin, a specialist on the history of the police and the SS. On another evening, the historian was Andreas Hillgruber—then (i.e., before the eruption of the *Historikerstreit* in 1986) still a respected historian of Nazi foreign policy.⁸ And on another evening Martin Broszat took the historian’s chair. Since 1972 Broszat had been director of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich, the leading institution for research projects on Nazi rule; and in 1977 he launched a wide-ranging and ambitious project on modes of accepting nazism in everyday practices among the majority of Germans.⁹

The very scene is memorable: there they sat in a circle—and could not cope! Not just hundreds but thousands of questions almost flooded the personnel who received the calls.¹⁰ More important, many calls were not just questions: thousands of people

⁶ I still prefer the term “German fascism” for three reasons: (1) the term keeps the contemporary connotation of political opposition toward “fascism”; (2) it preserves the notion that fascism represents and relates to the complex totality of society; and (3) the term calls for comparative perspectives—which have to be claimed but cannot be fulfilled here.

⁷ Hermann Langbein, *Die Stärkeren: Erfahrungen in Auschwitz und anderen Konzentrationslagern* (Cologne, 1982), and *Menschen in Auschwitz* (Vienna, 1987).

⁸ Particularly appalling was Hillgruber’s call to historians to identify themselves with the continuous fighting of the German forces at the Eastern front in 1944–45. On the clash and the following controversies, see the special issue of *New German Critique*, no. 44 (1988); and, more generally, the assessment by Geoff Eley (“Nazism, Politics and the Image of the Past: Thoughts on the West German *Historikerstreit*, 1986–1987,” *Past and Present*, no. 121 [1988], pp. 171–208).

⁹ Martin Broszat, Elke Fröhlich, and Falk Wiesemann, eds., *Bayern in der NS-Zeit*, (Munich and Vienna, 1977), vol. 1; vols. 2–6 appeared from 1980 to 1983.

¹⁰ Communication research intensively used surveys to explore the range of the *Holocaust* broadcasting and the reactions it generated among the audiences. More than 20 million citizens watched the film. That was more than 50 percent of the adult population of the country: this film reached more people than any other broadcasting of the German television networks that dealt with the topic of contemporary history up to that date. The percentage of younger people among the onlookers was remarkably high (about 15 percent of eight- to thirteen-year-olds). And about 56 percent of the viewers were people who had completed only elementary schooling. More than 80 percent of the respondents told the interviewers that in their view the film presented an appropriate interpretation of the situation and living conditions under nazism. And more than half of the respondents to the survey had talked to relatives and also to mates and colleagues at their respective workplaces about the film. Among those who had watched the film, votes approving a “moral obligation of Germany to pay compensation and restitution” increased remarkably (45 percent accepted this line before the broadcasting, while 54 percent of those who had watched it agreed afterward). Also, the statement that all adults during nazism “shared at least some guilt” was rated positive by more people after they had watched the film (16 percent before, 22 percent afterward). The survey was done twice, for the first time immediately after the broadcasting and a second time fourteen weeks later. In this case the same people were interviewed twice. As regards the study on the impact of the film on the audiences’ assessments of nazism, a methodological caveat is necessary: in this case, the nonviewers almost could not have avoided some information, since several of the networks had made pre-shows and had offered other

cried on the phone. And millions of spectators could—or, more precisely, had to—listen to dozens of unknown voices attempting to express their utter bewilderment and despair in public: How could it have been? How could it happen? How could people—citizens of German towns, for instance—stand it who *must* have watched the brutalities and later the seclusion in ghettos or single-ghetto-buildings (*Judenhäuser*) and, finally, the marches to “the East”—in fact, of course, to the train stations that led to the death camps? What about the appropriation of the property of the deported? Who had acquired the belongings of those who were shipped out of town on short notice? And what about the railway employees who conducted the trains? Did they hear and investigate the moaning and crying from inside the cars?

The professional historians increasingly ran into trouble and displayed insecurity, if not helplessness. Not surprisingly, they strove to reestablish a discursive atmosphere: time and again they referred to the existing body of knowledge. Not surprisingly, they mentioned books and named authors. To be sure, Broszat had published the first edition of his masterly book on “Hitler’s state” as long ago as 1969. And, to be sure, this and other important studies were available in cheap paperback editions. To professionals this might have been perfect advice: readers would find sober analyses of Hitler’s power and impact in Karl-Dietrich Bracher’s works, or a critique of Bracher’s reading of nazism when they turned to Hans Mommsen’s painstaking reconstructions of the bureaucratic “workings” of the agencies of state and the Nazi party that repressed enemies of nazism while, at the same time, integrating its supporters into the sociocultural fabric of nazism. These studies focused on functional aspects of Nazi politics in the 1930s as well as on the long-standing structural roots of authoritarian behavior. Because of them, German fascism could no longer be perceived as a mysterious “event” or a sudden “catastrophe.”¹¹ Nevertheless, one question loomed large in these phone-ins: Why had people neglected that knowledge? Why had they avoided looking it up in the books?

broadcasts about the topic. However, respondents on this topic before the broadcast and afterward were not necessarily the same persons. One of the survivors of Nazi terror, then political scientist and publicist Eugen Kogon (who had published the first account of the murderous practices of the SS in the concentration camps in 1946, *Der SS-Staat*), underlined several months after the broadcast that for him the broadcasting had stopped the “Hitler wave,” and, he added, “Humanity quite unexpectedly has gained ground in the Federal Republic since.” On the whole matter of the broadcast and the responses, see Peter Märthesheimer and Ivo Frenzel, eds., *Der Fernsehfilm ‘Holocaust’: Eine Nation ist betroffen* (Frankfurt, 1979); and F. T. Ernst, “*Holocaust*: Das Fernsehereignis aus der Sicht politischer Bildung,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 34 (1981): 3–22.

¹¹ See the brief account that assesses very highly these accomplishments of West German historical research in Ulrich Herbert, “Der Holocaust in der Geschichtsschreibung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” in *Zweierlei Bewältigung: Vier Beiträge über den Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit in den beiden deutschen Staaten*, ed. U. Herbert and O. Groehler (Hamburg, 1992), pp. 67–86; he is also skeptical of the impact of the *Holocaust* film (p. 78). The term *catastrophe* was employed and legitimized by works like Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe* (Berlin, 1946). However, one has to note that Meinecke explicitly had searched for structural features that had led to nazism; he had named, e.g., the Prusso-German militarism (at least partly, the emphasis on long-term aspects contradicted the title of Meinecke’s study).

Watching and listening to calls and efforts to respond conveyed the notion that “other” or “silent” histories of the Nazi past existed outside academia and the schools. Many of the incoming calls were variations on a single question: What drove people to “let it happen,” if not to participate in brutalities or even murders of “others”? Questions of causation and moral judgment troubled thousands of those who phoned in. Their concern revolved around the question, Who shared complicity in and with German fascism? Had “we” or, for that matter, “our parents” recognized what happened to neighbors as they were publicly mistreated beginning in March of 1933? What, for instance, about the expulsion of Jews from public services or from schools? What about “aryanization” (*Arisierung*) of small and large shops, which increased especially after 1934?¹² And what about the seclusion into *Judenhäuser* and the conspicuous designation by the Star of David (after 1941) and, finally, the deportation that started inside the villages and towns as the victims were driven to various railway stations? How was it possible that “the masses”—that is, we ourselves or our parents—had “let it happen”? Had not most people accepted what was going on? Had they not actively supported or even participated in efforts that many justified by the promise of a “renewed” German grandeur, either in terms of military strength or social “purification,” the extinction of all “filthy” and thus “dangerous” elements of the population? But history also evolved into the immediate present: How would we act and behave if we found ourselves in comparable situations?

II

After the military defeat of 1945, a widespread consensus seemed to prevail among most Germans. Authors and pastors, at least, confirmed each other in newspapers and journals, in plays, poetry, and sermons: “Never again!”¹³ However, if one looks more closely, the homogeneity of statements hid different views and even

¹² Avraham Barkai, *Vom Boykott zur “Entjudung” Der wirtschaftliche Existenzkampf der Juden im Dritten Reich, 1933–1943* (Frankfurt, 1987).

¹³ On the years from 1945 to about 1950, and especially on the implicit strong continuity of anti-Semitic prejudices, cf. the outline by Wolfgang Benz (“Postwar Society and National Socialism: Remembrance, Amnesia, Rejection,” *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für Deutsche Geschichte* 19 [1990]: 1–12) and the discussion of contemporary social research in Uta Gerhardt, “Re-Demokratisierung nach 1945 im Spiegel der zeitgenössischen Sozialforschung und sozialwissenschaftlichen Literatur,” in *Gesellschaftlicher Umbruch, 1945–1990: Re-Demokratisierung und Lebensverhältnisse*, ed. U. Gerhardt and B. Mochmann (Bonn, 1992), pp. 27–57. The discussion of the intellectuals (primarily published in journals and by radio broadcast) is analyzed by Thomas Koebner (“Die Schuldfrage: Vergangenheitsverweigerung und Lebenslügen in der Diskussion, 1945–1949,” in *Deutschland nach Hitler*, ed. T. Koebner, G. Sauermeister, and S. Schneider [Opladen, 1987], pp. 301–29); prior to 1948–49 the debate among intellectuals in the Soviet zone was also recognized in the West; a useful account of the centrality of the notion of “antifascist” politics and culture in that context is provided by Verena Blaum in her analysis of the leading paper on cultural matters in the Soviet zone (see her *Kunst und Politik im SONNTAG* [Cologne, 1992]). On autobiographical writings, see Helmut Peitsch, “Autobiographical Writing as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Mastering the Past),” *German History* 7 (1989): 47–70. Very important was the attitude of the (Protestant) churches: see Clemens Vollnhals, *Evangelische Kirche und Entnazifizierung, 1945–1949: Die Last der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit*

contradictions: certainly the “never again” slogan was the reverse side of the reigning metaphor of “catastrophe.”

Notions of catastrophe and complete breakdown were not simply imposed from above. Since early 1943, the army’s disaster at Stalingrad and, concomitantly, the increasing air raids throughout the *Reich* had “brought home” the war and its brutalities.¹⁴ From this psychological “turning point” of the war onward, the Western Allies’ call for “unconditional surrender” put the ongoing war efforts into a gloomy perspective: skepticism or even distance toward nazism might not help. Everybody would be considered responsible for whatever had happened.¹⁵ Finally, for many Germans the victory of the Allies in 1945 was tightly interwoven with personal sufferings and material as well as emotional losses. The longstanding experience of ordinary people seemed to be confirmed anew—the common man (and woman) was overpowered and thus made a victim too.

However, under the surface of public or silent consent, divergent undertones reverberated. Recently published diaries¹⁶ and sporadic accounts from the war mention traces of “guilty conscience.” The air raids: were they not justified compared to the “Blitz” against Britain and, primarily, the German warfare in the East—not to mention the obviously cruel treatment of the Jews and so-called “enemies to the [German] community”?¹⁷ And in certain segments of society a still different view prevailed: socialists and communists adhered to the notion of social and economic causation. More concretely, they blamed the ruling class for its seizure of the state—including the fascist “solution,” which was in their view the turning over of state power to the Nazis.¹⁸ To be sure, after 1945 in West Germany these readings of fascism and personal experiences and actions remained limited to rather small groups.

(Munich, 1989); and Thomas Friebel, *Kirche und politische Verantwortung in der sowjetischen Zone und der DDR, 1945–1969* (Gütersloh, 1992).

¹⁴ For a general account, see Marc Roseman, “World War II and Social Change in Germany,” in *Total War and Social Change*, ed. Arthur Marwick (London, 1988), pp. 58–78; and Bernd Rusinek, “‘Maskenlose Zeit’: Der Zerfall der Gesellschaft im Krieg,” in *Über Leben im Krieg: Kriegserfahrungen in einer Industrieregion, 1939–1945*, ed. U. Borsdorf and M. Jamin (Reinbek, 1989), pp. 180–94.

¹⁵ See the exploration of biographical material by Gabriele Rosenthal, ed. (“*Als der Krieg kam, hatte ich mit Hitler nichts mehr zu tun*”: Zur Gegenwärtigkeit des “Dritten Reiches” in *Biographien* [Opladen, 1990]); cf. Lutz Niethammer, “Heimat und Front,” in “*Die Jahre weiß man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll*”: *Faschismuserfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet, 1930–1960*, ed. Lutz Niethammer (Berlin and Bonn, 1983), pp. 142 ff.

¹⁶ Herbert Obenaus and Sybille Obenaus, eds., “*Schreiben wie es wirklich war*”: *Die Aufzeichnungen Karl Dürckfeldens aus der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (Hannover, 1985), esp. p. 123.

¹⁷ On the administrative and scientific efforts in the 1930s to establish this notion as the fundamental norm of social life, see Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany* (Oxford, 1987), chaps. 10–12.

¹⁸ As one concrete example of this view, see the letters the imprisoned communist newspaper editor Dagobert Lubinski wrote to his family between April 1937 and November 1942. Lubinski had been active in the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Opposition) KPD(O), a group that openly opposed the Komintern line of the mainstream KPD (and thence was expelled by the KPD). In January 1943 Lubinski, according to the Nazi rule, Jewish, was taken out of custody of the prison department and transferred to Auschwitz, where he was murdered; his letters were edited by Annette Leo (*Briefe zwischen Kommen und Gehen* [Berlin, 1991]).

At the Potsdam conference in the summer of 1945 the Allies defined the eradication of nazism from Germany as one of the main goals of their occupation policies and politics. But almost from the first day each Ally pursued a different line. While the Soviet authorities in their zone expelled former officials and expropriated the property of factory owners and proprietors of “large” estates,¹⁹ nothing similar was undertaken on a large scale in the Western zones (and most teachers or officials of state agencies who had been fired or suspended in 1945 and 1946 were reinstated in 1948 and 1949).²⁰

In the Western zones, efforts toward denazification rapidly turned into an enormous bureaucratic machine that produced a lot of paperwork. Therefore it should be no surprise that its performance and its results confirmed self-pity and notions of “we the victims” among the majority of the German population. In quantitative terms, for instance, in the British zone about 95 percent of the registered people—that is, members of the Nazi party or its affiliates—were classified as *Mitläufer* (fellow travelers). In addition, the courtlike procedure and the official statements of the respective boards rendered the sentences of the denazification boards particularly meaningful—as if they were “final” or court sentences. Thus, the label *Mitläufer* easily could be read as a juridical acquittal that would end any further political or moral investigation. Even the very term *Mitläufer* indicated that one had joined forces with many others, all of them following some leader more or less unconsciously. These *Mitläufer* were not confronted with the difference between their behavior and the suffering of those who had been imprisoned, tortured, and murdered under the Nazi rule. Instead, the whole arrangement of denazification tended to stimulate the notion that the masses were not responsible, allowing the *Mitläufer* to perceive themselves as much closer to the victims than to the perpetrators.²¹

¹⁹ Helga A. Welsh, “‘Antifaschistisch-demokratische Umwälzung’ und politische Säuberung in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands,” in *Politische Säuberung in Europa: Die Abrechnung mit Faschismus und Kollaboration nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. Klaus-Dietmar Henke (Munich, 1991), pp. 84–107. In this article I will not pursue the issue of the East German antifascist claims and cultural or political practices (and their increasingly less hidden contradictions, at least in the 1980s). Intriguing accounts from hindsight are provided by both the West German writer Horst Domdey (“Deutschland erlöst nicht mehr die Welt: Anmerkungen zum antifaschistischen Feindbild und seinem Fortleben unter den Dichtern,” *Kursbuch* 110 [1992]: 82–105) and the East German historian Olaf Groehler (“Antifaschismus—vom Umgang mit einem Begriff,” in Herbert and Groehler, eds. [n. 11 above], pp. 29–40); see also the West German historian Herbert Obenaus (*NS-Geschichte nach dem Ende der DDR: Eine abgeschlossene Vergangenheit?* [Hanover, 1992], pp. 7–10), and, on most recent developments, Christian Marquart, “Topographie der Empfindlichkeiten,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (March 18, 1993).

²⁰ Compare Klaus-Dietmar Henke, “Die Trennung vom Nationalsozialismus: Selbsterstörung, politische Säuberung, ‘Entnazifizierung, Strafverfolgung,’” in Henke, ed., pp. 21–83, esp. pp. 32 ff.; particularly on reeducation measures of the British, see Heiner Wember, *Umerziehung im Lager: Internierung und Bestrafung von Nationalsozialisten in der britischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands* (Essen, 1991).

²¹ A perfect example of this denial to tackle “general” history and also one’s personal history in terms of “guilt” and, thus, to employ “conscience,” was the widely cherished autobiographical account by the writer and former member of a fascist *Freikorps*, Ernst von Salomon (*Der Fragebogen* [Reinbek, 1951], esp. p. 6). By 1961 more than 250,000 paperback copies had been printed.

After the split between the Allied powers as a result of the Cold War in 1947 and 1948 it was especially the American authorities who pressed for a quick end to this whole effort. They preferred a well-functioning economy and an efficient administration. Therefore, any danger of dissolving the functional elites in Germany should be avoided.

The change in emphasis on denazification by Western Allies corresponded with a change of perspective German writers of autobiographies presented to their presumptive readers. A recent study of these books shows that until 1947 diaries by survivors from concentration camps constituted the largest group among the books on the Third Reich (between 1945 and 1947, forty to fifty books appeared annually on that subject in general).²² In 1947 and 1948 review articles in journals increasingly took a skeptical stance toward personal accounts. Reviewers criticized the authors' lack of distance toward themselves and demanded a more artistic rendering (*Gestaltung*). In their call for "objective" writing the critics mentioned as negative examples primarily accounts from and by exiles. At the same time, the bitter polemics between Thomas Mann and Frank Thiess about the limitations and self-deceptions (Mann) or the achievements if not silent heroism (Thiess) of the "internal emigration" became the focus of an intense public debate.

Those who demanded "distance" and "objectivity" also called for appropriate forms of artistic and fictional presentation. The historical account should be presented in well-balanced and "objective" texts. Since emphatic and emotional fervor seemingly had prepared the ground for nazism, every effort was made to suppress emotions and irrationality.

III

In fall of 1959 Theodor W. Adorno addressed the question "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" in a public lecture that was also broadcast.²³ In contrast to the case of the *Holocaust* film, nothing was recorded or collected about reactions or responses of listeners. However, the text has been published several times and people have very often quoted it or referred their readers to this authoritative statement.

Adorno claims that "coming to terms" is a misleading notion. Accordingly, its common usage in West Germany does not imply critical analysis of the processes by which the majority of Germans accepted, if not supported or actively participated in, German fascism. On the contrary, Adorno holds that not "enlightened consciousness" but various forms of willful "forgetting" characterize the confrontation with nazism among most Germans. In Adorno's view, the notion of "coming to terms" functions to "finish off" such "tedious" questions. The dominating *mentalité* aims, consciously or unconsciously, to suppress any notion of guilt; thus, people try "to get rid of the past." Adorno gives as an example the widespread practice of using euphemistic labels to avoid confronting

²² Peitsch (n. 13 above).

²³ Theodor W. Adorno, "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit" (1959), in his *Eingriffe* (Frankfurt, 1963), pp. 125–46.

the realities of deportation and mass murder; calling the mass pogrom of November 1938 *Reichskristallnacht* is a case in point.²⁴

Adorno outlined a spectrum of powerful constraints and processes all sustaining the notion of a collective “we.” He suggested that the Germans actually negated—or, at least, forgot—their experiences under and with fascism. But strangely enough, this emphasis on people’s experiences did not trigger scrutiny of the formation and repression of specific experiences. To be fair, it was another twenty years before research into the everyday lives of “ordinary people” revealed that many of those who had been born before the mid-1920s encountered improved living standards and increased opportunities for jobs or marriage under fascism.²⁵ Not least, studies of certain families or neighborhoods showed that people experienced occasional “highs” (*Rausch*) triggered by public and even festive displays of heroic postures and military successes of the Nazi regime between 1936 and 1942. In this view, the purported German identity rests, however, on a shared notion of weakness and powerlessness that, in turn, calls for subjugation to a powerful “master.” Therefore, continuing obedience to the actual authorities regardless of any change in and after 1945 should be read as proof of people’s ongoing sense of powerlessness.

According to Adorno, the basis of the sense of weakness and, thus, susceptibility to any appeal of power rests in societal structures and constraints. More concretely, he emphasized the impact of the system of capitalist accumulation and exploitation. Its dynamics necessarily create a fundamental split between the dominating few and the dominated masses. Nevertheless, Adorno still believed there was room to maneuver. He called social “subjects” to action: they should promote enlightenment and raise critical “consciousness” about those mechanisms that produce obedience. Only “consciousness” would free everyone from the haunting ghosts of the past. And in order to involve ever more people in this task Adorno proposed means that ironically contradict his own perspective: he demanded the institution of “mobile educational task forces” that would appeal to people’s consciousness.²⁶ Thus, the effort revolved solely around cognition, and Adorno completely neglected the simultaneous noncognitive mode of articulation and expression. In other words, he did not take into account the multilayered practices of the everyday through which men and women, young and old people, reproduce but also reappropriate and, thus, transform seemingly unchangeable “structural boundaries.”

²⁴ Recent debates, especially research projects on local pogroms of 1938, have provided information that the notion of *Reichskristallnacht* conveyed not so much Nazi cynicism but a critical stance toward Nazi brutality. Accordingly, the folks of Berlin articulated their wit and supposed distance from fascism by coining and employing that very term.

²⁵ See Ulrich Herbert, “‘Die guten und die schlechten Zeiten’: Überlegungen zur diachronen Analyse lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews,” pp. 67–96; Michael Zimmermann, “Ausbruchshoffnung: Junge Bergleute in den Dreißiger Jahren,” pp. 97–132, both in Niethammer, ed. (n. 15 above).

²⁶ Compare the broadcast lecture of 1966 that was printed three years later: Theodor W. Adorno, “Erziehung nach Auschwitz,” in his *Stichworte: Kritische Modelle 2* (Frankfurt, 1969), pp. 85–101.

IV

Adorno delivered his lecture only a few weeks before Jewish cemeteries were desecrated during the Christmas holidays of 1959 (in Cologne as well as several other places). Politicians of all parties and journalists and commentators at national and regional papers alike hastily proclaimed utter shame. Moral disgust was made public over and over again. When it came to action, the publicists and politicians joined forces to exert strong pressures on schools, teachers, and publishers of textbooks for schools: nazism should not be omitted but dealt with extensively. However, the spokesmen of the “powers that be” implicitly denied any connection between widely shared attitudes and these “incidents.” Since the authorities defined them as “deviant behavior” on the part of youngsters, the educational system and its specialists would take care of that “nuisance.”²⁷ And it was an increase of information about the “facts” of nazism that would teach young people to behave themselves: as to these practical consequences, the mainstream did not differ from the central figure of critical theory.

In the 1950s and early 1960s it was taboo in West Germany to ask whether incidents like those in Cologne reflected an ongoing or renewed attractiveness of nazism among the Germans. The immediate effort to narrow the focus of debate onto improved teaching of the young reflected that very taboo. At the same time, the restriction of the politics of remembering to education or to moralizing also resonated with West Germany’s role in the Cold War: to turn Adorno’s general point about capitalism and its proneness to authoritarian behavior into political practice would have meant to aim for both a reversal of the sociopolitical order and a loosening of Germany’s ties with the West. Not only the political elites but also the vast majority of the population strongly rejected socioeconomic changes, and both agreed to the (unequal) ties of the West German state and economy with the Western powers. The economic recovery and, even more, the economic “miracle” after the mid-1950s—triggered by the Korean boom—had laid the groundwork for this attitude, which cut across all boundaries of class and political camp. As in the mid-1930s, it was the visible improvement of most people’s daily economic situation that prepared them to accept the actual political system.²⁸ At any rate, for most people the democratic state and its parliaments did not hinder, and perhaps even made possible, experiences and acquisitions they associated with the “good life,” which was tied to rising wages.²⁹

²⁷ However, the federal government opted for a seemingly suitable alternative when it declared unknown East German envoys as responsible—surely a move that reflected the impact of the Cold War; cf. *Weißbuch der Bundesregierung zu den antisemitischen und Nazi-Vorfällen* (Bonn, 1960).

²⁸ See on this the accounts by Hans-Peter Schwarz (*Die Ära Adenauer: Gründerjahre der Republik, 1949–1957* [Stuttgart and Wiesbaden, 1981], pp. 275 ff.); and Christoph Kleßmann (*Die doppelte Staatsgründung: Deutsche Geschichte, 1945–1955* [Göttingen, 1982], chap. 7).

²⁹ On the “end of the proletarian habit and conduct” (*Proletarität*), see Josef Mosser, *Arbeiterleben in Deutschland, 1900–1970: Klassenlagen, Kultur und Politik* (Frankfurt, 1984), pp. 179 ff., 224 ff.; an even more nuanced analysis of the cycles and ambiguities of these processes is given by Michael Wildt (“Am Beginn der Konsumgesellschaft: Konsum in Westdeutschland in den fünfziger Jahren,” [Ph.D. diss., University of Hamburg, 1992]; published under the same title [Hamburg, 1993]).

Immediately after 1945 many of those who had articulated their “hunger” for culture—that is, for attending theater performances, reading journals, listening to radio programs—were teachers and theoreticians of education. Although different political stances were represented among the various groups from the *bildungs-bürgerliche* spectrum, they were united in strong support of humanistic or Christian ideals.³⁰ It was this blend of humanistic ideals and moralizing attitudes that was given new momentum by the “incidents” of December 1959.³¹

In this well-meaning atmosphere a more materialistic drive developed a dynamic of its own: teachers of history and “community studies” (*Gemeinschaftskunde*—the term was not “political studies”!) seized the opportunity and set out to demarcate and occupy a new terrain of professional work and, thus, of jobs. In school teaching as well as adult education (*Volkshochschulen*) in the early 1960s many courses were put on the agenda that addressed either “modern” or secular anti-Semitism or, more comprehensively, focused on the history of nazism. Teachers and functionaries of youth organizations were sent to special training courses on these matters. Federal and state agencies for political education (*Bundes- oder Landeszentralen für politische Bildung*) pumped thousands of deutsche marks into brochures and books containing guidelines for lessons in classrooms. Mainly texts were provided to deal with the development of secular or modern forms of racism and anti-Semitism. Thus, statements by ideologues of the late nineteenth century were reprinted for analysis in high schools: the writings of Houston Stuart Chamberlain, Guenther Maar, Count Gobineau, Alfred Stoecker, and Richard Wagner as well as leading Nazi ideologists like Alfred Rosenberg circulated anew.³² The intention was to stimulate critical reading, which, in turn, would immunize the people. In the end, such amplification of knowledge would trigger enlightened or

³⁰ Compare Hermann Glaser, *Kulturgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Munich, 1985–86), vols. 1, 2.

³¹ The discussion revolved around education and its failures and possible improvements. However, it remained confined to the teaching of school children, not of university students. Academe and its professors—and also science—were not affected and “stayed out.” The well-founded attack by Max Weinreich had had no response whatsoever among German professors; see his *Hitler’s Professors: The Part of Scholarship in Germany’s Crimes against the Jewish People* (New York, 1946). Instead, a documentation on Nazi physicians that had been collected for the Interregional Commission of the West German Physicians’ Chambers by Alexander Mitscherlich and Fritz Mielke in 1947 had been declared by these very chambers “defamatory.” Therefore, this semiofficial interest group of German physicians had bought the complete edition of ten thousand volumes before it could circulate. Its first publication, then, was in 1949: Alexander Mitscherlich and Fritz Mielke, *Medizin ohne Menschlichkeit: Dokumente der Nürnberger Ärzteprozesse* (Heidelberg, 1949). On a similar blend of arrogant ignorance and moralizing in the human sciences, cf. Wolfgang F. Haug, *Der hilflose Antifaschismus: Zur Kritik der Vorlesungsreihen über Wissenschaft und NS an deutschen Universitäten* (Frankfurt, 1967).

³² Compare Harry Pross, ed., *Die Zerstörung der deutschen Politik: Dokumente von 1871 bis 1933* (Frankfurt, 1960); Karl Thieme, ed., *Judenfeindschaft: Darstellung und Analysen* (Frankfurt, 1963); both editions were immediately (and only) published in paperback and were part of a program of political education and enlightenment especially pursued by Fischer Pocket Books. Also in 1960, Fischer Pocket Books made available again the documentation on the Nazi physicians by Alexander Mitscherlich and Fritz Mielke, *Medizin ohne Menschlichkeit: Dokumente der Nürnberger Ärzteprozesse* (Frankfurt, 1960).

“rational” political behavior. And at least in public, nobody doubted that proper knowledge was the key to prompting support for the political order as it then existed.³³

V

In the 1950s and early 1960s the majority of (West) Germans colluded in forgetting if not repressing those recollections of fascism that might recall its violent and murderous practices. Above all, one’s own role and activity during fascism was “forgotten” or “cut out”: people silently erased any remembrance of their own acceptance, support, and complicity.³⁴

The terrain of remembering and forgetting cannot be mapped out here sufficiently; but it is crucial to understand private and public (re)presentations of people’s sorrow and collective commemoration. Official ceremonies address the arena of public politics; however, they simultaneously (re)present the voices and resonate with the silences of individuals.

Surviving victims have never been given an opportunity to speak at those public and official commemorations that have been held since the early 1950s. Instead, the annual celebrations of the twentieth of July, 1944, have been dedicated to the killed or “fallen” heroes of resistance against fascism. In particular, Count Stauffenberg and the small number of his associates, mostly military men, who had tried to kill Hitler, the symbol and central figure of power of nazism, on July 20, 1944, were named. Had not these few men courageously “restored the honor of the German people”? Along these lines, the July twentieth coup was (and still is) year after year officially commemorated on the very site in Berlin where the participants were executed (the so-called *Bendlerblock*, then the site of

³³ Accordingly, the silence on the judges and their perpetration or complicity remained unbroken, as was the involvement of prosecutors and lawyers. However, there had been a few critical voices within the profession itself. They had exerted pressure to prosecute Nazi crimes, e.g., the Hesse prosecutor general Fritz Bauer, who prepared the Auschwitz trial at Frankfurt in 1963–64; they were involved with the *Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung von nationalsozialistischen Verbrechen* (established in 1958); see on this the (partly autobiographical) disturbing as well as impressive account by Barbara Just-Dahlmann and Helmut Just (*Die Gehilfen: NS-Verbrechen und die Justiz nach 1945* [Frankfurt, 1988]). Research into the role of law professors started only in the (late) 1980s; see Ingo Müller, *Furchtbare Juristen: Die unbewältigte Vergangenheit unserer Justiz* (Munich, 1987); Bernd Rütters, *Rechtslehren und Kronjuristen im Dritten Reich*, 2d ed. (Munich, 1989); Hans Göppinger, *Juristen jüdischer Abstammung im “Dritten Reich”: Entrechtung und Verfolgung*, 2d ed. (Munich, 1990); and Lothar Gruchmann, *Justiz im Dritten Reich, 1933–1940: Anpassung und Unterwerfung in der Ära Gürtner* (Munich, 1988). Particularly fruitful is the detailed analysis of the whole realm of judicial practice and ruling of the Hamburg judiciary; see Justizbehörde Hamburg/Klaus Bästlein, Helge Grabitz, and Wolfgang Scheffler, eds., “Für Führer, Volk und Vaterland . . .”: *Hamburger Justiz im Nationalsozialismus* (Hamburg, 1992).

³⁴ Therefore, the publication of Melita Maschmann’s autobiographical account (*Fazit: Kein Rechtfertigungsversuch* [Stuttgart, 1963]) had a sensational commercial success: within six months four editions were published of this recollection of her unconditioned enthusiasm for and intensive cooperation with fascism as full-time functionary of the Bund Deutscher Mädel (BDM), the organization of girls and young women.

the High Command of the army and the prison of *Plötzensee*).³⁵ In fact, these were the only physical sites that could convey the sensual and emotional dimensions of the actual event and its actors: at least here names and other printed information could be related to material remnants, to buildings and physical surroundings.

Official hesitation regarding public ceremonies in the 1950s and (early) 1960s followed a peculiar rationale: the more public the commemoration, the more emotional and, presumably, irrational the voices or activities that might be triggered. Therefore, the passivity of political authorities on all levels resonated with manifold desires “to forget” while ignoring those who called for enlightened discourse and self-criticism by the Germans. Reading books and discussing texts in seminars would guarantee both orderly behavior and increased “rationality.” Therefore, agreements were easily reached across political chasms that “coming to terms” with the Nazi past ought to avoid “public emotions.”

Even at the very sites of the concentration camps, almost nothing was done to offer a permanent opportunity to remember nazism and to construct a site for commemorating the victims. For instance, at Bergen-Belsen, in the state of Lower Saxony, the British authorities had erected an obelisk and a wall with inscriptions in 1946; but when the Lower Saxon state government took over in 1952, it virtually abandoned the site. Only in 1966 did a government agency open a rather pitiful “house of documentation.” At other locations, at Dachau or Flossenbürg (in Bavaria), at Neuengamme (Hamburg) or Wewelsburg (North Rhine Westphalia), things were no better.³⁶

In the mid-sixties, increasing criticism of organizations of survivors forced local and state authorities to overcome their stubborn passivity. However, they did at least “something” only at special sites: at the places of former concentration camps.³⁷ Here they started to restore some buildings that then housed displays of

³⁵ The critical analysis of the authoritarian views of most of the activists and the direct supporters of the men of July 20, particularly the members of the Kreisauer Kreis, stirred strong sentiments in the late 1960s but only mildly influenced the course of representative politics of commemoration; cf. the analysis by Hans Mommsen (“Gesellschaftsbild und Verfassungspläne des deutschen Widerstandes,” in *Widerstand gegen Hitler*, ed. Walter Schmitthener and Hans Buchheim [Cologne and Berlin, 1966], pp. 73–167).

³⁶ Bernd Eichmann, *Versteint—Verharmlost—Vergessen: KZ-Gedenkstätten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt, 1985). In Bergen-Belsen a library, a teaching room, and an exhibition hall have been added in 1990; further additions are in preparation since the change of state government after the Social Democrats and the Greens won elections in June 1990 and developed a special program of and for regional sites of remembrance. In a different arena, a small group tried to reach the public by a journal: in cooperation with the Comité Internal de Dachau and inspired by the curator of the Dachau camp museum, Barbara Distel, in 1985 some people started the journal *Dachauer Hefte* (Pamphlets of Dachau); of course, the name refers to the *Hefte von Auschwitz* (Pamphlets of Auschwitz), which have been published since the 1960s by the State Museum of Auschwitz.

³⁷ In fact, the focus was only on the main camps, e.g., Dachau or Neuengamme, but not on its dozens—and during the war, even hundreds—of subcamps (*Außenlager*). The first study that comprehensively (and literally) mapped the local camps is Rainer Fröbe et al., *Konzentrationslager in Hannover: KZ-Arbeit und Rüstungsindustrie in der Spätphase des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Hildesheim, 1985).

documents and “remainders” (such as caps or sandals). These activities were, however, still extremely modest and kept a very low profile, both personally and financially. Efforts to venture onto new ground, in particular, to go beyond abstract or “general” commemoration of “the victims” without further notice of any individual and her or his distinct fate, were neglected or explicitly declared unnecessary.

But it took another decade until, in the late 1970s, a small number of people started to combine leftist political interests with pedagogical expertise. They set out to develop a program that conceived of the very sites of concentration camps as “locations of learning.”³⁸ These would be the proper places to explore what individual perpetrators of nazism might have been like and how their individual victims had to suffer. The activists declared themselves to be heirs of the socialist or communist resisters to nazism during the 1930s. They wanted to break with the dismal practices of repressing the Nazi past as they had prevailed during the “Adenauer era.”³⁹ In particular, the youth organizations of the trade unions became active in this field. Similar concepts stemmed from and were intensively pursued by local history workshop projects.⁴⁰ They all shared the goal of

³⁸ See Gisela Lehrke, *Gedenkstätten für Opfer des Nationalsozialismus: Historisch-politische Bildung an Stätten des Widerstands* (Frankfurt and New York, 1989).

³⁹ For instance, the brochure of Karl Jaspers, the philosopher who had emigrated to Basel (*Die Schuldfrage* [Heidelberg, 1946]), which had been widely discussed in 1946–47, was reprinted together with other of his political writings and (radio) speeches only in 1963; see Karl Jaspers, *Lebensfragen der deutschen Politik* (Munich, 1963), pp. 36–114. Jaspers had stressed the necessity to provide compensation and had prepared the ground for the point on “liability of all Germans” as put forward by Theodor Heuss in 1948 and 1949. On the political-cultural sterility of the 1950s as experienced by many intellectuals regardless of their individual preferences, see the essays by Heinrich Böll (*Reden* [Cologne, 1967]; *Gesammelte Werke*, vols. 7 and 8, *Aufsätze, Kritiken* [Cologne, 1977 and 1978]) and also newspaper commentators like Erich Kuby, *Das ist des Deutschen Vaterland* (Reinbek, 1959); Gerhard Zwerenz, *Wider die deutschen Tabus: Kritik der reinen Unvernunft* (Munich, 1962); and Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, *Die Bundesrepublik in der Ära Adenauer* (Reinbek, 1963).

⁴⁰ First projects focused on the seemingly “forgotten” local resistance activities of seemingly unnamed people against nazism. Professional and lay historians cooperated in these projects. Public attention grew enormously when in 1982–83 groups in Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Solingen, Freiburg, and Konstanz (to name only a few) painstakingly documented less resistance but a massive collusion and open support of most Germans of the Nazi seizure of power in 1933; cf. Arbeitsgruppe Kiezgeschichte—Berlin 1933, ed., “*Wer sich erinnern will . . . ist gezwungen, die Geschichte noch einmal zu erleben*”: *Kiezgeschichte Berlin 1933* (Berlin, 1983); and W. Tammen and K. Tebbe, ed., *Kreuzberg 1983: Ein Bezirk erinnert sich* (Berlin, 1983). In a next step, the history of everyday repression under fascism became a subject; see, e.g., Solinger Geschichtswerkstatt, *Fremdarbeiter in Solingen, 1939–45* (Solingen, n.d. [1982]); and Projektgruppe für die “vergessenen” Opfer des NS-Regimes in Hamburg, ed., *Verachtet, verfolgt, vernichtet* (Hamburg, 1986). In the same perspective more recently: Dorothea Kolland, ed., *Zehn Brüder waren wir gewesen . . . Spuren jüdischen Lebens in Neukölln* (Berlin, 1988); Hazel Rosenstrauch, ed., *Aus Nachbarn wurden Juden: Ausgrenzung und Selbstbehauptung, 1933–1942* (Berlin, 1988); Manfred Gailus, ed., *Kirchengemeinden im Nationalsozialismus: Sieben Beispiele aus Berlin* (Berlin, 1990); and Karola Frings et al., “. . . Einziges Land in dem Judenfrage und Zigeunerfrage gelöst wurden”: *Die Verfolgung der Roma im faschistisch besetzten Jugoslawien, 1941–1945* (Cologne, 1992). Particularly important is that people from the medical and the psychiatric professions became involved in the critical reconstruction of their

promoting identification not with perpetrators or accomplices but with those who had been made their objects. The activists wanted to stimulate among “ordinary” Germans (according to the Nazi terminology, *Reichsdeutsche*) the feeling that (self-)critical investigation of one’s own role and behavior during fascism was both a moral duty and a political necessity. To be sure, it was the children of the Nazi accomplices and perpetrators who started to question publicly their parents and grandparents.

In West Germany no “central” memorial to those who suffered under nazism and at the hands of Germans has been erected. There is no memorial either to the Holocaust nor to the other hundreds of thousands of individuals who were tortured and killed by German fascism and fascists. Only in 1985–86 did small groups in Berlin start to discuss the necessity of a “central” memorial to the Jewish victims—that is, a Holocaust memorial.⁴¹ Construction plans for the Prinz-Albrecht-Straße (then close to the Wall) provided the reason: the site of the former Gestapo headquarters was under consideration for rebuilding.⁴² Thus, people

professions’ history under fascism; cf., e.g., G. Baader and U. Schultz, eds., *Medizin und Nationalsozialismus: Tabuisierte Vergangenheit—Ungebrochene Tradition?* (Berlin, 1980); Bernd Müller-Hill, *Tödliche Wissenschaft* (Reinbek, 1984); and J. Bleker and N. Jachertz, *Medizin im Dritten Reich* (Cologne, 1989); cf. for a general account, Norbert Frei, ed., *Medizin und Gesundheit in der NS-Zeit* (Munich, 1991).

⁴¹ At the same time, in the summer of 1985, members of the Jewish community of Frankfurt am Main started to protest publicly against the plans of the Frankfurt Theater to perform a play by Rainer W. Faßbinder, the author and film director. The protesters claimed that Faßbinder in his play “*Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod*” would dwell on the same anti-Semitic prejudices, especially the stereotype of the “scrupulous Jewish capitalist” the Nazis had used. The dispute that followed revolved mostly around the freedom-of-speech-and-of-the-arts issue. The protest included direct action: protesters several times occupied the stage and blocked rehearsals. After several weeks the theater withdrew the play. It was certainly not accidental that in the following year intellectuals and leftist political activists from Frankfurt started to rally for the preservation of the remnants of the Jewish ghetto of Frankfurt. During construction work on a central public administration building these remnants had surfaced again (they had been determinedly buried under a main traffic thoroughway in 1954, in the context of the first reconstruction of the bombed city after 1945). Finally, after the site had been occupied by protesters (in August 1987), the city council decided to incorporate the remnants into the administration building by using glass for those walls that would “face” the remnants. Thus, the building was erected on top of the former ghetto; this part of the city was, however, now evoked by a museum-like display. Ironically enough, the windows that were to offer a view of the remnants were built too high above the ground: even tiptoeing did not allow people to have a look (see *Frankfurter Rundschau* [September 11, 1990], p. 11); meanwhile, this has been changed: see Dieter Bartetzko, “Die Angst vor der Geschichte: Zur Eröffnung des Museums Judengasse,” *Frankfurter Rundschau* (November 27, 1992), p. 27.

⁴² In November 1989 a private initiative inspired by the proposal of a Berlin television editor, Lea Rosh, started to call for support of a German Holocaust memorial that would be erected at or close to the former Gestapo headquarters at Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse (the latter being turned into a site recalling the perpetrators). In April 1992 the federal government and the Berlin state government gave their consent and granted parts of the funds (including the land). The proposal to build a place for commemoration of the millions of individual Jews who had been murdered led also to a rather bitter debate over whether it would determinedly exclude Sinti and Roma (or whether it should be changed to include also other groups of victims). The core group of the Holocaust memorial initiative insisted on its aim to offer a site for memorializing the murdered Jews; see, on the fissures and agonies of this debate, Jan Ross, “Singulär: Mahnmahl in Berlin,” *Frankfurter*

from various leftist and “alternative” groups recognized that it was fundamental to their struggle against the tide of forgetting not “to let go” this final opportunity to establish a place for commemoration of the murdered. The very location where the perpetrators had developed and administered their killing plans called for both a demonstrative gesture and a permanent sign of remembrance.

VI

In state or community commemorations of the dead from fascism, nobody cared to address the individual human beings who had been tormented and killed. However, in one respect private remembrance and public commemoration was already a common practice during the war: dead soldiers and victims of air raids were commemorated in state ceremonies. Primarily, however, the local churches provided services to assuage the grief of kin and dependants. And immediately after the war, in 1945 or 1946, plaques were hung up in churches or displayed at memorials in churchyard cemeteries. Here the names of the killed soldiers (and sometimes of the civilian victims of air raids) from that particular parish were preserved and made public. In fact, free space on the plaque from World War I was often used for that purpose, or people added a further segment to the existing plaque.

Secular ceremonies of commemoration do not name or especially mention individuals who have become victims. In this respect the annual meeting to commemorate the war dead in front of a local war memorial on National Mourning Day does not differ from the commemoration of the “victims of violent domination” every November 8 or 9, the date of the pogrom of *Reichskristallnacht* in 1938. Since the early 1960s it has become almost an established custom in many towns to call for a commemoration ceremony at the site of the former synagogue. In most cases, the site is either void or newly occupied with a structure such as a parking garage or department store (and town councils have only reluctantly hung up plaques referring to the former synagogue and its burning in 1938).⁴³

Allgemeine Zeitung (July 25, 1992); Rudolf Kraft, “In trennendem Gedenken,” *Die Zeit* (July 24, 1992), p. 53; and Stefanie Endlich, “Ereigniswege zum Holocaust?” *Gedenkstätten-Rundbrief* 52 (1992): 1–2. Not in organizational terms but substantially related to the project of a national Holocaust memorial is the plan for a Berlin Jewish museum; a competition of architects was decided in June 1989 and after extended delays the construction started in 1992 according to the plan of Daniel Libeskind. The commemoration of the 1938 pogrom stimulated many activities (see the note on the history workshops above), e.g., private and state agencies of Berlin invited artists to propose memorials for two local sites of the Holocaust in Berlin; see *Berlinische Galerie und Der Senator für Bau- und Wohnungswesen*, eds., *Gedenken und Denkmal: Entwürfe zur Erinnerung an die Deportation und Vernichtung der jüdischen Bevölkerung Berlins* (Berlin, 1988); see also the plan of the city of Frankfurt to establish a center of learning and documentation, Hammo Loewy, *Holocaust: Die Grenzen des Verstehens* (Reinbek, 1992).

⁴³ Legally, in these cases the land has been sold by the heirs of the original proprietors, mostly in the early 1950s. That was also the case in Hamburg-Ottensen, where in 1991–92 a group of Orthodox Jews claimed that a cemetery that had been transferred decades ago and the land sold in the early 1950s would be desecrated by new construction that was already under way. Only after extended debates and several small riots was an agreement signed, granting the pursuit of the construction if special caution would be observed regarding any discoveries in the ground.

Thus, public commemoration of nazism and the war glosses over the concrete suffering and grief of the mourners. The very format of these meetings buries the sorrow of the mourners again under the “big numbers” of the millions who were killed. Thus, fascism, which was produced by people and took place in a historical setting, becomes or remains isolated from its very context.

Victims, even individual ones, are cited, however, in the annual observances and state ceremonies for the “fallen” soldiers and other victims of the military actions of war. The so-called celebration of reconciliation with Chancellor Kohl and President Reagan at Bitburg cemetery (April 1985) revealed to the international public what has become routine in West Germany since the early 1950s: at least once a year, on a Sunday in November, National Mourning Day (*Volks- trauer tag*) is celebrated in the Federal Parliament as well as in front of hundreds and thousands of local war memorials.⁴⁴

War memorials are to be found in almost every village and town in West Germany. Göttingen, a medium-sized university town in central Germany, differs from most other German towns and villages in that no memorial has been erected to “glorious warriors” of the war with France in 1870–71.⁴⁵ However, one special memorial celebrated the colonial “war”—that is, the slaughtering of the Heros in 1904—with a display depicting an Imperial Eagle striking some disloyal subjects. To the outrage of some local “respectable citizens,” this bird of iron was stolen in 1978. Since then the pedestal has remained empty.

⁴⁴ In the Soviet zone of occupied Germany, the military authorities in June 1946 ordered that all inscriptions on public monuments (including those on church cemeteries) and comparable street names that celebrated war heroism or displayed other “militaristic” features must be destroyed—and the monuments themselves if they showed such characteristics. On the Soviet orders and the respective reports of the German local authorities, see Landeshauptarchiv Potsdam, Repertorium 230 Oberlandratsamt Cottbus, no. 66; cf. on the emphasis of the Soviet authorities on the “antifascist” struggle against remnants of the old order, the autobiography of Sergej Tulpanow, then a colonel and in charge of cultural and ideological affairs in the Soviet zone, *Deutschland nach dem Kriege (1945–1949)*, trans. G. Grossing and L. Jäger, ed. S. Doernberg (Berlin, 1987), pp. 165–79. The East German authorities did not allow the construction of war cemeteries for German war dead. Not until 1959 was a site finally agreed to, and the Waldfriedhof Halbe was opened to the public. Here had been buried corpses from a battle south of Berlin that killed about 22,000 soldiers and civilians of various nationalities between April 24 and 28, 1945. A Protestant pastor, Wilhelm Teichmann, had started to collect the corpses in 1947, and strove to be transferred to the parish of Halbe (which had been abolished as a separate unit and given to the pastor of a neighboring village before the war); he succeeded in 1951. Teichmann pursued his task during the 1950s against hidden obstruction and open intervention by the officials of the state and of the ruling Socialist Unity Party. The church administration and Teichmann’s immediate superiors had given their consent to his effort. However, they did not approve enthusiastically of the pastor’s project. See, on this, Landeshauptarchiv Potsdam, Repertorium 203 Ministerium des Innern, no. 801 and Repertorium 401 Bezirksregierung und Rat des Bezirkes, no. 6300, for interviews with his widow and his daughter, respectively, on August 17, 1992, and an interview with the acting pastor of Halbe, Pastorin Labes, on January 23, 1992. In the very first days after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 West Germans demonstratively established West German customs for this cemetery, as regards the setup of permanent displays of wreaths from associations of surviving soldiers (many of them outspokenly advocating right-wing if not neo-Nazi politics).

⁴⁵ Carola Gottschalk, ed., *Verewigt und Vergessen: Kriegerdenkmäler, Mahnmale und Gedenksteine in Göttingen* (Göttingen, 1992).

Preeminently, though, another memorial has raised sentiment and interest among the local public: a stone erected by the association of survivors from the infantry regiment that was based in Göttingen. Its inscription celebrates and commemorates the “fallen comrades” of 1939–45. And each *Volkstrauertag* a public gathering takes place, including the mayor, representatives of local associations and political parties, and, not least, a delegation of the federal army in full gear putting down the army’s wreath.⁴⁶ The line has not changed over the years: the poor fellows who had nonvoluntarily fulfilled their duties in the army had paid “their price.” Weren’t they similarly true victims of “the brown terror regime”? For the past three years, some dozen people have tried to disrupt each gathering, but of course, police pushed them aside. Some of the critics are now demanding a memorial to the deserters.

On the memorial in Göttingen as well as on many similar memorials, inscriptions refer to general and anonymous “relationships of violence” (*Gewaltverhältnisse*). Thus, respect should be paid to all victims of all “relationships of violence.” No specific perpetrators are named or referred to. No individuals or groups, not to mention “criminal organizations” (such as the SS and Waffen-SS), figure in these inscriptions. Keeping “it” at a distance; this was and still is the implicit as well as the explicit message. Even more, aspects of shared complicity by hundreds and thousands of people have remained out of sight at these sites of commemoration.

VII

Adorno’s question, “What does coming to terms with the past mean?” aimed at spreading enlightenment. To be sure, in the long run this should lead to political

⁴⁶ The Allies assessed the Prusso-German “militarism” as one of the most important clues for explaining ideological dispositions as well as societal formations and political practices that rendered possible Hitler and German fascism. Accordingly, the destruction of militarism was at the heart of their reeducation efforts after 1945. When in the course of the Korean war the Western Allies coincided in their interest to reconstruct a (West) German military, the German proponents of a new military seriously had tried to learn their lesson: they thoroughly strove for an army of a different kind and outlook than the tradition would dictate. For the new federal army (established in November 1955) they proposed the slogan “citizen in uniform.” This was to foster a new type of social relationship and, even more, a basically “civilized” mode of conduct within the military organization itself. Concomitantly, (re)presentations were designed that carefully avoided references to German military traditions. Goose-stepping was prohibited; neither the cut nor the color of the uniform resembled the traditional *feldgrau* outfit. Not the least, American-type badges and steel helmets conspicuously showed that this is a Western army. And as regards conduct, the principle of *Innere Führung* emphasized the shift onto “civilized” standards. The proponents wanted to outlaw unconditional obedience. Instead, subordinates should follow their leaders by consent and conviction. The contrast with the East German military was striking. Its units were established in January 1956, only a few weeks after the announcement of the buildup of the West German army. The cut of their uniforms and the color (*feldgrau*) were almost identical with the make of the uniforms of the Nazi *Wehrmacht*; not the least, the East German National People’s Army determinedly preserved goose-stepping. The implicit appeal of “Germans don’t shoot Germans” relied, strangely enough, on the symbols of that military formation that had been the backbone of Nazi war and Nazi domination.

action in order to change socioeconomic and political structures. Ironically enough, Adorno pursued a line that was both fundamentally ahistorical and fundamentally apolitical.

As to the ahistoricity: Adorno regarded the masses of the German population as driven by proneness to obedience, which he assumed to be produced structurally (thus, in this view the Germans were bound to cling to any “strong” authority). Similar views had shaped and propelled the interpretation of German fascism among victims as well as among “ordinary” Germans almost since 1945. For instance, Eugen Kogon, who had survived the concentration camp of Buchenwald, outlined a similar view in his account that was published only several months after his liberation, under the title *Der SS-Staat*.⁴⁷ According to him, the “scum of mankind” had guarded the inmates in the camps. That is to say, one of the victims regarded a clearly defined and recognizable small group of persons as “the” perpetrators.

Above all, the interpretation of fascism as “catastrophe” did not offer a different perspective. Again, adherents held that only a small group of “criminals” had actively organized the system and the politics of terror and mass murder as well as the war efforts and war activities. Even the Allied Powers seemed to pursue rather similar if not congruent views at the Nuremberg trials (and the follow-up trials, too). For instance, Albert Speer, “the architect of the führer” after 1933, who had been responsible for most of the armament efforts and the mass employment of brutally enforced labor after 1942, was not sentenced as a war criminal. In fact, his claim in court to have been only one among 75 million German victims could appear to have been accepted.⁴⁸ Did not victims, exiled authors, and the Allies—that is, the liberators or the “victors” (as the vast majority of Germans preferred to call them)—share the focus on a few centers of power and on a handful of central figures? Such coincidence strongly fostered tendencies among “ordinary” Germans rigidly to demarcate “us” from “them”: victims from perpetrators. Who, except for Hitler and a half-dozen others was, then, considered a perpetrator? This effort to liberate oneself from any questioning cut across lines of class and cultural or political milieu.

If this seemed to be a legitimate view, nobody felt particularly motivated to scrutinize the everyday practices of the masses of the population during the period of Nazi rule. Thus, the sense of responsibility for the suffering of “the others” during the war, as it was occasionally recorded or even shared among Germans, at least between 1943 and 1945, could not serve as a vantage point. And historical research after 1945 focused on the “grand perpetrators” such as Hitler and the small clique around him (Göring, Goebbels, and Himmler).⁴⁹ Again, feelings of guilt were put to rest. And other professional historians who since the 1960s have

⁴⁷ Kogon (n. 10 above). The U.S. military government licensed a first edition of 100,000—an enormous number compared to other books and also considering the scarcity of paper.

⁴⁸ On the view Albert Speer presented even after he had served his twenty-year sentence and was released from Spandau prison, see his *Erinnerungen*, 8th ed. (Frankfurt, 1972), pp. 521 ff.; here he quotes from his statement in Nuremberg that he upholds unchanged.

⁴⁹ See the summarizing account of its accomplishments by Karl-Dietrich Bracher (*Die deutsche Diktatur: Entstehung, Struktur, Folgen des Nationalsozialismus* [Cologne, 1969]).

emphasized polycratic if not anarchic elements of the power structure and the practice of domination during German fascism have not shifted the primary concern away from the (seeming) centers of power to the practices of supporting and acclaiming those centers.⁵⁰ The result was similar to the analyses that revealed the intricacies of the machinery of terror: who, after all, had “done”—or, for that matter, “perpetrated”—anything? Had anybody supported the selections of Jews, of Sinti and Roma, or of homosexuals? Had anybody watched their transportation to “the East”? Had nobody joined the war efforts? Were there no accomplices?

VIII

Adorno’s reasoning about “coming to terms with the past” was characterized also by an apolitical emphasis, as were most debates on this issue in West Germany. Questions and proposals revolved around the assumption that appropriate remembrance and commemoration is primarily based on cognitive information. Critical reflection relied on notions of distance as well as on scientific analysis. Thus, ritual elements and emotions might even distort remembrance and commemoration. However, these very proposals to strengthen the cognitive element reveal an ambiguity that seems built into any effort toward “coming to terms” with a certain past. Neither rituals—whether private or public, modest or conspicuous—nor analysis, reflection, and intellectual exchange can accomplish that task. Again, Adorno’s lecture reveals that ambiguity: he emphasizes that toil and pain are unavoidable in the process of “coming to terms.” And several years later (1967) Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich emphasized similar ideas: in their view it would take time to overcome self-victimization and to accept the experiences of “the others.”⁵¹

To turn to “the other” and try to experience relationships between “me” and “the other” seems to necessitate connecting both cognitive and emotive practices. In this view, to construct and reflect upon a relationship between one’s own past and the past of others cannot be separated from practical consequences. Or, to put it more precisely, the issue of compensation (*Entschädigung*) for personal sufferings by and under Nazi repression may be one of the telling “proofs” of what people really mean by “coming to terms.”⁵² Compensation is not confined

⁵⁰ Particularly influential became Martin Broszat (*Der Staat Hitlers* [Munich, 1969]); and Hans Mommsen (*Beamtenum im Dritten Reich* [Stuttgart, 1966]).

⁵¹ Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* (Frankfurt, 1967); cf. the reflections on the reactions of “the public” and on the unchanged urgency of these efforts by one of the authors, Margarete Mitscherlich (*Erinnerungsarbeit: Zur Psychoanalyse der Unfähigkeit zu trauern* [Frankfurt, 1987]).

⁵² In general, (West) German policies for restitution for Nazi crimes (*Wiedergutmachung*) included different efforts, such as payments to the state of Israel. Here I will not discuss all aspects of this multifaceted field; cf., for a detailed account of the processes of lawmaking and of public debate, the majority of contributions in Ludolf Herbst and Constantin Goschler, eds., *Wiedergutmachung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Munich, 1989); see also Regina Hennig, *Wiedergutmachung oder fortgesetzte Diskriminierung? Unterstützung, Entschädigung*

to solemn observances but relates responsibility and liability to people’s everyday context. Even more, the everyday is invoked in terms of the cash nexus, which is not only crucial to people’s daily chores and fantasies but also fundamental to the “structure” of capitalist societies.

Payments should “compensate” for personal sufferings and injuries under fascist domination. However, the matter developed in a political climate where interests in the restitution (*Wiedergutmachung*) of property had to be balanced with other interests in a broader approach to compensation: the proponents of restitution and compensation of the victims of Nazi crimes had to compete with those interested in compensating the personal losses and damages of the other German victims of war. Immediately after the war, the Allies decided on principles of their own, and the American military government in particular pushed for a law on property restitution to Jewish victims of nazism. Its aim was to regulate compensation for all losses of property that had been taken away under the Nazi claim of “aryanization of the economy” (*Arisierung der Wirtschaft*).⁵³ German lawyers prepared the law, but it was issued by the military government on November 10, 1947. To be sure, this made it easier for German “loyal *Ariseure*” to denounce the regulations, and they founded an association that strongly fought the Allied law on the restitution of companies and private enterprises. They could not stop or change the law itself, but they finally did succeed in obtaining a regulation that guaranteed them compensation as “victims of compensation” (1969).

IX

The rather efficient solution of restitution focused solely on losses of property or devaluation of assets. In contrast, those who did not own property but had suffered psychic or physical harm or who had lost relatives, their health, years of their lives, and further opportunities could not claim any compensation from these laws. It is difficult to tell whether the German population had been aware of their obligation not only to restore property but also to compensate for the sufferings the Germans had caused. As regards surviving Jews, a survey from August 1949 rendered a response of 54 percent in favor of such an obligation. However, this should cover only the “surviving Jews who still live in Germany.”⁵⁴ But even on

und Interessenvertretung für NS-Verfolgte in Niedersachsen, 1945–1949 (Bielefeld, 1991). Here I focus on the perspectives of those who had been victimized by the Nazis; cf. the last third of the contributions to Herbst and Goshler, eds.; see esp. Christian Pross, *Wiedergutmachung: Der Kleinkrieg gegen die Opfer* (Frankfurt, 1988); see also Helga Fischer-Hübner and Hermann Fischer-Hübner, eds., *Die Kehrseite der “Wiedergutmachung”: Das Leiden von NS-Verfolgten in den Entschädigungsverfahren* (Gerlingen, 1990).

⁵³ See the comprehensive study by Avraham Barkai (*Vom Boykott zur “Entjudung”: Der wirtschaftliche Existenzkampf der Juden im Dritten Reich, 1933–1943* [Frankfurt, 1987]); see also Helmut Genschel, *Die Verdrängung der Juden aus der Wirtschaft im Dritten Reich* (Göttingen, 1966).

⁵⁴ See, for a more positive reading of these figures, Michael Wölffsohn, “Das Wiedergutmachungsabkommen mit Israel: Eine Untersuchung deutscher und ausländischer Umfragen,” in

this issue 31 percent answered “no” and 15 percent remained “undecided.” The same survey included a question on the treatment of widows and orphans of German soldiers. In this case, 96 percent supported immediate compensation.

The American military government did not have to wait for the Germans. It had dealt with related matters and in April 1949 also issued a law granting payments to Jewish survivors. But even when the Allies declared the Federal Republic a sovereign state (except for control of armaments and the military) in February 1952, no German law on this matter had been proposed. Moreover, perpetrators and accomplices were again treated preferentially. Already in May 1951 the Federal Parliament by a wide margin had accepted a proposal to reinstate most state and government employees who had been dismissed after 1945 on grounds of NSDAP membership. (Members of the Gestapo, the SS, and the Waffen-SS, which had been declared criminal institutions by the Nuremberg ruling, were still excluded.)⁵⁵ On the very same day, May 11, 1951, the parliament also passed a law that guaranteed compensation for all public servants who had been dismissed under Hitler. However, in contrast to similar regulations for employees of private companies, this law did not state any time limit.

In the years that followed, the first German law on the matter (from 1953) provided many restrictive clauses that painstakingly tried to measure and quantify individual suffering and despair according to bureaucratic formula.⁵⁶ Two principles informed these efforts. The first could be dated back even to Allied planning of postwar German affairs during the war. Here, the persecutees were defined as those who had suffered because racial, religious, or political “reasons” had been given or constructed by the Nazis. The immediate result of this definition was to reduce drastically the number of those who were entitled to claim compensation at all. In a statement to the Law Committee of the Federal Parliament on May 4, 1953, one of the most active supporters of compensation regulations, Hermann Brill, showed the effects using the camp of Buchenwald as an example: according to the proposed definition, only 700 of its 42,000 inmates in 1945 would be considered “victims of Nazism.”⁵⁷ Yet Brill did not oppose this reduction: he shared the obviously common understanding that non-German inmates had to be neglected. In this case, there were 22,000 Russians. Finally, “only” 1,800 Germans had been present in the camp, and the majority of those

Westdeutschland, 1945–1955: Unterwerfung, Kontrolle, Integration, ed. Ludolf Herbst (Munich, 1986), pp. 203–18, esp. p. 209; very different, i.e., much more negative, was the reaction to the imminent treaty with the state of Israel on the compensatory payment of 3 billion DM in 1952; see pp. 206 ff.

⁵⁵ In 1961 the Court of Constitutional Law, however, ruled that members of the Waffen-SS (who after 1943 partly had been drafted) were granted the same rights as those who had been named in the law of May 11, 1951; see Hermann Weiss, “Alte Kameraden von der Waffen-SS,” in *Rechtsextremismus in der Bundesrepublik*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Frankfurt, 1989), p. 208.

⁵⁶ This law replaced the first law on the matter that had been issued by the American military government in 1949; see for the juridical details Walter Brunn et al., *Das Bundesentschädigungsgesetz* (Munich, 1981), pt. 1; about the politics of this policy, see Pross.

⁵⁷ See, on this issue in general, the painstaking reconstruction in Constantin Goschler, *Wiedergutmachung: Westdeutschland und die Verfolgten des Nationalsozialismus, 1945–1954* (Munich, 1992), esp. the Buchenwald example on p. 316.

consisted of “professional criminals or *Asoziale*.” It may not come as a surprise that these labels were taken directly from the language of the SS.

The second principle was mentioned by Otto Küster, another advocate of generous regulations. In 1953, he criticized not only government officials but also representatives of the political parties for insisting on need as the sole basis for compensation. Küster pointed out that the persecutees insisted they had a special right based on their special situation: they were due compensation for their sufferings.

To be sure, the second German law on compensation (announced in 1956 as the “final” one by the government) improved certain provisions. For instance, the right to receive a pension was no longer restricted to those whose ability to work was considered by medical experts to be 70 percent or less. The new law considered smaller disabilities as well, stating that a capacity to work of 75 percent or less should qualify for compensation. Also, this law declared that it was not only inmates of concentration camps who had suffered injustice but also any persons who had been persecuted because of their political opposition to the Nazis or because of their race, faith, or system of belief and worldview. And all of them were entitled to receive lifelong pensions as well as other special compensations.

Nevertheless, large numbers of those who had been mistreated and persecuted still were not considered eligible for compensation. According to the law of 1953, almost none of the foreign enforced laborers were entitled, because the claimant had to sustain territorial connections to Germany.⁵⁸ In fact, this required his or her permanent return to the land of terror. And other groups were completely neglected, such as those who had been under police surveillance and were persecuted as “ordinary” criminals (like Sinti and Roma, homeless people, *Asoziale*, homosexuals, and communists). It was precisely in the same vein that Nazi authorities had justified the detainment (and murder) of Sinti and Roma and of homosexuals in the KZs as “necessary for the protection” of society.

Even some explicit political opponents of nazism were declared noneligible by the first German law on the matter, issued in 1953, which stated that communists who had aimed at “another form of violent domination” were excluded. The law of 1956, instituted after the prohibition of the Communist party by the federal government, changed this provision such that only those who had continued their affiliation with the Communist party after 1945–49 were denied compensation. The law declared enemies to the “liberal democratic constitutional order” as “unworthy” of receiving pensions or compensations (*entschädigungsunwürdig*).⁵⁹ Only in the mid-sixties did the attitude of political representatives and

⁵⁸ A concise account is provided by Ulrich Herbert, “Nicht entschädigungsfähig? Die Wiedergutmachungsansprüche der Ausländer,” in Herbst and Goshler, eds., pp. 273–302; the decisive legal title to deny all claims to the German state or, for that matter, to private companies, became the Treaty on German Debts signed at London in 1952; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 278 ff.; see also the case study by Dietrich Vaupel (*Spuren die nicht vergehen* [Kassel, 1990]).

⁵⁹ Gotthard Jasper, “Die disqualifizierten Opfer: Der Kalte Krieg und die Entschädigung für Kommunisten,” in Herbst and Goshler, eds., pp. 361–84. Particularly telling on the late 1950s is the case of Rudolf Schottlaender: the philosopher had emigrated to West Berlin after having been dismissed from his job in East Germany, but since he stayed in contact with people in East

legislators change: the tough antiliberal stance of the Adenauer era broke down, and hence the urgency of persecuting active communists seemed less acute. At that point parliament began to grant compensation regardless of people's presumed stance vis-à-vis the constitutional order. And in 1967 the Court of Constitutional Law ruled that only those communists should be denied compensation who, even after prohibition of the KPD in 1956, "actively" fought the constitutional order of the Federal Republic. This meant that every communist who remained silent and passive after 1949 could hope for continuing payments.

The range of exclusions extended beyond the compensation issue in the strict sense. For instance, the association of those suppressed by the Nazi regime (*Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Nazi-Regimes [VVN]*) was founded immediately after the end of the war, mainly by surviving communists. But originally this association also included Social Democrats (SPD), Christian Democrats (CDU), and Liberals. However, during the increasing Cold War this coalition did not last. In May 1948 the Social Democrats declared membership in the VVN to be unacceptable for members of the SPD. In February 1950 the CDU followed suit and founded a separate organization, just as the SPD had done. Half a year later the federal government stated that members of the VVN could no longer serve as government employees. In August 1951 the Hamburg authorities declared the VVN illegal; the next day the same decision was announced in the state of Hesse. And with the prohibition of the KPD in 1956, the VVN was declared to be a communist undercover organization and, consequently, prohibited as well. It was only in 1967 that one of the federal courts declared the prohibition of the VVN void.

The majority of VVN members were victims of the Nazi terror who had been members of the Communist party or who at least had sympathized with communist organizations. Most of these people had suffered immensely under the fascist terror, and to them, communist politics until 1933 had been beyond criticism. Thus, they had been and remained silent or blind (or both) on all aspects of Stalinist terror. It is only recently—in 1988 and 1989—that younger people have begun to define antifascist practices in new terms: to them, criticizing and fighting all modes and justifications of repression have become vital. However, the moral authority of the victims—that is, of the older generation—prevailed.⁶⁰

X

Even after groups of victims were declared eligible for compensation, administrative procedures continued to burden individuals. Particularly poignant was the

Germany, his status of a persecuted person under nazism was denied in July 1959 because of his being a "supporter of a totalitarian regime." Not until 1962 did a higher court abolish this sentence; cf. Pross, pp. 104–5.

⁶⁰ It is of a particular irony (or historical cynicism?) that this organization of victims of fascism became the first of the Communist party affiliates in West Germany who directly had to pay for the stubborn loyalty of the organized West German communists to the SED in East Germany: the VVN almost immediately after November 9, 1989 (the opening of the Berlin Wall), went bankrupt. The subsidies from the Deutsche Kommunistische Partei (DKP) and, thus, from the SED, had stopped from one day to the next.

long time it took until people’s claims were checked and decided. If one had been incarcerated it usually took almost five years to receive final bureaucratic clearance. In cases of damage to one’s health (mostly women!) it took even longer. On average, these victims had to wait and insist for about eight and one-half years until they were formally recognized as victims of the Nazi rule and could receive a pension. Above all, the victims had to turn in evidence to be checked by the bureaucracy, and officials offered no active support with, for instance, archival research. And since the law required that all claimants had to prove that they were part of the “realm of German language and culture,” in a number of cases the bureaucracy ordered investigations of the German language of the claimants. Writing mistakes or poor knowledge of German literature were taken as evidence that the person did not belong to that “realm.”

But it was not only the state and federal bureaucracies that were reluctant to cooperate with the victims: the companies that had called for and exploited enforced labor also stubbornly refused to participate in the compensation “business.” Many of the laborers they had employed or “used” had been recruited from concentration camps. However, about six million people from the occupied countries, among them more than three million from Poland and the Soviet Union, had also been forced to go to the *Reich* in order to work in German industry and agriculture; in many cases they had to leave on little or no notice. At the same time, more than 700,000 inmates of concentration camps and around two million prisoners of war, mostly from the Red Army, were forced to work, toil, and starve in the German armament factories.⁶¹

Beginning in the late 1950s, at least some big companies decided that enforced laborers who had been specially selected in and taken from their home countries should be eligible for compensation. Thus, after years of deliberation, several of the big companies agreed to pay: Krupp, Siemens, AEG, Telefunken, Rheinmetall, and IG Farben. However, few of those concerned were still alive, and almost none received more than 5,000 DM in total. And even these companies did not accept any legal obligation: they explicitly disclaimed responsibility in their agreement to pay this modest sum. The Deutsche Bank finally agreed to pay certain amounts of money only in the 1980s. Regarding its subsidiary company Dynamit AG, for example, the bank granted five million deutsche marks. But since almost 2,500 people had turned in claims (most of them as far back as 1960), this five million did not suffice to pay each of them 5,000 DM.

It took more than twenty years for the issue of compensation for enforced laborers to be put back on the public and political agenda. This was achieved in particular through the efforts of local critics—not least the members of history workshops—to prove the involvement of local companies or branches of nationwide firms, which finally began to be taken seriously by several nationwide newspapers and the public television networks. Whether this was due to any concern on the part of managers for their international “standing” or any recognition of their historical responsibility or that of their predecessors is open to

⁶¹ Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter: Politik und Praxis des ‘Ausländer-Einsatzes’ in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches* (Berlin and Bonn, 1985).

debate. Presumably it was a conjuncture of such motives and interests that triggered a move that should lead to a final settlement of the issue: in 1987 Mercedes Benz allocated 20 million DM for compensation and designated the International Red Cross, the Jewish Claims Conference, and the Polish-German Maximilian-Kolbe-Stiftung to administer its distribution to surviving enforced laborers from the wartime. So far, no other company has taken a similar initiative. German companies also remained mute when the federal government finally endowed the newly established "Polish-German Reconciliation Foundation" with 500 million DM and, even more recently, when it endowed the "Russian-German Reconciliation Foundation" with 1 billion DM. These foundations will take care of all claims for compensation by former enforced laborers.⁶² The federal chancellor's explicit call to industry to grant another 500 million DM has remained unanswered so far, except for one positive response.⁶³

XI

Only in the middle of the 1980s was the notion of the "overlooked" and "forgotten" victims slowly introduced into political and public debates. Some Liberals and Social Democrats, but especially members of the Green party and its affiliates and, not least, independent working groups and history workshops, revealed the appalling treatment and suffering of those concerned. In particular, Sinti and Roma and homosexuals, as well as those who had been sterilized or mistreated in various ways by medical "experiments," had continued to be victimized and discriminated against after 1945, even by officials and judges. The latter applied the laws such that certain characteristics of people's behavior as, for instance, homosexuality, were taken as crimes justifying persecution and even KZ during nazism. In the spring of 1986 the Berlin parliament organized a hearing to elicit more information on these people, but still the VVN was not allowed to participate. Only the direct intervention of one representative reversed that decision, and this was the first time a communist had the opportunity to report to a parliamentary committee how for so many decades he and his fellows had been humiliated and scorned by administrative departments and in court. Or consider the Gypsies: until 1979, with the foundation of the central council of the Sinti and

⁶² This government initiative implied the understanding that thereby no legal obligation to pay any compensation had been accepted. On the first experiences of the "Reconciliation Foundation," see Edith Heller, "Pro Monat KZ gibt es 62 Mark und zwölf Pfennige," *Frankfurter Rundschau* (November 7, 1992). A similar regulation has by November 1992 been established with Russia as one of the successor states of the former Soviet Union; the endowment is reported at 1 billion DM.

⁶³ In the fall of 1991 Volkswagen AG decided to allocate 12 million DM and to give it to a foundation. See also the conflict on the recommendation of the head of a research team on the history of Volkswagen, Hans Mommsen, not to pay compensation to individual enforced laborers who had worked with Volkswagen during the war; cf. Eckart Spoo, "'Bei Zwangsarbeit multikulturelle Gesellschaft an der Werkbank,'" *Frankfurter Rundschau* (October 10, 1991), p. 1; Otto Köhler, "Kein Stein: Kein Geld," *Die Zeit* (October 15, 1991), p. 71; and Hans Mommsen, "Ein Streit um VW," *Die Zeit* (November 22, 1991), p. 75.

Roma, there was no lobby for them at all; and thus they had never been invited to any hearing or public debate on these matters.

Most efforts toward compensation and restitution focused on the Jewish victims and survivors, but this was designed and pursued in a particularly restricted way. Adenauer, for instance, mentioned German guilt in the general debate in 1951 in the Federal Parliament, and he promised a nonbureaucratic treatment of compensation. At the same time, however, the finance minister of his own cabinet (Fritz Schäffer) tried to save every penny when it came to details. Above all, the handling of the laws by the courts reveals numerous cases of the most restrictive interpretations. For instance, to receive compensation for detainment in a concentration camp the claimant was required to prove that he or she had stayed at least for one year in a KZ. In one case this year would only have been completed if the days of transport were included, but the court ruled against counting the days of transport.

As regards the courts, vast amounts of material confirm the restrictive line mentioned above. Only very few public figures opposed this jurisdictional narrowness. Among them was Social Democrat Adolf Arndt, relentlessly arguing against the disgraceful rulings of most courts.⁶⁴ Consider, for instance, a sentence he quoted from a Berlin court of appeals (*Kammergericht*). The judges had ruled that in the case of the female plaintiff “she personally had not suffered Nazi violence, and that it would have been possible to divorce her husband” (her husband was Jewish). But she had not divorced him; on the contrary, she had followed him into illegality. Therefore the court declared it her “free will” to live in illegality and thus decided that her sufferings were not caused by Nazi violence. The court denied any compensation. Summing up cases of this kind, Arndt sarcastically remarked in 1954 that “in no other matters did the administration and the courts treat people in such a narrow and mean way, and that nowhere else were hair- and wordsplitting employed so intensely.” He added, “This is the result of the foul climate of creeping anti-Semitism.”

To be sure, Arndt was not the only critic. Other federal representatives fought along the same lines (e.g., Hans Reif, Franz Böhm, and Otto-Heinrich Greve). But these half-dozen people could not even provoke those who were responsible for the restrictive and mean practices of the administration to respond publicly or to justify their practices. To be sure, the amended “final” law on the matter (from 1956) was a little less restrictive in some clauses. However, the thrust of the regulations remained unchanged.⁶⁵

The difference between this and other measures of compensation is striking. There were no limitations in the law that regulated compensation for the material losses of Germans in the provinces taken over by Poland and in the Soviet zone and East Germany (the so-called *Lastenausgleich*). In contrast, the compensation law of 1956 restricted all claims by victims of Nazi camps to a firm deadline. The last amendment of 1965 also necessitated quick action: final claims had to be

⁶⁴ On the context of his career and politics, see Dieter Gosewinkel, *Adolf Arndt: Die Wiedergeburt des Rechtsstaates aus dem Geist der Sozialdemokratie (1945–1961)* (Bonn, 1991).

⁶⁵ See Pross, pp. 99 ff.

turned in within a year. And it took another quarter of a century before grassroots pressure succeeded in establishing state-backed foundations to support those victims of Nazi brutalities who so far had been excluded or totally neglected by the restrictive administration.⁶⁶

XII

On November 10, 1965, in a speech to the Federal Parliament, Chancellor Ludwig Erhard had declared the postwar period “finished.” The Federal Republic had turned into a political “adult.” Not least, this would mean that “we cannot accept those who infer from previous cruelty a German hereditary sin and try to preserve this for political purposes.”

The declaration by Erhard had been preceded by a year of heated debate on the statute of limitations for murder. The obvious issue was how to extend it, since the prosecution of perpetrators of the Holocaust had started again only in the late 1950s.⁶⁷ In the summer of 1965 the Federal Diet agreed to a motion by representatives from the governing Christian Democrats as well as the opposing Social Democrats: they proposed to shift the starting date for the twenty-year statute of limitations for murder from May 9, 1945, to January 1, 1950. When, in the end, this extension approached, the federal government obviously wanted to take preventive action to forestall criticism by associations of victims from abroad. The government proposed to abolish any statute of limitations for murder. Parliament, however, did not agree, and voted for a thirty-year extension. Of course, this move could not settle the matter, and the debate started again in the fall of 1978. And although the SPD was now the leading party of the governing coalition, proposals to distinguish between crimes against humanity or Nazi murders and murder in general once again went almost unnoticed. On July 3, 1979, parliament decided to abolish any statute of limitations for murder.⁶⁸

In contrast to the question of the term of limitation for murder, criticism of the regulation of compensation was not influenced by the increasing general criticism and awareness of shared complicity; rather, it was prompted by the 1961

⁶⁶ Only since 1990 have several German states begun to allocate funds for the seemingly forgotten victims and persecutees of nazism; see *die tageszeitung* (September 18, 1992). The biggest state in terms of population, North Rhine–Westphalia, will not begin until 1993.

⁶⁷ See the overview by one of the long-term leading officials of the Central Agency of German Administrations of Justice to Prosecute Nazi Crimes at Ludwigsburg: Adalbert Rückerl, *NS-Verbrechen vor Gericht: Versuch einer Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Heidelberg, 1982); this agency was established in the fall of 1958; cf. also Just-Dahlmann and Just (n. 33 above), esp. pp. 275 ff.

⁶⁸ See Deutscher Bundestag, ed., *Zur Verjährung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen: Dokumentation der parlamentarischen Bewältigung des Problems, 1960–1979*, 3 pts. (Bonn, 1980); Adalbert Rückerl, *NS-Prozesse: Nach 25 Jahren Strafverfolgung* (Karlsruhe, 1971); and Peter Steinbach, *Nationalsozialistische Gewaltverbrechen: Die Diskussion in der deutschen Öffentlichkeit nach 1945* (Berlin, 1981).

Eichmann trial at Jerusalem or the Auschwitz trial of 1962–63 at Frankfurt (and the play by Peter Weiss based on it, in 1965). On May 26, 1965 (several months before Erhard’s declaration of November 1965 quoted above), the Federal Parliament accepted another law on compensation; it should “wrap up” what had been overlooked previously. To be sure, it offered various improvements. But serious problems still remained unsettled: for instance, having suffered in a ghetto or by living in illegality were not considered equivalent to having suffered in a concentration camp. And contrary to the demands of concerned people, the legislators neither accepted a “minimum” of a five-month stay in a camp as justifying compensation nor did they extend or completely abolish the narrow final deadline for turning in claims.⁶⁹

XIII

It is slowly becoming clear that conspicuous gestures and ceremonies are grossly inadequate: practical caring for those who have been victimized is fundamental for any effort “to come to terms with the Nazi past.” However, to do “justice” to survivors and, concomitantly, to trigger changes of orientation, conduct, and behavior among fellow Germans seems almost impossible.⁷⁰

In fascism, complicity penetrated most spheres of daily behavior and practices. No separate spheres could be preserved: the “political” infused the “private.” But this process could be experienced in reverse as well: seemingly intimate situations were incorporated into public and political ritual to strengthen the appeal of the political order.⁷¹ Local studies have shown this in painful detail, from *Arisierung* of neighboring small shops and May Day celebrations to the deportation of one’s own neighbors. That is to say, those who were victimized and who had to bear the thrust of the human “costs” of fascist mobilization and those who had the advantage of this suffering were intricately connected with one another. The private and public realms could not be separated, nor could suffering

⁶⁹ Compare Pross, pp. 123–24; except for a very few cases, the deadline for the submission of claims was September 30, 1966, just one year after the law’s publication; for further details, see Pross, pp. 123–24.

⁷⁰ Here, various local efforts to get in touch with surviving enforced laborers and to invite them to meet Germans and to visit the former sites are important; see the activities in Hessisch-Lichtenau by the local history workshop since about 1985 or, more recently, in Frankfurt am Main (“Zwangsarbeiter fragen nach,” *Frankfurter Rundschau* [December 17, 1992]). The limits of these reunions surface only occasionally. But the case of a Polish couple who had been forced to work on a farm in southwest Germany and were visited by the *Bäuerin*, their former master or “lady,” was shown on television in 1989. The Poles obviously expected a payment of wages they had never received, to be given when the German visited them or, at the latest, when they answered her invitation and came to Germany in 1990. Of course, the hosts in both instances were and remained polite, if not kind. Nevertheless, the gulf between the former master and the former servants remained wide open; see Tilman Krause, “Gestörte Versöhnung,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (November 20, 1991).

⁷¹ See the visual documentation by the photographs of Otto Weber in *Tausend ganz normale Jahre* (Nördlingen, 1987).

and profit be disconnected. More concretely, Ravensbrück was and remained completely in sight of the inhabitants of Fürstenberg, the town across the lake.⁷²

Only recently, Ernst Klee and others have published eyewitness reports that offer a monotonously recurrent and deplorable vision. Letters, pictures, and diaries confirm that hundreds and thousands of ordinary German soldiers “knew”: they had watched and taken notes, they had even taken photographs of the mass murder “behind the front line” in “the East”—and almost nobody seems to have cared! “The Bolsheviks? We had to destroy them. They were not just enemies, they were *Untermenschen*.”⁷³

Efforts to address the modes of complicity have to reflect the intimate connectedness of the “private” and the “political” (which is to a large extent identical with the “public”). And efforts that mainly aim to do justice to the victims have to respect the needs and longings, and above all the anxieties, of the survivors. But does this restrict any public and political use of personal experiences? Or is it just the opposite: that it will bring relief and finally settle the historical account if personal suffering is made public and employed in political exchange? The preservation of their privacy is not of paramount concern to all survivors. But this has to be decided not by those who are liable for the Nazi past: *we* have to listen to *their* voices and *their* recollections. Otherwise, not only commemoration but also compensation will victimize the “others” a second time.

⁷² It was a widely discussed event when the president of the Federal Republic, Richard von Weizsäcker, explicitly referred to and, thus, acknowledged the general knowledge of the confinement, the transportation, and the destruction of the Jews and of others by the fascist “domination of violence,” as Weizsäcker put it when he celebrated and commemorated the liberation in his speech on May 8, 1985 (Richard von Weizsäcker, *Von Deutschland aus: Reden des Bundespräsidenten* [Munich, 1987], pp. 16 ff.).

⁷³ Ernst Klee et al., “*Schöne Zeiten*”: *Judenmord aus der Sicht der Täter und Gaffer* (Frankfurt, 1988); on the complicity of the German army in the East, see esp. Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York and Oxford, 1991); cf. the study on the cruel and murderous treatment of the Soviet prisoners of war by the German military: Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen, 1941–1945* (Stuttgart, 1978). Bartov's emphasis on a large-scale ideological conviction of the soldiers is questioned by the results of Theo Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Oxford, 1989); and Hans J. Schröder, *Die gestohlenen Jahre: Erzählgeschichten und Geschichtserzählung im Interview: Der Zweite Weltkrieg aus der Sicht ehemaliger Mannschaftssoldaten* (Tübingen, 1992).