The Place of the Second World War in German Memory and History

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*The Place of the Second World War in German Memory and History**

Michael Geyer

The fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II is marked by two developments. For one, the barrier of silence that served to separate the memory of the war experience from the present has fallen in Germany. For another, with the events of 1989-91 Europe has entered into a new period of self-determination. Both of these upheavals come together in a renewal of historical consciousness, allowing the recognition of an epochal transition and posing new challenges for writing history beyond contemporary history. In the reflection of a passing period, this history preserves and leaves behind memories of an epoch of world wars — memories deeply embedded in German identity that cannot be removed. Among the central elements of such a history of German identity in the twentieth century are the experience of mass death, the failure of democracy as a political and social ordering principle, and the stigma of genocide. Against the background of a brief comment about the problem of remembering and forgetting, I wish here to characterize the importance of these defining elements of a German past for a German history after the epochal turn of 1989/91.

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I

The celebrations in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war have revealed a paradox. The return of memory is an unmistakable sign of the mortality of the surviving witnesses of mass murder and annihilation.[1] It signals the passing of the immediate physical presence of the war, one harbored by the historical witnesses whose life experiences are tied to it.[2] This is a dangerous moment; for it seems as if memory itself will pass on with the deaths of the historical witnesses. This explains the many attempts to preserve memory, the most antiquarian expression of which are monuments, the newest form of which are archives of recorded memories on video cassette.

Let us forget the monuments as quotations of an earlier form of public commemoration that had played an important role until 1945. At least as regards the present situation in Germany, it is mostly the external form of the memorial that remains.[3] The video archives of memory seem better suited to resolve the problem of the mortality of the witnesses.[4] A document of witnesses is preserved — and with it also a consciousness that all they saw was not only an authentic fact, but that war, death, and annihilation were experienced, were lived and suffered through. Moreover, because video archives collect everyday testimony, the memory of all those affected, they create a testimony beyond the control of the custodians of meaning in politics, culture, and scholarship.[5] Also, the remembered experience seems to acquire a certain permanence as an electronic document. Still, it is precisely at this point that doubts should be raised. Aside from the issue that even electronically stored data have only a limited life span, the mere fact of electronically mediated testimonial is an

1. Charles S. Maier, "A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy, and Denial," *History & Memory* 5 (1993): 136-51.

2. Reinhart Koselleck, "Vielerlei Abschied vom Krieg," *Vom Vergessen — vom Gedenken: Erinnerungen und Erwartung in Europa zum 8. Mai 1945*, eds. Brigitte Sauzay, Heinz Ludwig Arnold, Rudolf von Thadden (Göttingen, 1995) 21.

3. James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993). *Der politische Totenkult. Kriegerdenkmäler in der Moderne*, eds. Reinhart Koselleck and Michael Jeismann (Munich: Fink, 1994). As a concrete example: *Streit um die neue Wache: Zur Gestaltung einer zentralen Gedenkstätte*, ed. Akademie der Künste (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1993).

4. "Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies," *Guide to Yale University Library Holocaust Video Testimonies* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994).

5. See on the problem of testimony, Shoshana Feldman and Dori Laub, "Testimony, Crises of Witnessing," *Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

indication of an altered perception. Like photography, it is an act of disappearance anticipated through substitution. The image takes the place of the living, embodied memory. Even in these documents of lived experience, the physical presence of the era of world wars vanishes. They are therefore scarcely suited to confine the "fury of disappearance."[6]

For that reason, the electronic memory banks are less the preserved presence of the past than an entreaty of the witnesses on a present that is in the process of change.[7] The effectiveness of witnesses depends entirely on whether or not, how (and where) these documents are received — in which ways they are able to create and to continuously refashion a context for memory. It is because they may find a reception that they are recorded. The image and the voice of the witness does not spring from nowhere to one's eye and ear, however moving and telling they may be. Their integrity and authenticity alone do not guarantee the survival of memory. Rather, it remains a supreme challenge to the historical imagination of coming generations to re-create a place for the recorded memories. The same is also true, incidentally, for the physical traces of the past, the sites of commemoration. No preservation, however perfect, can save these traces for the present unless they are accepted in the present. The effectiveness of the vestiges of memory is dependent upon historical imagination and historical consciousness — not a procession of images and facts from the past, but the readiness to assure oneself of the past beyond the existence of its witnesses.[8] For this reason, the charge of a history beyond contemporary history consists of making possible the transfer of past events and destinies from immediate memory into the presence of history. This transformation requires a kind of labor that is commonly regarded as self-evident, but one that stands nonetheless at the beginning of all history — the work on a (historical) consciousness beyond the sentient presence [*Wahrheitspräsenz*] of the past.[9]

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6. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. Hans-Friedrich Wessels (Hamburg, 1988) 389.

7. Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Public Memory and Its Discontents," *Raritan* 13 (1994): 24-40.

8. *Mnemosyne: Formen und Funktionen der kulturellen Erinnerung*, eds. Aleida Assmann and Dietrich Harth (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1991).

9. In Germany this has taken on the form of work on commemorative sites: see *Reaktionäre Modernität und Völkermord. Probleme des Umgangs mit der NS-Zeit in Museen, Ausstellungen, Gedenkstätten*, eds. Bernd Faulenbach and Franz-Joseph Jelich (Essen: Klartext, 1994); *Gedenkstätten im vereinten Deutschland. Fünfzig Jahre nach der Befreiung der Konzentrationslager*, eds. Jürgen Dittberner and Antje von Meer (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1995).

This transfer is not random or merely a matter of taste — as though the past were an arbitrary commodity. It is rather an act of translation, which secures or is meant to secure a continuity of cultural memory.[10] This work on history, to appropriate at this point a reflection from the philosophy of history, is a secularized form of commemorating death. In the transformation to history, the anthropological insight is incorporated that human society may not forget the dead without fatal consequences for later generations. For death — above all the deaths committed by men in war — brings up principally the question of survival. This question does not concern the dead, but it does address itself to succeeding generations. Every commemoration of death is a confirmation of the foundation of survival,[11] which demands this effort of the living, if they do not wish to forfeit their civility as a surviving community. For this reason, (self)-assessment in the present in view of the knowledge of death is at once the essence of the work on a historical consciousness and the impetus for the historical imagination. Without much effort, Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*[12] can be applied to the continuation of this thought. For Hegel, as for an idealist philosophy of history in general, the question of the survival of humanity in the face of the universality of man-made (mass) death was of great importance for the attempt at a foundation of history. It was a question of weighing the progress, or at least the sheer survival, of the human race against the destructive reality of human action. How is it, Hegel asked, that humans kill each other without flinching, destroy states and empires in bloody wars, and still the history of humanity progresses?

The answer was to be found, according to Hegel, in a historicizing commemoration that must not exhaust itself "in the empty, unfruitful grandeur of the negative outcome" of death. Hegel's alternative was history as a specifically bourgeois science. "In as much as we regard history as this slaughter-house, to which the happiness of the people(s), the wisdom of the states and the virtue of the individuals are brought to sacrifice, there necessarily arises in this also the question, to whom, to

10. Amos Funkenstein, "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness," *History & Memory* 1 (1989): 5-26; Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1992).

11. Reinhart Koselleck, "Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftung der Überlebenden," *Identität*, eds. Odo Marquard and Karlheinz Stierle (Munich: W. Fink, 1979) 255-76.

12. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte. Werke* 12 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).

what final purpose, have these monstrous sacrifices been brought?" Hegel seeks the answer with respect to the "drama of passions" in a history of the progressive self-realization of liberty, which the teleological certainty of his philosophy of history represents.[13]

Today we tend to be skeptically disposed toward such a teleology of history. To us, salvation in the knowledge of the course of world history is, if not a suspect, then certainly a foreign idea. This is not only a matter of a general reservation toward teleological thinking, one which would rather emphasize the contingency of human activity and thus set the construction of subjectivity against the Hegelian spirit of liberty. More than this, such a history misses the main theme of the twentieth century, because the central theme of this century is not the underhanded advancement of freedom through catastrophes, but the challenge to the freedom of humanity by self-staged catastrophes.[14]

This brief excursus in the philosophy of history has a practical reason. If, in the era of European world wars, an entire civilization — the German civilization — indeed either stopped short or collapsed, as Dan Diner has provocatively claimed with his thesis of a rupture in civilization, and if this civilization is now gaining the sovereignty to renew itself, then the inevitable question arises: what is required so that the later generations of this ruptured civilization can be re-united?[15] What do the Germans need (now that it lies entirely in their hands), in view of the war and genocide they caused, in order to live with themselves and the world in the future? That is the problem of self-realization in historical consciousness today. My response is that this renewal of civilization requires a national history that in the historical reflection on war and annihilation will do justice to the need for self-recognition among later generations. Neither the appeal to an older national history nor the mere continuation of the critical social history of the Federal Republic can bring this into being, because both, caught up in this past, have done everything to evade the remembrance of the dead.

The experience of mass death weaves through the German history of this century: it has become its signature. Fifty years after the end of World War II, for the first time since 1914, a generation is growing up

13. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* 34-36.

14. Edith Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes: Hegel, Heidegger, and Man-Made Mass Death* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985).

15. *Zivilisationsbruch: Denken nach Auschwitz*, ed. Dan Diner (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1988).

that has confronted the experience of wholesale death only indirectly — precisely through "history."[16] This cannot be said of either the generation born during the war or that born after the war, although for the latter war and annihilation possessed no physical presence of their own. However, these postwar generations were confronted immediately enough with the reality of war and annihilation by means of the impressions of their fathers and mothers.[17] This has led to elaborate scholarly discussions, for one about the limits and possibilities of secondary traumatization, and also about victims and perpetrators, discussions that I do not intend to address here.[18] In this context, the long and unbroken continuity of the experience of death — as an experience of violent separation — is important. It is one of the fundamental experiences for the German history of this century. German society — even if not voluntarily, and often enough reluctantly and defensively — has gone through an extended death zone. This long journey may well be the stuff for modern-day myths. I would like to contemplate the lineaments of a history that narrates the conscious or unconscious working through of the experience of mass death by the Germans as one of the central experiences of the century, one that has fashioned the Germans and their identity. It marked them as a people in that it impressed upon them the unmistakable and lasting stamp of violence. But a clarification is needed here in two respects.

First, the experience of mass death reflects the notion of killing as the stigma of Cain, as well as the experience of the innocent victim, that is, the remembrance of Abel. These are on the one hand incommensurable experiences, and on the other, experiences that are forever related to each other. I would like to characterize as the *stigma of violence* — in contrast to the experience of mass death — the mark of those who did the killing. War interlaces both killing and being killed. Those who kill also bear the risk of being killed. This is not the case in genocide, where murder is not set against this risk. To kill innocent and defenseless people, people rendered defenseless, is murder. The German experience of mass death is filtered and concentrated through

16. Miriam Hansen, "*Schindler's List* is not *Shoah*; the Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory," *Critical Inquiry* 22.2 (Winter 1996): 292-312.

17. Heinz Bude, *Das Altern einer Generation. Die Jahrgänge 1938-1948* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1995).

18. The German discussion on this theme has only now arisen. See, for example, "Psychologische Folgen des Holocaust," *Psyche* 49.1 (1995).

this mark of the murderer as through a prism — irrespective of who actually committed the atrocity. The latter is of decisive importance for the contemporaries, for they have to judge guilt, albeit only very conditionally for the surviving community of the following generations. For them, the loss of their past, for ever separated from the present through the act of genocide, is what matters. For this reason, the stigma of violence and the ways it is passed on in the transmission from witnesses to the following generations gains effectiveness [*Wirkkraft*] instead — as one might be inclined to assume — of losing it.

The neo-nationalistic revisionists in Germany have thoroughly recognized this. Their efforts to operate with the concept of the stigma are not merely trivial psychologizing. They rather fail to recognize the particular German injury that results from the stigma of murder and the way it intercedes into the experience of mass death. They argue that a stigma has been forced upon the Germans after 1945 as part of the occupational regimes. The attempt to hold Germans guilty for war and genocide was intended, so they say, to marginalize Germany within the international community and to keep Germans in a state of dependence and obfuscation of power [*Machtvergessenheit*].[19] In this view, the stigma of violence is reinvested in German history, which they conceive of as ruptured by virtue of the allied victory. The stigma of violence becomes then either a reflection of the bankruptcy of German politics, or simply an effect of the German defeat. This is a falsification of the historical record — and not only because victim and perpetrator are accounted against each other and German genocide becomes an invention of the allies. Rather, the experience of mass death, refracted in the stigma of violence, constitutes the inner history of the Germans in the twentieth century. It makes up their particular identity. The tense dual reality of mass death has stamped the German national and cultural memory in the twentieth century.

The attempt to pass off some changeling on the Germans as their identity instead of their own unmistakable history is infamous in the face of the actual disappearance of the living memory of mass death. Yet the limits of such attempts to liberate the Germans from their memory should be evident as well. The expectation and hope that the particularly

19. *Die selbstbewusste Nation. "Anschwellender Bocksgesang" und weitere Beiträge zu einer deutschen Debatte*, eds. Heimo Schwilk and Ulrich Schacht (Berlin: Ullstein, 1995).

German history of mass death as one of the most overwhelming realities of the epoch of world wars can be swept away, if only for once the sovereignty of the nation's own history could be restored, is as preposterous as it is a phantasm. The Germans cannot walk away from this past, in which they were the main agents, without abandoning themselves or drifting off into some dreamland. The denial of historical thinking does not do away with the past — but it is injurious to the present. A renewed national history will have no choice but to accept and reflect upon the experience of mass death and the resulting manifold and contradictory work on death; that is, the work on the separation both from those whom the Germans killed and from the Germans who were killed. For that is the identity of the Germans emerging from the era of world wars. They do in fact step out of this era, but their past cannot be re-fashioned or unmade if it is to be the German past, instead of one that is randomly pieced together as some fictitious Germanness.

II

The German experience with mass death was a many-layered and contested process. I wish here merely to single out one element in order to illustrate the feasibility of a historical consideration of this problematic and its cultural impact: the inversion of war trauma from World War I to World War II. The very fact of this transformation suggests that the experience of mass death has to be understood not as an anthropological or psychological constant, but as a cultural field of contention. This definition is not the least important because in the psychological investigation of trauma and in its literary-historical appropriation, which provide the basis for this consideration, a mostly ahistorical and individualized notion of the association with mass death predominates.[20]

How conflicted and publicly disputed the experience of war death can be, becomes particularly evident in and after World War I. At the time it was everywhere emphasized that the experience of industrial war could find no adequate expression, because it transcended all means of representation; and yet war and death were discussed and written about without evasion, war was ceaselessly represented in word and image, and the consequences of war death were extensively

20. I am thinking here in particular of the excellent work by Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects. Mourning, Memory, and Film in Post-War Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990).

debated in the scientific and the public spheres.[21] At scarcely any other time did war and death stand so much in the center as in the first post-war era — and the historical interest of intellectuals in the culture of the seventeenth century is only a further expression of this configuration.[22] Thus, there existed a kind of "public sphere of death," which in many respects stood in contrast not only to the presumed crisis of representation as a result of war, but also to the preceding development of the rites of death, in which death had been increasingly banished from the public sphere into the realm of the private and intimate.[23]

This public sphere was deeply divided. It produced competing remembrances of death, which imputed alternative meanings of mass death. The lingering competition of these remembrances led to a consequential shift in the discourse about war death. Notwithstanding the attempt at distancing or numbing the experience of death, the articulation of physical and psychic shock in response to the experience of mass death was the prevalent form of reaction, as was the emotional and altogether pragmatic flight from the war (for example, in the war neuroses during the war and in the mass desertions of 1918) — a reaction which past work on the mentality of war had all too frequently neglected.[24] It found its expression less in a specific politics (this was the disappointment of the revolution of 1918) than in an emotional and often sentimental culture of mourning, one that sought for an expression of personal injury as well as for the suffering in the face of death. Above all, religious rites took up this experience of suffering, although religion too, like literature, science, and the welfare state, never did justice to the needs of the mourners. An excess of sorrow is interwoven into the fabric of the Weimar Republic, which neither the institutions of culture nor those of

21. J. M. Winter, *The Experience of World War I* (New York: Oxford UP, 1989); *Frontalltag im Ersten Weltkrieg. Wahn und Wirklichkeit*, eds. Bernd Ulrich and Benjamin Ziemann (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1994).

22. This confrontation with war, relocated on the axis of time, can be found for example in Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, eds Rolf Tiedmann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), according to the dedication "conceived 1916, written 1925." Of further importance for the following is the latency period between conception and realization.

23. The classic study of this, now as before, is Philippe Ariès, *Essais sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident du moyen âge à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1975); somewhat more laborious is Armin Nassehi and Georg Werner, *Tod, Modernität und Gesellschaft. Entwurf einer Theorie der Todesverdrängung* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1989).

24. See, however, the important work by Robert W. Whalen, *Bitter Wounds. German Victims of the Great War, 1914-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984).

politics could accommodate. This sentimental culture of death was, however, supplanted by that hardened and cynical notion of "life in death," which has since become the distinctive historical image of the remembrance of war death in the Weimar Republic and which exercises a unmistakable attraction, not only for the neo-nationalistic right, today.[25] The cold, apparently affectless confrontation with death was present from the beginning, but it gained the upper hand, at least in intellectual circles, only in the late twenties.[26] The origins of this cult of coldness have little to do with the war itself, although it was quickly identified with the fiction of soldierly community, which in an appeal to killing (and fantasies of killing) overcame pain and death.[27] This entire complex then became centrally important for the heroic death cult of National Socialism, which ritually froze suffering by monumentally surmounting death and exploiting it as the point of departure for a cult of battle.[28] An unmistakable path led from this cult of death to the annihilation policies of the Third Reich, although the National Socialist politics of annihilation draws from multiple sources.

Both images of death — the experience of sorrow (Scheler) and that of pain (Jünger)[29] — share a common core in the sense of injury. The experience of mass death in the World War I was, long before the defeat in 1918, an experience of the radical depreciation of the individual and his or her ability to construct life deliberately and meaningfully. The scandal of the destruction of the body combined with the scandal of the destruction of human and social bonds — the sum of everyday work on the society (as for example when men came home war cripples, or when widows and orphans confronted a rubble heap of life's plans with the death of husband or father). War death was then

25. Bernd Hüppauf, "Schlachtenmythen und die Konstruktion des 'Neuen Menschen,'" *"Keiner fühlt sich hier mehr als Mensch...." Erlebnis und Wirkung des ersten Weltkrieges* (Essen: Klartext, 1993) 43-84.

26. Helmut Lethen, *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte, Lebensversuche zwischen den Kriegen* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1994).

27. Fundamental to the problem of pain and anasthesia in the interwar era: Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," *October* 62 (1992): 3-42.

28. George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford UP, 1990).

29. The two definitive texts are Max Scheler, "Vom Sinn des Leidens," *Schriften zur Soziologie und Weltanschauungslehre* (Bern: Francke, 1963) 36-72; and Ernst Jünger, "Über den Schmerz," *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 7, *Betrachtungen zur Zeit* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978), 143-91.

not only unimaginably horrible and inhuman (as Otto Dix depicted it), but also gnawed quite directly on the construction of the individual's and the society's survival. The radical devaluation of the husband on the battlefield played off the devastation of the wife and children through fear of death, hunger, and epidemic at home, with the devaluation of the nation in defeat and of the society in inflation, so that we gain in this multiplicity of injuries an idea of the cultural crisis in Germany. We also gain a historical sense of the challenge to the traditional, religious rites of death (and of its ultimate breakdown in face of the experience of mass death), as well as of the attractions that came with notions of hardening the individual and the collective body politic. The latter seized the whole of German society.

Historians have come to characterize a state of overwhelming and intractable, individual and collective agitation in the face of the experience of mass death as the typical reaction to industrial warfare. It is as though body and mind could not adequately apprehend and certainly not process the onrushing sensations of technological warfare — the bodily and emotional shocks and injuries — and these then sought an unintended expression — mimetic reaction — in convulsions of the body and the mind. Even the mere expectation of battle could generate these emotions. This is, in any case, the prevailing image of "shell-shock," which was itself a popular psychological condensation of different illness profiles. The debates emerging around this complex may be left undecided here.[30] They remained debates only with respect to World War I. The German experience of mass death in and after World War II was certainly no less terrifying, but it was an altogether different one. It manifested itself primarily as an experience of torpor, instead of an experience of inundating agitation, as in World War I. The contemporary military psychology called this condition "apathy." It could be attended by hyper-activity, which was designated by the term "panic."[31] Both suggest a lack of will and self-direction. They also point to a state of utter abandonment and disorientation both in

30. Bernd Ulrich, "Nerven und Krieg. Skizzierung einer Beziehung," *Geschichte und Psychologie. Annäherungsversuche*, ed. Bedrich Loewenstein (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1992) 163-92; Chris Feudtner, "'Minds the Dead Have Ravished': Shell Shock, History, and the Ecology of Disease-Systems," *History of Science* 31 (1993): 377-420.

31. See the scattered remarks, particularly in the manuscript version: Hubert Fischer, "Der deutsche Sanitätsdienst 1921-1945. Organisation, Dokumente und persönliche Erfahrung, Band 4;" BA-Militärarchiv (MA) Msg. 177/26.

space and time. The idea of a "blocked time" — a traumatic splitting of one's life history, in which the experience of death was arrested outside the physical and emotional lifetime in a zone of death — came into being only in World War II.[32] The condition described by "apathy" suggested that this blockage could spread to the whole of a person's life and consume his or her vitality. The confinement of the trauma of war and death, in contrast to the encroachment of trauma on body and soul, marks the war experience of World War II. That is, we can observe a complete inversion of the experience of mass death in the progression from World War I to World War II.

There is much to find fault with in this contemporary conceptualization meant to describe traumatic states both of soldiers and of bombing victims. It conceals, for example, reversions to physiological theory that are typical for the military psychiatry of the Third Reich. It effaces the brutality with which World War I war neuroses were suppressed. Important, however, is the unmistakable surprise of these specialists in facing an entirely unexpected reaction to mass death.[33] For "apathy" is a reaction to war that filters into military psychiatry more by happenstance than as a scientifically founded reflection, ill-conceived as it may have been, regarding the problem of trauma in World War II. It was an overwhelming fact, particularly late in the war, rather than a theory. It found popular expression in discussions both of the vacant gaze and the otherwise quite incomprehensible, death-defying impulse to activity of the front soldiers and of those made homeless by bombings, or in the hopeless wandering of refugees, which was later-on taken up in postwar film and literature. This condition was subsequently described rather well as a numbing of the emotions as long as one takes this description quite literally.[34] The deadening of the emotional world may well be the prevailing form of the physical and psychic reaction to the experience of mass

32. The possibilities of a detailed evaluation of the evidence (as, for example, the Armee-Sanitätsabteilung 522; BA-MA RH50/146-147) are only suggested in this.

33. For preliminary work on military psychiatry, see G. Komo, *"Für Volk und Vaterland." Militärpsychiatrie in den Weltkriegen* (Münster: Lit, 1992). The connection between "Vernichtungspsychiatrie" (Dirk Blasius, *"Einfache Seelenstörung." Geschichte der deutschen Psychiatrie 1800-1945* [Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994] 173ff.) and *völkische Regenerationpsychologie* remains largely unresearched.

34. Robert Jay Lifton and Eric Markusen, *The Genocidal Mentality. Nazi Holocaust and Nuclear Threat* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); Roger J. Spiller, "Shell Shock," *American Heritage* 41.4 (1990): 1-74; *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995).

death in and after World War II. There is more to say about this moment of living death, abandoned in the folds of an externally impelled life, but this will have to be set aside for a more thorough presentation. What should be remembered is "apathy," the extinguishing of the emotive capacities of the body and the soul, as a paradigmatic reaction to the experience of mass death in World War II.

Instead of sorrow and mourning as expression of the reaction to mass death, we find an exclusion and a quarantine of the dead and of the experience of death among the survivors. This detachment was, of course, never stable. It collapsed repeatedly, only to expose a glimpse of a raw wound. Particularly during the 1940s and 1950s, one cannot escape the impression that a good deal of effort was employed to keep this wound closed — in no way, then, a forgetting or a silence, but a convulsive closing of the injuries as a result of the experience of mass death.[35] For the consideration of the resulting blind alleys through the German death zone, it is decisive that this distancing from death and the attendant confinement of the death experience cannot simply be understood as a consequence of the excess of killing. It is rather a consequence of the predominating death cult in National Socialism, which had promised deliverance from the wounds of World War I. The National Socialist valorization of death (and of killing) withdrew death from the realm of human beings and into an inhuman or superhuman space. Their planned death fortresses [*Totenburgen*] are as much an emphatic as an overwhelming example of this.[36] These memorials were planned in a grand and monumental style. Commemoration of the dead was a major theme of National Socialist culture, but a heroic corpse is of course always an ultimately unknown corpse, so that the fundamentally civilizing work of death rites, the renewal of exchange among the living, is denied the survivors. Death becomes inescapable and can only be conquered in death. In this National Socialist cult of death there is no community of survivors who strive toward the other shore in their memories of the departed. As long as this cult of death held power, the survivors remained captive to

35. On this point should begin also the overdue, critical debate with Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* (Munich: Piper, 1977), because this work, so important for the Federal Republic, obscured the experience and the traumatic consequences of mass death.

36. A preliminary investigation of this theme is by Jay W. Beard, *To Die for Germany: Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Bloomington Indiana UP, 1990); see also Meinhold Lurz, *Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland, Band 5: Drittes Reich* (Heidelberg: Esprint, 1977).

the death zone of war. Setting a taboo on religious rituals as an expression of sorrow and mourning went along with this. If the National Socialist death cult never managed to suppress the expression of human sorrow or, for that matter, religious rites, it was surprisingly successful in the paralysis of public emotions of sorrow. Crying was not *völkisch*; grief was unheroic; rites of mourning were prohibited.[37]

The psychic and cultural costs of this suppression of sorrow and mourning are palpable in the postwar period, and it took a long time until the memory of war death — in contrast to the "war experience" — could be articulated at all.[38] There arose that peculiar insensitivity to death that was to be so shocking for the postwar generations (reproduced well in the Berlin postwar photograph of people bathing next to newly dug war graves).[39] What their angry reaction did not understand was the fact that this want of feeling was part of an undiminished inner presence of death.[40] The numbing of emotions — not just a want of feeling and its re-fashioning through sentimentality, as had been the case with the generation of *Flakhelfer*,[41] but the restriction of the sensorium, everywhere accompanied by an inability of communication bordering on speechlessness — this was its principal manifestation. The experience of wholesale death in World War II sat like a "congealed lava mass"[42] in all the survivors. It became an experience arrested next to or outside of time, as Hans Erich Nossack described this in 1943 in his autobiographical writing about the bombing attack on Hamburg,

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37. Klaus Latzel, *Vom Sterben im Krieg. Wandlungen in der Einstellung zum Soldatentod vom Siebenjährigen Krieg bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Warendorf: Fahlbusch, 1988); Hans Joachim Schröder, *Die gestohlenen Jahre. Erzählgeschichte und Geschichtserzählung im Interview: Der Zweite Weltkrieg aus der Sicht ehemaliger Mannschaftssoldaten* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992).

38. Michael Rutschky, *Erfahrungshunger. Ein Essay über die siebziger Jahre* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Tachschenbuch, 1982); Anita Eckstaedt, *Nationalsozialismus in der "Zweiten Generation." Psychoanalyse von Hörigkeitsverhältnissen* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1989).

39. Dagmar Barnouw, *Germany 1945: Views of War and Violence* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996).

40. This actually became evident only in the flood of remembering on occasion of the fifty year commemoration of the end of World War II. The reflection about this public spectacle of memory began along with the event. Klaus Naumann, "Dresdner Pietà oder: Die Grenzen deutscher Selbstversöhnung. Eine Fallstudie zum 'Gedenkjahr 1995'" (Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ms.).

41. Jane Kramer, "Letter From Germany: The Politics of Memory," *New Yorker* (14 August 1995) 48-65, with a portrait of Helmut Kohl as representative of this generation.

42. Koselleck, "Vielerlei Abschied" 22.

Der Untergang.[43] There was indeed typically a commemoration of death, but there was no public sphere of death as there had been in the Weimar Republic.[44] The association with the dead was reduced to a stage whisper, not really repressed into the unconscious, but enclosed between conscious and unconscious — a half-waking presence. Mass death continued to have an effect in this "semi-consciousness"[45] long after the war, which led to that permanence of numbing that became in many respects the primary characteristic of the postwar period.

If the paralysis of the emotions and the resultant combination of apathy and panic resulted primarily from the National Socialist death cult's heroizing of the German dead, it also had a further cause, one much more difficult to grasp. The experience of mass death combined with a widely disseminated feeling of guilt, already before the end of the war and before the allied distribution of images and films of the concentration and extermination camps. This guilt diffusely bore on the fate of the Jews (and not primarily remorsefully, but spitefully and aggressively), in which the primary themes were exclusion and expulsion, but also a more veiled one: mass annihilation (less in extermination camps as on and behind the Eastern Front).[46] It is this conception which, for example, understood the air raids as punishment and the Russian barbarizing of battle as revenge — without accounting for what these were supposed to be punishing and avenging. It is here that the stigma of violence developed, which then in the postwar era — as a result of the confrontation of Germans with the reality of genocide — began to pervade the German remembrance of death. The reality of these feelings of guilt is just as palpable as the blockade which, after 1945, was swiftly erected against a public discussion of German guilt, and which developed into a network of lies and obfuscations that so profoundly alarmed observers like Hannah Arendt.[47]

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43. Hans Erich Nossack, *Der Untergang* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1991).

44. Gerhard Schneider, *"...nicht umsonst gefallen?" Kriegerdenkmäler und Kriegstotenkult in Hannover* (Hannover: Hahnsche, 1991) 221ff.

45. It is not accidental that Hermann Broch understood precisely this condition ["*Dämmerungszustand*"] as characteristic for the fascistoid "masses"; see Broch, *Massenwahntheorie. Beiträge zu einer Psychologie der Politik* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1979).

46. A small example of this is offered by Valentin Senger, *Der Heimkehrer. Eine Verwunderung über die Nachkriegszeit* (Munich: Luchterland, 1995). An evaluation of the comprehensive existing sources (German, American, and English) on this theme is still to be undertaken.

47. Hannah Arendt, *Besuch in Deutschland* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1993).

The discussions of memory and forgetting that have resulted from this situation, and the accounting for the dead, are just as outrageous today as they were after the war. However, the mere critique of the German passion to be counted among the victors in the present and the victims in the past overlooks for its part the fact that suppressing the question of guilt as a way of approaching the stigma of violence had very palpable consequences. If recovery from emotional numbing was so slow and hesitant, and if an entire generation and their children have never stepped out of the shadow of the experience of death, this has above all to do with the fact that a public consciousness of the stigma of violence did not really emerge until the late seventies.

The objection of the new Right that the German victims of the war were omitted from memory[48] is for this reason a double infamy. It suppresses the fact that the cause of the silence about the dead and the blockade in the association with mass death is to be found in the National Socialist cult of death, and in its prevention of death rites directed at survival and the recovery of civility. Moreover, it overlooks that this internal blockade, which was one of the most enduring consequences of the Third Reich, could not be counteracted precisely because there was no public debate on war and genocide. Once this discussion took hold, the paralysis of emotions was eased, leading in the eighties to a veritable German cult of remembering. That is the secret of the strange double success of the television series *Holocaust* on the one hand, and *Heimat* on the other.[49] Only the former had made the latter possible.

If it is true that nations are in principle open — one would like to add, public — communities of memory, then the German discussion about national identity still needs to learn that the cultural memory of the Germans has been marked in high measure by the experience and the association with mass death — in the form of mass killing and being killed — as a signature of this age. It is a matter of an identity that bears the stigma of genocide and that must find in this stigma the site for the interment of its dead. Paramount for this is overcoming the National Socialist death cult's legacy of devastation and its systematic destruction of an economy of the emotions. If the Germans wish to be a nation, then they can in no case refer to a normality of others (such as the French or the

48. See the advertisement "8. Mai 1945 — Gegen das Vergessen," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (7 April 1995) 3, and their self-pity as victims of the *Erinnerungsversuch*.

49. Anton Kaes, *Deutschlandbilder: Die Wiederkehr der Geschichte als Film* (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 1987).

Americans), but must take an interest in their own history and their own dead, the victims as well as the culprits, and their equally divided and interrelated histories. Not too long ago that was a matter of assigning guilt. But now it will increasingly become a question of protecting the civility of succeeding generations in light of a passing era.

III

Modern history offers a unique contribution to historical consciousness in that it sublates the experience of a generation in the evaluation of an era.[50] The feasibility and usefulness of this undertaking have been much debated, wholly aside from the fact that the great majority of historians have confined themselves to the mere administration of the past. Yet neither the one nor the other alters the fact that the contours of a passing age have become visible in the present and require a more precise determination. How is it possible to make sense of the rubble heap of European politics, the clash of contrary milieus and ideologies, the confrontation of national, power-political ambitions and explosive, racist, and bigoted fanaticism — a landscape of ruins, which in the second half of the century has so suddenly given way to the construction of a prospering (partial-) Europe that has acted like a magnet on the European periphery and finally also on the "other" part of Europe cut off in the imperial sphere of the Soviet Union? That is the decisive point of departure for the survey of an era of mass death.

Due to a lack of experience in answering this kind of "grand" question, one will look for models here also. In this case it is not inconvenient that the history of another great war stands at the beginning of the writing of Western history. At least Thucydides encourages us to recognize that this kind of epochal observation is necessary and possible. And the reading of classical models is not exhausted in this alone. For the history of the Peloponnesian war — and here I see a fruitful point of departure for an analysis of the passing century of European wars — also suggests that we seek the causes and the courses of really great wars in the struggle for the realization of democracy, the government of the people. And for this reason: the challenge to the political and social order of the nineteenth century by the rise of mass democracy and by the struggle over the form of mass democratic governance

50. Adopted from Arno Borst, "Befreit von der Pflicht zu töten," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (5 May 1995) 43. He juxtaposes *Menschenalter* and *Zeitalter*.

is the abutment of the elliptical movement of this era from mass death to mass prosperity. The causes of both world wars correspondingly lie not — or at least not predominantly — in the interests of the states (power-politics), the economy (profit), or ideology (*Weltanschauung*). Rather these wars were the explosive release of the internal and external tensions that resulted from the conflicts over democracy.

The democratic question as a political and social question about the possibilities and forms of government by the people replaced the social question of the nineteenth century.[51] The confrontation about the possibilities and limitations of democracy then wove like a red thread through the whole of European politics. The egalitarianism closely proceeding from the strivings for democracy was in the twentieth century as much a challenge for autocrats as for the *juste milieu* of liberal Constitutionalism — but not, as it turned out, for modern despots. The realization of the overwhelming desire for the self-determination of the people, the great resistances, the articulation of national self-determination in the individual rights of the citizens and universal human rights, the halting attempts to suppress or revoke advances in internal and external self-determination — these were the primary conflict zones around which alternative ideological systems crystallized.

War as a response to the challenge of democracy must not be confused with the Western allies' formulation of a "war for democracy." The validity of this slogan may remain undecided here, although I would grant it greater meaning than has recently been the case with many historians.[52] These historians have reduced it to a kind of false consciousness, a world power ultimately fighting only for global hegemony, ideologically blinded and driven by a Manichaean hatred of Germany, the United States of America. As with all these conclusions about the "other" side, the problem lies on one's own. The slogan "war for democracy" legitimated not only the war efforts of the Western powers (or, better said, the Americans). It articulated rather a project for which there had been a great struggle in all the nations of Europe. Whatever there might have been to this war-cry, the quest for democracy was a thoroughly European problem. This project failed, and it had to be brought back to Europe — and not only to Germany — from outside. This prob-

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51. Geoff Eley, "War and the Twentieth Century State," *Daedalus* 124 (1995) 155-74.

52. Detlef Junker, *The Manichaen Trap: American Perceptions of the German Empire 1871-1945* (Washington D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1995).

lematic can be delineated on the basis of three great fields of conflict.

The first is the development of self-determination in Europe — and, by extension to global war, the self-determination of the colonial world. The differentiation of compact, territorial nation states constructed on the principle of self-determination belongs to the fundamental developments of the twentieth century. And yet the principle of national self-determination has, now as before, a decidedly bad reputation. From Sarajevo (1914) to Sarajevo (1994), its realization has been brought about in connection with violence, terror and war, and a general condition of uncertainty, in contrast to which the preceding order of the great powers seems a safe-haven of stability. For this reason not a few observers look back to the time of the central and eastern European empires and see in them a benevolently ordered future of Europe. The escalated uncertainty of the relations in and between European states that were forming in 1918-19, and those forming in 1989-91 is not to be mistaken, and as a result the call for great and protecting powers seems to gain a certain plausibility. Still, the principle of national self-determination has succeeded against all internal and external attacks and proven to be irreversible. Neither minorities nor empires have stopped the development toward the integral nation state, which can therefore be seen as a typical product of Europe. That the majority of European nation states are a product of the twentieth century and not of a thousand year history is something to be set against the claims of the neo-nationalists in all countries. Likewise to be noted is that with the completion of nation state building in Europe in the years 1989-91 the history of imperial nations in Europe (whose models were the imperial "Western" nation states) also came to a conclusion. The devolution of imperial power in the overseas regions runs parallel to the devolution of empire in Europe. The formation of a Europe of nation states, in other words, points to a transformation of territorial forms of government, which encompasses also the great and imperial powers.

This development is dragged back and forth between imperial and ethnic politics. To the internal threat of the development of the nation state belongs the tendency to ethnicize the state's people and the corresponding effort to create a homogeneous state citizenry — a tendency which through the vitality of established minorities as well as through new movements of migration is at the same time advanced and offset. The attempt to form an ethnically homogeneous state has in any case driven to the brink of ruin all the states arising out of the European

new order after World War I. It not only weakened these states, but also drew them into the vortex of European wars. One could say with some accuracy that this European civil war (in contrast to the global war of ideologies) comprises the matrix for the great conflagrations. Both world wars arose out of this struggle and, hence, these wars always remained composite wars, in which ethnic and regional wars were carried out both at the level of the great power confrontations and beneath this level, and these wars continued undiminished into the post war era. Poland, Yugoslavia, and Turkey are the primary theaters of these "little" wars, but Austria, Italy, Spain, and Germany were equally affected by them.[53] The significance of these wars in relation to the great conflagrations, and their role in Austrian and German war policy has so far scarcely been investigated.[54]

External threats to the development of the nation state can be found in the reservations of imperial European powers regarding the principle of equal rights among European nation states. These reservations could express themselves in a negative diplomacy, if, say, France or Great Britain promoted the development of the eastern central European nation states as a counterbalance to Germany, but did nothing to secure equal rights for these states within a European political order — and this completely independent of the possibilities and limits of a European economic policy. (Only the majority rule of the EC brought about effective political change in this respect.) The continuity of great power politics found its chilling apotheosis in the French and British diplomacy on occasion of the Munich agreement of 1938, where, in the style of the power politics of past centuries, the Czechoslovakian Republic was divided following the principle of "convenience," with the aim of pacifying the Third Reich as an expanding great power. This late imperial diplomacy found its correspondence in the revisionism of the German elites, which regarded eastern and southern Europe as their own vested sphere of interest. This revisionism did not necessarily entail military conquest and subjugation, but its goal remained the subordination of these states. It was imperial policy. However, the internal German

53. As a single example: Mikolaj Terles, *Ethnic Cleansing of Poles in Volhynia and East Galicia, 1942-1946* (Toronto: Alliance of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1993). As indicator: Michael Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985).

54. Vejas G. Liulevicius, "War Land: Peoples, Lands, and National Identity on the Eastern Front in World War I," Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1994.

debates suggest that the imperial idea itself was changing and radicalizing. The National Socialists retracted older perspectives of imperial great power politics, liking expansion with racist politics. The occupation of Poland and Yugoslavia indicates how old colonial(-ist) dreams combined with racist planning to form a politics of terror with the aim, not simply of exploiting peoples and territories, but of destroying societies as possible sites of autonomous nation state development. The means to this end was a combination of forced ethnic dislocation and imperial reorganization of Europe. This policy was put into practice in a war that deliberately destroyed the political, social, and cultural cohesions of societies in order to create an anomie of social relations. In an age of national self-determination this has become the predominant means of occupation.[55] It is entirely in keeping with this image that the Soviet Union, as the last imperial power within Europe, tried to continue this process in the eastern European states after 1945.[56]

The second field of conflict is a result of the ideological antagonisms of the 1930s. Ernst Nolte, of course, took up this point and, with readily transparent apologist intentions, set the opposition of National Socialism and fascism on the one hand and Bolshevism on the other at the focus of a "European Civil War" thesis.[57] Years earlier, Arno Mayer understood the decisive result of World War I to be a world civil war-like opposition between Leninism and Wilsonianism.[58] Important in these reflections is the fact that they describe National Socialism as a world political challenge. As yet, this challenge has been analyzed only insufficiently. Three things seem important to me:

1. One will have to call to mind the crisis of European Constitutionalism inherited from the nineteenth century, which in however different ways, affected all European nations. This was in all cases a crisis of traditional liberalism — especially evident in nations with such different

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55. Jan Tomasz Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation: the Generalgouvernement, 1939-1944* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979); Czeslaw Madajczyk, *Die Okkupationpolitik Nazideutschlands in Polen 1939-1945* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1988).

56. Keith Sword, *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939-1948* (New York, London: St. Martins, 1994); Jan Thomasz Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: the Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988).

57. Ernst Nolte, *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917-1945: Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus* (Frankfurt/Main: Propylaen, 1987).

58. Arno J. Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1959).

liberal traditions as France or Austria — in response to the political and social challenges that came with the extension of suffrage and mass participation in politics. There were indeed initial reforms everywhere in the inter-war period that sought to overcome this crisis. But these reforms and their architects were neither politically nor intellectually equal to the challenges of the inter-war period.[59] This internal European crisis was the precondition for the unleashing a new round of global competition over the hemispheric division of labor extending beyond Europe, which was impelled forward into an escalating war by National Socialist Germany.

2. A new "subjective" factor began to shape the international power struggle extending beyond the European borders; not only the expansion of markets and power, but the political and social articulation of alternative life-worlds became an object of international conflicts. The furious antagonism of the Third Reich to the Soviet Union and the United States therefore cannot be understood exclusively as a globally extended progression of power politics.[60] There developed rather a politics that was emotionally charged and beset by fanaticisms. German policy toward America and the Soviet Union was accompanied by eruptions of hate and enthusiasm — (anti-) Americanism and (anti-) Bolshevism.[61] It was identity politics instead of power politics that was extended into warfare. The explicit goal of National Socialist war policy was the immunizing of a Germanicized, European folk (and racial) body against a presumed American and Soviet challenge, the prerequisite for this being the conquest of *Lebensraum* (and with that the destruction of the Soviet Union), and the confrontation with the United States (and with that the militarization of transatlantic relations.) This militarized identity politics was globally oriented and claimed to offer a universalist alternative to Americanism or Bolshevism.[62] One is inclined to apostrophize it as Germanism, and also to grant it that missionary ability and readiness that one generally associates with the two competing global powers.

59. Hans Mommsen, *Die verspielte Freiheit. Der Weg der Republik von Weimar in den Untergang* (Berlin: Propylaen, 1989).

60. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).

61. Dan Diner, *Verkehrte Welt. Antiamerikanismus in Deutschland* (Frankfurt/Main: Eichborn, 1993). A similarly concise, comprehensive essay on the relationship to Russia and the Soviet Union is unknown to me.

62. Here, in my opinion, one could continue what was initiated by Andreas Hillgruber's *Der Zenit des Zweiten Weltkrieges, Juli 1941* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1977).

This Germanism made aggressive and far-reaching claims about the inequality of human beings and the supremacy of a Germanized race of Europeans, in contrast to the United States and the Soviet Union, who, with their own universalist ideologies of freedom and equality — universals that carried along their own exclusionary strategies — had established themselves against or at least at a distance from Europe.

3. The United States and the Soviet Union, for all their universal claims, had been isolated on the periphery of the European world and were occupied with themselves until the National Socialist expansion policy drew them into the war, a war which they picked up and conducted as a global war in actual fact. This is not to say that the two great states did not pursue imperial designs of their own, but these always stood in significant disproportion to their universalist ideologies. They remained imitations of European models that had to be transformed against considerable internal resistance in order to be able to act from the position of their own abundance of power in a manner befitting a world power. The mobilization against National Socialist Germany finally gave the universalist conceptions of the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics a genuine power political substance. Because until this time Republicanism and Communism had indeed been universalist conceptions, but they still remained, like the universalist goals expressed during the French Revolution, nationally organized and imperially embellished. Only at the height of World War II did they acquire truly global dimensions, in the fusion of ideological claims, power political presence, and projection of alternative life-worlds. With the strategic turn of the war in 1942-43 they gained the political initiative. The fusion of universalist, utopian thinking and a global dynamic of violence that came into being at that time, and which defined the cold war, began to fall apart only after 1989-91.[63] This was by no means the end of history, but one would have to say that the great European traditions of instituting international political order, in the end eccentrically organized from the far ends of the continent, were exhausted.

The third great field of conflict was the democratization of German society, in whose failure the cause for the outbreak of both world wars is to be found. Reservations against this argument come primarily from

63. Patrick Brogan, *Eastern Europe, 1939-1989: The Fifty Years War* (London: Bloomsbury, 1990); Richard Crockatt, *The Fifty Years War: The United States and the Soviet Union in World Politics, 1941-1991* (New York, London: Routledge, 1996).

representatives of diplomatic history, who bemoan the neglect of international relations as a factor in war policy. If these reservations are not convincing, at least in their present form,[64] the dominant thesis of the structural crisis of Germany as the cause of both world wars likewise falls short.[65] The suggestion that national society does not conduct war on its own accord, or in any case that it is not to be won for it, is indeed a remarkable hope, but nothing more.[66] There is little evidence for it. The remarkably widespread readiness of a good part of German society to engage in war again and again, and to fight it through to the end, seems to me what is noteworthy about the German situation. Revolutionary movement in World War I and resistance in World War II existed, to be sure, and both had their effect. But their power and meaning are highly overestimated — not the least because it is difficult to comprehend why a nation will conduct war to the point of its own destruction. Without an exorbitant degree of self-mobilization neither World War I nor World War II is conceivable — and as reluctant as the support of a variety of social groups was during certain phases of the war, it was not involuntary in World War I all the way to the defeat, and in the case of World War II it went far beyond that.

The readiness for war only makes historical sense if we understand war as a form of participation, and as an opportunity for individual and national self-realization. The mobilization of society for war then becomes crucial when we bring it into connection with what must be called a "will to annihilation," which in particular determined the war praxis of the Third Reich, but which is already to be recognized in World War I.[67] This will to annihilation can be perceived in "grand" strategies (questions of alliance formation, assessment of the enemy) and "imperial" politics (occupation) as well as in the operational conduct of war in a narrower sense (scorched earth, treatment of enemy prisoners of war) as well as in military tactics (reprisals, war against

64. Klaus Hildebrand, *Das vergangene Reich. Deutsche Aussenpolitik von Bismark bis Hitler 1871-1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1995) largely lacks a discussion of nation state development in Europe.

65. Volker Berghahn, *Germany and the Approach to War in 1914* (New York: St. Martins, 1993).

66. Wolfram Wette, *Militarismus und Pazifismus: Auseinandersetzung mit den deutschen Kriegen* (Bremen: Donat, 1991).

67. Horst Boog et al., *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion*. (Vol.4: *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, [Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983]) ; Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991).

civilians). It was therefore not imposed "ideology," but became a form of military behavior. One would almost wish that this war of annihilation had been conducted by a rabble of soldiers in the manner of Theweleit's volunteer corps Rambos.[68] Although this latter group should not be underestimated in the *Wehrmacht* (and especially in the SS), the widespread phenomenon of excessive violence cannot be explained in terms of this alone. The *Wehrmacht* was a conscript army, in which — despite all the stereotypes of a warlike masculinity as a common foundation — all possible kinds of people stood in arms.[69] The alarming thing about the "barbarization of the war" is that while not every soldier was entangled in the murderous logic of the extermination war, almost every soldier collaborated, once confronted with the appropriate situation.[70] That "one" took part in this, with so little thought and with a mixture of pride and horror (and on the eastern Front with an incredible fear that persisted throughout the whole of the postwar period), this is what is historically significant for the consideration of a failed democratic development.

Violence became excessive with neutralizing the moral and cultural norms, which traditionally in martial organizations delimit the command to kill. In World War II it was a mixture of orders (to exterminate certain groups) and the loosening and lifting of prohibitions (removal of sanctions against punishable offenses) — with the simultaneous tightening of disciplinary authority (concerning desertion). Since battle was stylized to a permanent manifestation of life, the aura of uniqueness and singularity of martial violence was effaced. Because the war was understood not as a confrontation between equals, but as means of determining the inequality of races, it undercut the respect for the enemy, which constitutes the main source for a limitation of violence and is the foundation of co-existence after the war has passed. Because the *Wehrmacht* imposed its own soldierly superiority as a norm, and measured the individual soldier against this norm, it created in the truest sense of the word a murderous compulsion to succeed. In the otherwise thoroughly unheroic life history of the conscripted soldiers, the fulfillment of this

68. Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt/Main: Roter Stern, 1977/78).

69. This diversity becomes evident in Walter Kempowski, *Das Echolot*, 4 vols. (Munich: A. Knaus, 1993).

70. Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Aaron Ascher, 1992).

deathly compulsion to succeed became the confirmation of one's own strength and superiority — a standard that was then desperately "maintained" even after the state of the war had long since changed, and the allied armies were forcing the Germans to retreat on all fronts.[71] Still, there can be no doubt that this compulsion to succeed was taken up by the soldiers and made their own. Out of this there arose a kind of collective, martial public.[72] War became — and here is the crux of these reflections — the drug of self-confirmation and an everyday, immensely violent and explosive alternative to the political self-determination of the masses. Self-confirmation as an alternative to self-determination is the formula for the domination of despots in an age of democracy. Extermination war is the medium of this amoral politics.

With this we have returned through the back door to our point of departure. For, as one can already learn from Thucydides, government of the people is never solely a problem of the suitable form of rule. The problem of political self-determination is tightly connected with the problem of personal responsibility, as is the ability of conscious critical action in public.[73] The failure of democracy is always also the failure of responsible action. In every "culture" within the German nation (be it bourgeois, Catholic, or socialist), this failure of responsibility and the delegation of judgment to higher authorities indicates a lack of "civility." In looking back on the failure of democracy in Germany, its surrendering in favor of despotic rule, we arrive once again at a historical-philosophical observation. The realization of the condition — forgive the archaic expression — of *morality* [*Sittlichkeit*] has always been the basis of reflections about forms of government, and, viewed in more detail, this was not only the case in the Peloponnesian War of Thucydides, but also in reflections about the Republican constitution, as Hannah Arendt understood it.[74] This morality and its foundation in responsible action were tested by the praxis of the extermination war,

71. Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: the Experience of Occupation, 1941-1944* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993).

72. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Geschichte und Eigensinn* (Frankfurt/Main: Zweitausendeins, 1981) 777ff.

73. Hannah Arendt, *Was ist Politik? Fragmente aus dem Nachlass*, ed. Ursula Ludz (Munich: Piper, 1993).

74. Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972). The decisive notion, which links the crisis of the Republic with the rise of totalitarianism, is lying, or — to employ the German conception — *Verrat*. A history of twentieth century rule in Germany could be written on the basis of this thematic.

which challenged the readiness for solidarity. No one exposes oneself to this testing deliberately, but only by means of one's second nature, one's civility, as it is articulated in social and national identities. Hence, it is not (only) an individual, but a collective challenge. In World War II, German *Sittlichkeit* was weighed and it was found to be wanting. The crisis of humanism exposed by the conduct of war was a profound crisis of German identity. It remains a rupture in German history. As a crisis of morality in its own time, this was a crisis of the self-determination of the individual and of the nation in the emerging mobile society of the twentieth century, of the status of equal rights in the nations of the European community, and of the understanding of the universal claim of human beings to self-realization.

Here again, we confront our initial question about the government of the people and about life in freedom, and have characterized with this the core of the challenge that came with the quest for democracy. The mission that Europe set itself, when this continent for the last time in this century was able to formulate politics on its own, was the realization of a civil constitution for Europe — for the political organization of power, as well as for the civility of the individual within a European order, one based upon democratically founded societies and nation states connected through exchange and communication in an international order. The European response to this challenge — impelled by National Socialist Germany — consisted of terror, annihilation, the destruction of politics, the derision of fundamental rights and the repudiation of human solidarity. This is the burden of the past, which affects all endeavors to construct a new, accountable politics for a sovereign Germany, and for a Europe growing increasingly together.

IV

Recalling the classical writing of history makes possible a historical interpretation of the era of world wars and of mass extermination, one that preserves the horrifying experiences and terror of this century, without sinking into despair or cynicism. It accomplishes this by seeing individual experiences elevated to a general one — in this case the confrontations surrounding the implementation of democracy within competing forms of rule. This is, as far as Germany and Europe are concerned, no triumphant history, but rather a history of failure and breakdown that has been paid for with enormous suffering. It is the history of a downfall, one that developed out of recent German and European

history and one that therefore cannot simply be omitted for the benefit of a better German or European past. There is no leap back into European liberalism or the modernity of the nineteenth century that would not have to pass through the experience of its failure in the twentieth century.[75] Nonetheless, there remains in this history a surplus of events that towers above the outer limits of even a daring historical narrative. This reality transgressing all limits is the stigma of violence, the shaping of this history through the National Socialist genocide against the European Jews. This genocide evades a consideration directed at the (historically) universal. The singularity of this genocide collapses the borders of the historical and the borders of the national, and with these the classical parameters of the writing of history.[76]

In view of the millions of killings in the two world wars, an element of unease remains in the consideration of the era. This unease cannot be allayed even by the fact that a history directed at the universal will evaluate the place of the great wars of the first half of the twentieth century, and the particular meaning of the extermination war in the development of Germany. Nothing seems adequate in light of the experience of suffering, which has deeply inflicted the European life-worlds and darkened the horizon of thought and action. Even more than this, the scale of the destruction and of the extermination of life stands in striking contradiction to the determination of the causes of these wars, which in contrast to the catastrophe that befell Europe always seem conspicuously minor. It is difficult to comprehend that human beings, acting more or less consciously, sent several million other human beings to their death. For this reason contemporary history tends to elevate the causes of these wars to the monstrous and the demonic — the German *Sonderweg*, the demonic nature of Hitler, or inescapable, existential structural crises.[77] This unease exposes a primary contradiction that is common to

75. This is overlooked by, among others, François Furet, "Jenseits der Jahrestage: Eine weltgeschichtliche Betrachtung," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (8 May 1995) 35.

76. I am taking as my starting point Jean-François Lyotard, *Der Widerstreit* (Munich: W. Fink, 1989). An alternative beginning is Dan Diner, "Zwischen Aporie und Apologie: Über die Grenzen der Historisierbarkeit des Nationalsozialismus," *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte?: zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit*, ed. Dan Diner (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer) 62-73.

77. Hannah Arendt, "Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)," *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954. Uncollected and Unpublished Works*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1994) 319: "Causality, however, is an altogether alien and falsifying category in the historical sciences. [...] Only when something irrevocable has happened can we even try to trace history backward."

all wars: the overwhelming presence of man-made death, its ultimate inexplicability and inconceivability among the living, and its nonetheless entirely concrete, multiply documentable reality. It constantly forces the writing of history to march out substitute gods, be they the "nature" of the states, the "culture" of the Germans, or the "structure" of modern society. The history of devastating wars in particular is reality through and through, one that is unequivocally set in images and documents of the most varied kind, but as the reality of limits it evades historical comprehension. This observation still does not suffice to characterize the state of the writing of history in view of the National Socialist extermination war or especially in view of the murder of the Jews.

Two further reflections are required for this: one on the category of genocidal wars and the other on the singularity of the murder of European Jews. In order to do justice to the problem of genocidal wars as a historical (in contrast to a legal) problem, one will have to oppose above all the characterization of every war killing as "murder." War, and this on the other hand must be repeatedly emphasized against attempts at any conciliation, is killing. The history of war is therefore thanatology, a history of man-made death, however much historians of every stripe like to dodge this essential definition of war.[78] But it is a killing which, as I have intimated, is defined by the reciprocal (agonal) connection of those conducting war, and in this it acknowledges even in the destruction of property and of life an equality of human beings and their alliances (as, for example, of nations). Here it is necessary to note that war killing always requires a certain devaluation of the enemy (which will be ritually revoked in the death commemoration).[79] The death zone of modern, industrial killing has extended greatly into total national and civil wars, and also implicated non-combatants in the hunger blockade of World War I or in the air raids of World War II. But the subject of modern warfare was of course never the soldier or the military, but the nation — and only because the nation was the subject of war could one attempt to dissociate civilians from the context of war.[80] All this is only to be noted because there is an unmistakably modern and to a certain extent

78. Michael Geyer, "Eine Kriegsgeschichte, die vom Tode spricht," *Physische Gewalt: Studien zur Geschichte der Neuzeit*, eds. Thomas Lindenberger and Alf Lüdtke (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1995).

79. *Töten im Krieg*, eds. Heinrich von Stietencron and Jörg Rüpke (Freiburg: K. Alber, 1995).

80. Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in Warfare* (New York: Columbia UP, 1980).

technological problematic to the delimitation of warfare.[81] But this has nothing to do with genocidal wars.[82] Wherever the fundamental connection of the soldiers or the nations waging war to the reciprocity of battle is not acknowledged, and wherever war suppresses beyond death also the commemoration of death, one can properly speak of a genocidal (extermination) war, a war of mass murder. For mass murder (like all murder) shatters the bond of reciprocity among those involved and is meant as an expression of their a priori inequality. It denies the afterlife and in doing so denies the foundation for an independent renewal of the social or national life. Rape, expulsion, and ethnic cleansing are among the further dimensions of this genocidal warfare. This kind of war was tested in its basic features on the eastern front during the World War II, and then practiced for the first time in grand style during World War II in Poland. It took the upper hand in the war against the Soviet Union and exploded every limit of civility. Today it is a universal calamity.

The murder of the European Jews developed as idea and practice within the framework of this extermination war, although further, historically more deeply-seated elements contributed to this — above all a rooted anti-Semitism — and conducting a genocidal war cannot be understood as the cause of collective murder.[83] The murder of the Euro-

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81. Daniel Pick, *War Machine: The Rationalization of Slaughter in the Modern Age* (New Haven, 1993). Years ago I discussed a similar thesis in my study, *Deutsche Rüstungspolitik, 1860-1980* (Frankfurt/Main: Yale UP, 1984). Today I would rather be inclined to dismiss this position, since there is no recognizable bridge from the technology thesis of a "society of disappearance" to the analysis of war reality.

82. I prefer this to earlier attempts to understand this same reality as "*Weltanschauungskrieg*." This has its historical as well as conceptual reasons ("*Weltanschauungskrieg*" implies an ideological/dogmatic prefiguration of the martial proceedings, which is only part of the proceedings.) Because if we begin with the comparison of total forms of warfare, then it is necessary to distinguish, within the framework of a general unleashing of the fury of war in industrial extermination wars, the particularly German form of genocidal war from the Soviet and American variants. A daring but not quite entirely successful attempt is *200 Tage und 1 Jahrhundert: Gewalt und Destruktivität im Spiegel des Jahres 1945*, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1995).

83. Although Götz Aly, *"Endlösung." Völkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1995), approaches this differently (in terms of occupation and population politics), he has broadened historical research by showing a close connection between population displacement and Judeocide. Two points are to be distinguished in my argument: 1) a comparable connection between extermination war and Judeocide can be demonstrated, but 2) this evidence is not sufficient to establish the historical site of this genocide. The historical point of departure here is the recourse to anti-Semitism and its actualization in the Third Reich. Shulamit Volkov, *Jüdisches Leben und Antisemitismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1990).

pean Jews exceeds the genocidal praxis of extermination, and for this reason a second reflection is required. The obvious and historically tangible difference between the genocidal wars against Poland and the Soviet Union and the genocide of the Jews lies in the totality of the threat of annihilation and the systematization of its realization. It is not the foundation of autonomous development (country and culture) that was denied, but the life of each individual whom the perpetrators classified among the Jews. Also characteristic is the ideological quality — in the most literal sense of the word — of the legitimation of annihilation, which reached beyond any apparent instrumentality of action (such as the Aryanization of property, the annexation of territory, population politics, military reprisals). Finally, the aggressors themselves insisted on this distinction, in that they submitted the Jews everywhere in their sphere of control to separate "treatment," and carried out their annihilation systematically in specific extermination camps.[84]

These elements of a historiographical elucidation can be condensed to a specific and unmistakable syndrome of killing. As the expression of a genocidal will to annihilation, the National Socialist Judeocide negates not merely the equality of human beings but the humanity of a human kind [*Menschengeschlecht*]. The Judeocide, sketched out in the rhetoric of modern anti-Semitism and realized in the extermination camps, is an act of total killing (encompassing a kind of people in its entirety) in a long process of dehumanization, which begins with the process of mental, linguistic, and physical exclusion and segregation, and extends all the way to the annihilation of a people's afterlife and of their possibility of commemorating death, to the obliteration of the murdered and the apparatuses of murder. That is a "rupture in civilization:" for beyond mere death, the Third Reich repudiated in the Judeocide the bonds of human civility — and in the toleration of this condition (beyond the act itself, in the subsequent silence), the perpetrators of this murder implicated all of Germany in their atrocity. This act of annihilation is also no longer to be understood objectively or logically in the context of war or population politics — and also not in the context of the radicalization of National Socialist politics.[85] Here Arendt's verdict

84. The clarification of this condition is the result of the historians' debate, which is too easily underestimated. *"Historikerstreit:" die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (Munich: Piper, 1987).

against the search for origins scrapes a raw nerve among historians. To whatever extent the act had its causes (and however much these may be disputed in the weighing of factors), as the realization of the destruction of a human kind it will still always far exceed any causes.

The consequent effects of this annihilation of humanity act corrosively on the whole of thought and action. This can be observed, among other places, in the fact that this action released none of the perpetrators from the spell of the killing field. It is worth asking to what extent they live in the present at all, or whether they do not instead simulate their life in the present in the manner of a dislocated existence. This seems to come forth with particular plasticity in the interviews with the perpetrators in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (in distinct contrast to the "speechless" interviews with the surviving victims), in which the plasticity of the past presented by the perpetrators stands in striking contradiction to their impoverished present (and to the speechlessness of the victims).[86] Yet beyond the representations of the contemporary witnesses, the murder of the European Jews casts its shadow on the ability to construct historical consciousness in the present — at least in the manner and method that this was formerly possible. The destruction of a humankind, the shoah, like genocidal war, is by now comprehensively documented and so has an entirely unmistakable historical reality beyond the physical evidence of the contemporary witnesses; and yet each documentation of this total destruction far surpasses history in the manner of a transgression of limits that can no longer be retracted. History can, of course, attempt to describe how this collective murder came into being and how it was carried out, but it cannot comprehend the fury of annihilation and the void that it leaves behind, at least if it wishes to remain history in any traditional sense. As the attempted murder of a people in its entirety, the murder of the Jews violently shakes the fundaments of historical consciousness — and in doing so also all the subsequent attempts to re-create historical consciousness. This breach draws through all of history, as one might argue along with Hannah Arendt; for this murder of one of its kind is a threat to

85. Cf. the "little" historians' debate between Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer, in which Friedländer's argument seems more convincing. Saul Friedländer, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1993).

86. Shoshana Feldman, "The Return of the Voice: Claus Lanzmann's *Shoah*," *Testimony*, eds. Feldman and Dori Laub, 204-83 is the most important initiative here. A convincing investigation of the perpetrators' side is still lacking.

humankind.[87] But the mark of Cain for the murder of a people is stamped on German history alone. This is the stigma of violence in German history.

If, in the last twenty years, the German public has in fact trained itself in the act of forgetting, as many observers claim, then these reflections would at best serve the purpose of conjuring once more the "burden of the German past."[88] But this assumption about the attitude of the Germans is only very conditionally correct, even if there are, and probably always will be, more than enough people in Germany who will reject any confrontation with the murder of the European Jews. But the ordeal of the last twenty years lay not with those who did not want to remember and preferred to write off the history of the Third Reich as an obsolete burden, but with those who accepted this history, but were confronted with the German stigma of violence.[89] The stigma of violence left behind traces precisely in those manifold attempts at remembering, which must make an impression at least in their gravity and multiplicity. Their primary feature is a certain "circulation of memory" [*Kreislauf der Erinnerung*], which in opposition to the past provides a reflective image of this past.[90] It is a memory that renders evident the traces of murder and also calls for an alternative praxis, but ultimately remains bound to the death zone and therefore paralyzed. The most appropriate response to this lachrymose form of memory is black humor, which can take the liberty of apostrophizing the envisioned central Holocaust Memorial in Berlin (quite appropriately, in fact) as a "wreath drop zone" [*Kranzabwurfstelle*].[91] The other reaction attempts to overcome the paralysis by memory in pedagogical or political engagement. Heated political debates about the Gulf War, about the engagement of German troops in Yugoslavia, about xenophobia in Germany, and finally about the point and purpose of the culture

87. Hannah Arendt, "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility," *Essays*, 121-32.

88. Mark Fisher, *After the Wall: Germany, the Germans and the Burdens of History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

89. Michael Geyer and Miriam Hansen, "German-Jewish Memory and National Consciousness," *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 175-90.

90. Dan Diner, *Kreisläufe: Nationalsozialismus und Gedächtnis* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1995).

91. Cited from Mirjam Schraub, "Monumentale Überbauung" *die tageszeitung* (25 July 1995) 12. A further example of this is Henryk M. Broder, *Erbarmen mit den Deutschen* (Hamburg: Hoffmann and Campe, 1993).

of memory itself have brought this problematic to a head. The writing of history seems at first glance unaffected by these problems of a culture of remembrance. Conscious, deliberate, and systematically executed genocide, in particular the murder of the Jews, has found its place in the precise elaboration of the *res gestae* in contemporary history — it has its (now as then disputed) causes and patterns of progression, whose representation in words or images will always only circumscribe the reality of annihilation, but which have given it, in this indirect way peculiar to terror, very clear and unmistakable contours. Certain questions, especially of a German-Soviet comparison (one of the occasions of the historians' debate), are meanwhile being addressed on an empirical basis and comparatively (instead of causatively, as with Nolte), while the postmodern question of the "evidence" of sources is thus far being answered by the processing of new sources.[92] But in all these investigations of the Judeocide, an unacknowledged challenge remains to the foundation of history as a science and to the history of the Germans in particular, which cannot be unhinged by an analytically precise comparison or by more evidence, but only by a new foundation of history.

Let us take as point of departure the much debated exhibition *Wehrmacht und Vernichtungskrieg* [war of annihilation].[93] It presents in dramatic and extensively documented detail the traces of the German extermination war. But the victims are portrayed from a German-Austrian photo perspective (which lent the exhibition its impressiveness), and their pre-history and later history is not further documented. A narrative results that takes account of the German contexts, but not those of the victims — nor the conditions under which victim and perpetrator encountered each other. On the other hand, a history that leaves behind the death zone of the world wars will never be only a history of the Germans and (in the German documents) their speechless and imageless victims, but will always have to run over into the history/ies of those who

92. Some examples of this historical work are *Dimension des Völkermords: die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Munich:Oldenbourg, 1991); Franciszek Piper, *Die Zahl der Opfer von Auschwitz: Aufgrund der Quellen und der Erträge der Forschung 1945-1990* (Oswiecim: Verlag Staatliches Museum in Oswiecim, 1992); Jean-Claude Pressac, *Les crematoires d'Auschwitz: la machinerie du meurtre de masse* (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1993).

93. *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944*, eds. Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1995).

were affected by this war and by annihilation, and who have produced their own historical images. The only possible and conceivable history after the rupture of civilization in World War II, present as yet only in its inceptions, is therefore a multiple and contestatory history.

What constitutes such a history? It is aware of the fact that an element of German history is to be found in many other histories, and that these other histories have a share in Germany history and a claim on it. The national history of war and genocide does not belong to the Germans alone (and the historians of Germany), but to all those who have been affected by German history. It therefore also cannot — even in the critical debates with its own (German) side — be sufficiently written from the vantage point of one nation. This is, however, not a question of a random multiplication of histories. The multiplicity of histories affected by the German war is neither "encompassed" by German history nor does the history of others simply reflect back on Germany. Rather, these other histories are its competing element, which refers beyond it. They refract German history in the stigma of violence. As national history, this history encompassing the German past cannot be solely a German history. To learn to work historically with this antagonism is the task of a future German history in the age of world wars, a task still far from being realized. German national history is a history disjointed by extermination war and by Judeocide. Its historians must remain conscious of the disjointed nature of its national history in the contestatory mesh of narratives, if it wishes to bear in mind the history of the world wars. Only once this has happened can a developing historical consciousness call back into history the multiple and different possibilities of diverse communities living together at the site of the nation.

Even history itself, as a modern form of thinking about the past, cannot escape the consequences of this epoch of world wars. I argued at the outset that history is more than the verification and notation of the *res gestae* of past times, in that it counterbalances the reality of the world as slaughter-bench with the knowledge of the survival of the human race as its basic experience. It generates historical consciousness and historical interest in this memory of the fragility of human existence.[94] A return to this inner-worldly conquest of death through

94. For this insight I am thankful to Susan Crane, "Collecting and Historical Consciousness: New Forms of Collective Memory in Early Nineteenth Century Germany," Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1992.

history is no longer conceivable. For the murder of the Jews has quite categorically and consciously set the annihilation of a people against the experience of survival. The murder of the Jews is not only historical experience deceived, but the definitive refutation of the idealistic foundation of history. With Auschwitz it became a reality that human beings are capable of extirpating their kind. With that, the reason of history — which contrasted the mortality of human beings with the immortality of the humanity organized in nations — began to waver. With the systematically implemented annihilation, this optimistic transcendence of the nation, which was at one time supposed to guarantee immortality, was destroyed, without our being able to return to an age of myth in which gods save or eradicate human beings.[95] It is therefore not the immortality of the nation that can stand at the focus of a history at the end of the twentieth century, but only the insight into its principle destructibility. The real-historical experience of the finite nature of humankind, and of the will as well as the capacity for its destruction: these are the departure points for a truly historical renewal in stepping beyond the death zone of the twentieth century.

A critical, historical recollection will remember in this situation the destruction of the bond of friendship as the essence of annihilation, and will then no longer be able to reject the insight of Hannah Arendt, that human beings are not, as Heidegger argued, condemned to a life in death. Rather, the greatest good of humankind, as Arendt argued, would be found in the capacity for a new beginning, which thereby arrives at a position to repeal the knowledge of terror and death. This commemoration of death as work on the bond of human solidarity, mindful of a genocidal past, is a necessary element of the renewal of historical consciousness, which will then be able to look back on the epoch of world wars as a passing era.

Translated by Michael Latham

95. Zygmunt Baumann, *Mortality, Immortality & Other Life Strategies* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992).