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History and Current Developments of Holocaust Memorials in Germany (including the former GDR)

Memories are pliable
and we have to try to comprehend
how and by whom they are formed

Peter Burke 1991

I. Introduction - dealing with the past in Germany

The relationship of German society to its recent history is one of great complexity and contradictions. Public discussion about the past is essentially characterized by political controversies and conflicts. The innumerable debates concerning today's attitudes to the Third Reich, often evoked by new research results, official speeches or exhibitions[1], have to be interpreted in the larger context of a permanent dread that German society might forget its past. In some debates, for instance in the now over three years old dispute about the construction of a National Holocaust Monument in Berlin, the fear of forgetting serves as an argument for both sides - the opponents and the defenders.
This public concern reveals that memorials and commemorative days signify more than a symbolic place for official ritual acts of remembrance. "Places of memory" represent the political and historical way a society sees and understands itself. And as these commemorations always imply and express historical perspectives, values and ideologies, they tend to trigger off sensitive reactions and public controversies (cf. Reichel 1995).
The unification of West (the Federal Republic of Germany - FRG) and East Germany (the German Democratic Republic - GDR) did not facilitate this discourse. With the decline of the GDR the German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*[2] assumed a double meaning: it is now the special task of Germany to reappraise both kinds of totalitarian systems - Nazism and Stalinism. The Spanish author Jorge Semprun, a detainee in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp, emphasized that Germany is the only country in Europe which has experienced the two systems. Hence it has the unique opportunity and obligation to critically incorporate those experiences in its collective memory. Semprun sees this

[1] The discussion about collective German responsibility, (re)stimulated by D. J. Goldhagen in 1996, almost provoked a new *Historikerstreit*. During the last two years public attention focused on the following issues: an exhibition revealing the crimes committed by the German Wehrmacht; the construction of a National Holocaust monument; the refusal of banks and industry to pay reparations for forced labour during the Second World War.

[2] Today experts try to dissociate themselves from this popular but doubtful concept, which pretends that one can "master" or "cope with" the past. Pedagogues prefer the definition "working on memories" (*Erinnerungsarbeit*), historians increasingly use the term *Erinnerungskultur*, refering to the "politics of memories".

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challenge as a possibility to enrich the democratic future of Germany and even Europe (cf. Semprun 1995, 61).

It might be difficult to live up to the optimistic expectations of Semprun.[3] But certainly Germany can be seen as an example of an enduring relevance of dealing with the past. And since unification, the ambivalent role of history in shaping the institutions and values of civil society has become very evident.

The genesis and the current developments of historical and educational approaches in Holocaust memorials of East and West Germany demonstrate in an excellent way the restricted perspectives that had been prevalent in both states for a long time. The confrontation of the different points of view gave rise to many questions. Various reflections on the contents and conceptions that also took into account the larger social and temporal distance to the Nazi Regime contributed to essential paradigmatic changes in the working field of Holocaust memorials:

- Besides the traditional responsibility to commemorate, to remind and to investigate they also see themselves as learning places - for young people as well as for adults.
- As the Holocaust memorial itself is always a cultural product of a certain period, the documentation of its "social construction" has become part of the new conceptions.
- More important than the transmission of plenty of historical details about the period between 1933-1945 is their application to the present situation. Continuities have to be detected and consequences for future developments to be discussed.
- The generation of empathy for the victims is of great importance, but it should not halt in a general feeling of consternation. To understand how the atrocities could happen and how the system functioned we also have to examine the perspective of the perpetrators

The Holocaust memorials have only recently begun to tackle these tasks. To comprehend why it took such a long time to come to those changes we have to look at the different attitudes and positions that the two German states had adopted.

After a general overview over the different kinds of Holocaust memorials (II) this paper retraces differences in the East and West German approach to the past and points up its consequences on the construction of Holocaust memorials (III). How the Holocaust memorials try to transform their work and which kind of educational approaches they choose in order to show the complexity of German history will conclude this discussion (IV).

Buchenwald near Weimar in East Germany is one of the Holocaust memorials that has to reappraise the past of the two totalitarian systems. Since it illustrates the conflicting ways of "truth construction", its particular history will be described at the end of every section.

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[3] Unification is a very sensitive theme. While East German structures were totally transformed, the capitalist model was never questioned. Sometimes the impression arose that West Germans with their eagerness to change everything were trying to compensate for their failure of de-nazification.

II. Holocaust memorials - an overview

The generic term "Holocaust memorial" refers to different sorts of places. All over the world museums, monuments, plaques and other forms of commemorations remind us of the immense atrocities of the Third Reich. Being built at different periods and for various occasions a great variety exists and some of the conceptions experienced transformations in time.

The evolution of Holocaust monuments may serve as a good and concise example for this transitory differentiation. In the beginning it was a special concern of the constructors to commemorate the great suffering - especially of the detainees of concentration camps. Obelisks, crosses or stones at symbolic places did not need supplementary explanations. But gradually, with new generations coming up, the self-evidence diminished and perspectives on history changed. Therefore elucidation and comments became more important. To illustrate the different views on the same part of history the idea of a so called "counter monument" was raised. At the same time a general scepsis grew as to whether the traditional forms of monuments are able to prevent oblivion and repression. Thus it is that contemporary artists often turned away even from abstract expressions. Insisting on the processive aspects of the collective memory, in Germany, invisible and ephemeral monuments became popular (cf. Reichel 1995, 118f).[4]

While monuments and stones of commemorations contribute only little to remembrance by younger generations, Holocaust memorials at historical places with authentic buildings, permitting a slight idea of the former events, offer a high potentiality to enter into a deeper preoccupation (cf. Faulenbach 1998, 28). This explains the increasing attention given to those places and their specific approaches, also finding expression in a growing number of educational reflections[5] (cf. Lutz 1994, 35)

The present article will put a special focus on the development of "working memorials", which generally means that besides an exposition of original documents expert staff will be put in charge of visitors who would like to have more detailed information about the history of the place and its genesis as memorial (cf. Kuhls 1996, 25).[6]

Even though the first initiatives for this kind of memorials began beyond the German border, for example in Poland (Majdanek 1944; Auschwitz 1947), in Israel (Yad Vashem 1953) and the Netherlands (House of Anne Frank 1957), the following text will be limited to the memorials situated in Germany, the country of the perpetrators. As indicated in the introduction, a very particular historical constellation has to be taken into account

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[4] In 1986 Jochen and Esther Geerz put up a stele entitled "monument against faschism, war, violence - for peace and human rights". The public was invited to commit its vigilance by signing the stele. To symbolize that in the long term this monument will not be sufficient to combat injustice the artists slowly sank the stele with the signatures until it was completeley buried in 1993.

[5] The bibliography indicates that almost all studies refering to the conceptual work of Holocaust memorials were published in the nineties only. Older publications rarely exceed a descriptive level.

[6] Following this definition Robben Island is an example of a "working memorial".

when we look at the German Holocaust memorials. Nevertheless it has to be mentioned that the memorials are in close contact and many educational approaches in Germany were inspired by the international exchange.[7]
In spite of the large spectrum of different political systems and historical points of view, the Holocaust memorials shared, from the outset a world-wide desire to remember the victims of the Nazi Regime with honour (cf. Brebeck et al. 1988). The "authenticity of the place" (Kuhls 1996, 23) and its function during the Third Reich is decisive in making the victims the main object of interest in each memorial.

In Germany nine groups of memorials can be differentiated (cf. Zimmermann 1992):
1. Places of judicial crime and Gestapo terror
2. Places of the German political resistance
3. Concentration camps for the internment of German political opponents during the first years of the Nazi Regime
4. Concentration camps serving from 1938 on as "places of education and production" *(Erziehungs- und Produktionsstätte)* with prisoners from different countries
5. External camps*(Außenlager)*, where (foreign) prisoners had to execute forced labour
6. Cemeteries with mass graves of Soviet prisoners of war
7. "Educational workcamps" and "youth protection camps"
8. Places of euthanasia, the "extermination of unworthy life"
9. Centres of former Jewish life (synagogues etc.)

With the inauguration of the *Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz* in Berlin a new and unique type of Holocaust Memorial was added. This villa functioned neither as a place of violent persecution nor of resistance; it is the building, where some civil servants of the Nazi bureaucracy met on 20th January 1942 to assure the perfect carrying out of the *Endlösung*. Therefore it is the ruling area of the perpetrators and their verbal terror, demonstrating how the extermination of the Jews was decided by brains behind the scenes and based on the principle of the division of labour (cf. Kuhls 1996, 24f). As the example of Buchenwald indicates, some Holocaust memorials combine plenty of aspects at a time.

Buchenwald

Buchenwald Concentration Camp, originally called "Ettersberg Concentration Camp" was founded in 1937. Just eight kilometres from Weimar, the cultural community of National Socialists rejected this name which was associated with Goethe. Since Goethes's time and even during the Third Reich these forests used to be a popular place for excursions.

[7] The *Fritz Bauer Institut* in Francfort eg., a centre for studies on the Holocaust and its effects, developped a concept close to the american "Facing history and ourselves" called *Konfrontationen*.

Until 1938 the prison community consisted of political opponents to the Nazi Regime, of habitual criminals and of Jehovah's Witnesses. Under the pressure of the SS, the detainees had to build their own miserable quarters as well as SS barracks, villas for the commanders, a falcon house and even a zoo.
Hence, at the beginning Buchenwald was a prison for German political opponents. But already in 1938 the Gestapo took more than 13000 German and Austrian Jews, hundreds of Sinti Gypsies, homosexuals and so-called social misfits to the Camp. With an increasing number of partisans, resistance fighters and prisoners of war from various countries and the establishment of the *Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke* GmbH - a company owned by the SS - the camp transformed into a "place of education and production".
Besides the fact that Buchenwald as *Stammlager* sent a great amount of prisoners to its external camps spread all over Germany, this concentration camp also was a site of significance for the perpetrators. The SS guard troops - called *SS-Totenkopfverbände* - were formed in Buchenwald by specially trained SS men and they were regarded as the pillar of the concentration camp system. (cf. Stein/Stein 1993)

III. The different ways to deal with the past and their consequences for the development of Holocaust memorials in West and East Germany

For more than 40 years, both German States rejected suspicions of the continued existence of fascism and pursued reciprocal strategies of separation (*Abgrenzungspolitik*). This particular constellation together with their different orientation and dependence on the capitalist and communist ideology was bound to have an impact on the social construction and instrumentalisation of history and its commemoration.
Concerning the divergent perspectives on the past, the German sociologist M. Rainer Lepsius distinguishes the East German "universalisation" of National Socialism as fascism and the West German "internalisation" of the Third Reich as an indecent legacy that had to be integrated. These interpretations were constitutive for the political culture of each system (cf. Lepsius 1989). While the universalisation enabled the GDR to understand the "past as a benefit" (Reichel 1995, 36) which suggested a structural and socio-economic reorganisation that radically broke with the traditions of the Nazi regime and the capitalism of the *Weimarer Republik*, the internalisation of the former Federal Republic led to the interpretation of the "past as a burden" (Reichel 1995, 40).
With its classification as the successor state of the German Empire, West Germany also tried to justify and legimitize its claim to sole representation. The official acceptance of the Nazi heritage though did not restrain a broad sympathy for the idea of a so-called "final stroke". Expressions like "Zero Hour" *(Stunde Null)* disclose the West German wish to be distinguished from the Third Reich. Of course, this attitude had an impact on the work of the Holocaust memorials in the first decades of their existence. Research and historical education focused on the time of 1933-1945. This period seemed to be isolated

from the rest of German history and any continuity from the Nazi Regime before its establishment or afterwards was denied (cf. Fritzsche 1998; Frei 1996).
The official version of the former GDR on the other hand tried to hide the fact that the announced exchange of all collaborators in key positions finally failed because of a lack of professional competence. But the myth of the radical break released the population and allowed a major focus on present and future politics. Consequently the mission of the Holocaust memorials insisted on the formation of a socialistic awareness of history. A critical reflection was not intended (cf. Leo 1998, 36f; Lüttgenau 1994).
The politics of separation implicated a simplifying equation of capitalism and fascism on the one side and of communism and fascism on the other side of the inner German border. A different construction of "truth" in each state was the result. While East Germany insisted on the communist resistance and for a long time ignored the conservative and military resistance, West Germany did it the other way around (cf. Reichel 1995; Fritzsche 1998). The celebration of the German resistance fifty years after the failed assassination attempt of 20th July 1944 illustrates how deeply the collective memory of the separated German people was split and how long these restricted constructions can persist. Neither Helmut Kohl nor any other speaker mentioned in 1994, four years after a unification, a single member of the communist resistance (cf. Kuhls 1996, 14f).

The development of Holocaust Memorials in West Germany

The first West German Holocaust memorial was the *Gedenkstätte des Deutschen Widerstandes*, inaugurated in 1955. The institution of a concentration camp as memorial however took twenty years. In most cases the opening is due to one personal investor or small initiatives of former prisoners[8], and it often needed foreign pressure.[9] For a long time Dachau (1965) was the only working Holocaust memorial in West Germany. Finally, late effects of the student revolt in 1968 and the broad public attention to the US Holocaust film at the end of the seventies marked a turning point in the West German discussion about the past (cf. Reichel 1995; Lutz 1994). Following the slogan "dig where you stand", historical interest arose. This enthusiasm for history workshops and other private initiatives often culminated in the institution of different kinds of memorials.[10] Though this movement was and still is of great significance for the West German struggle with its past, its limits have to be pointed up. This social history research from the bottom up implicated a certain bias. Concentration on the perpetrators and their every-

[8] The Dachau prisoner and priest Leonhard Roth fought 15 years for a Dachau memorial. Joseph Wulf, a member of the Jewish resistance who survived Auschwitz, eagerly supported the idea of the *Haus der Wannsee Konferenz*. Tragically they did not experience the realization, both committed suicide .
[9] The demolition of the crematorium in Dachau had to be prevented by the French government which insisted on a prohibition for the FRG to destroy graves of victims (cf. Reichel 1995, 150).
[10] Between 1986 and 1990 the number of working Holocaust memorials increased from 12 to 18 and the initiatives working on memories doubled from about 100 to 200 (cf. Kuhls 1996, 20).

day life always runs the risk of individualizing and simplifying the historical events. Therefore regional and local history workshops have to be aware of the danger that the view on the larger context and the functioning of the system as a whole easily gets lost (cf. Geschichtswerkstatt 1997, 7f).

The development of Holocaust Memorials in East Germany

While in West Germany the development of the Holocaust memorials was fostered by international influence, in East Germany the government invested quite early in the institutionalisation of memorial places. From 1958 - 1961 three National Holocaust memorials were inaugurated: Buchenwald, Ravensbrück (a concentration camp for women) and Sachsenhausen (the former administrative coordination centre of all camps). In accordance with its significance for the communist conviction Buchenwald became the biggest memorial of East Germany. A huge "monument of admonition" served as an official place of celebration for swearing in the army and for the *Jugendweihe*, in which the 14-year-olds were given adult social status.

In the beginning former prisoners guided school and youth groups through the camps. Even though the historical information was to a large extent dictated by the SED and "a direct link was drawn between the Communists who were active in the International Camp Committee and the leaders of the East German regime" (Hackett 1995, 22), groups that had the opportunity to listen to the personal experience of their guide often remembered this visit as a positive and impressing event[11] (cf. Leo 1998, 44). In the seventies the number of former prisoners that were able to guide groups diminished and younger staff had to take over. In the eighties this had the consequence that slight changes were introduced: the fate of the Jews was mentioned, research groups were established and the transmission of historical details as well as the awareness for the complexity of history became more important (cf. Leo 1998; Lüttgenau 1994).

In spite of - or perhaps because of - the reciprocal strategies of separation, the two German versions of dealing with the past share some similarities.

Especially in the first decades both states were fixed on one major group of victims. For a long time the fate of homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Sinti and Roman Gypsies, for example, was not acknowledged, not to mention the omission of reparations.

Both systems contributed to the notion that the Nazism was something strange that grew apart from and is far away from the average person. (cf. Fritzsche 1998, 686). Not only East Germany had a tendency to simplify history in terms of good and bad, and in both states a "culture of consternation" dominated the educational approach. Looking at the four functions of Holocaust memorials today (to commemorate, to remind, to investigate and to learn) we can emphasize that the GDR tended to neglect the research work and

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[11] In spite of a growing ritualisation and depersonalisation, the effort the former prisoners made over years - and indeed with a great amount of enthusiasm - has to be highly acknowledged.

interpreted learning in a technocratic way (cf. Leo 1998). The FRG took a long time to develop educational concepts that went further than the information about historical facts.

Finally, neither West nor East German memorials unveiled the transformations the historical places saw before becoming an "authentic" place. Not only Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald were used as internment camps from 1945-1950, but Dachau and other West German camps as well. Of course, the fate of the people in the East German camps allows no comparison with the West German situation. As illustrated below, in the example of Buchenwald, this part of history was not simply banished to oblivion, but research on it was also forbidden. Nevertheless it was and sometimes still is a characteristic of the Holocaust memorials not to reveal the social construction of their history.

Buchenwald

To understand the great value the GDR attached to this place, it is necessary to glance at the historical events of the camp, paying special attention to its liberation:

The internal hierarchy in the camp determined the chances of survival. As the Camp extended - counting 110000 prisoners in January 1945 - the interest of the SS in having an efficient administration capable of running this immense camp and the long perseverance of the political prisoners enabled those detainees to take over important functions. This way the International Camp Committee led by the communists enlarged its possibilities to survey events as well as to help other prisoners. The rescue of many children is one of its achievements.

With the confusion during the air raid in August 1944, prisoners smuggled arms into the camp and created an underground military. Early in April, when the prisoners heard that the US-Army was approaching, the camp resistance tried to delay the departure of evacuation convoys. Finally on April 11 combat could be heard at a near distance and the prisoner militia who had been hiding with their weapons took over the main gate and searched for the escaping SS men (cf. Stein/Stein 1993; Hackett 1995).

"The courageous actions of the prisoner militia on the afternoon of April 11 would eventually lead to the post-war myth of the prisoners' 'self-liberation' of Buchenwald. There is of course some truth to this legend; the prisoners' actions are well documented. But in later East German literature, their part took an enormous importance, whereas the role of the US military in the camp's liberation was ignored or denigrated." (Hackett 1995, 5).

The myth of "self-liberation" found expression in a huge *Mahnmal*. Its genesis permits an insight into the politics and intentions of the GDR.[12]

The first idea of building a monument in commemoration of the victims was bornof the survivors, in 1946. Since the camp site was still occupied - the Soviet secret service used it for the internment of influential Nazis and persons who were dangerous to the occupation - a memorial called *Ehrenhain* was inaugurated in 1949 on the site of the mass graves of more than 3000 people killed in the concentration camp. After the dissolution

[12] In his book "Buchenwald and the GDR or the search for self-legitimation" (Göttingen 1995) Manfred Overesch gives a detailed overview of the way the SED influenced its construction.

of the internment camp in 1950 most of the "authentic" buildings of the former concentration camp were systematically destroyed. Meanwhile a commission of the government evaluated the possibilities of constructing a huge National Memorial, replacing the "Field of Honour". From 1954 to 1958 a monstrous contrivance with steles showing episodes of suffering and resistance in Buchenwald, ring tombs, the "road of nations" and an immense bell tower was built. In front of the tower the sculptor Fritz Cremer created an oversized statue of a group of defiant prisoners raising their fists in rebellion against their oppressors (cf. Overesch 1995; Stein/Stein 1993). Groups coming to visit the monument learned "that the camp had been used mostly to imprison heroic antifascists, socialists and Communists who had opposed fascism and capitalism" (Hackett 1995, 22). Accordingly the politicians in power regularly used the place for mass meetings and flag-hoisting. For other persons though the monument remained a place of mourning. Until today "survivors of the concentration camp come to lay wreaths in the tower every year on the anniversary of the liberation" (Stein/Stein 1993, 70).

The second focus of the *Nationale Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Buchenwald* was a museum in the original camp grounds, also opened in 1958. The exhibition was dominated by the SED principles of the "antifascist and anticapitalist educational work". In the mid-eighties though the museum experienced some transformations. With a revised version of the exhibition it moved into the renovated storehouse - the biggest building of the concentration camp that dates back to the foundation period. The new conception recorded some remarkable corrections but it still was under an obvious obligation to the SED (cf. Reichel 1995, 131). Neither the voluntary de- and reconstruction of the original concentration camp was mentioned nor the ambivalent period of the Soviet internment camp, where especially the bad living conditions led to high mortality. Concerning the internment camp between 1945 - 1950 and its significance in East Germany the authors of the brochure "Buchenwald - a tour of the Memorial Site" note: "The history of Special Camp No. 2 and the existence of mass graves was a taboo in the German Democratic Republic. Although some people knew about the existence of tombs north of the camp, there was no form of commemoration and no kind of monument." (Stein/Stein 1993, 80)

IV. The paradigmatic changes and their influence on educational work

As shown above the German attitude towards the Third Reich and its presentation in the Holocaust memorial changed at the beginning of the eighties. A loosening up of former taboos concerning the recent past could be observed in both states (cf. Reichel 1995, 38). Thus it is that Germany actually counts more than 35 Holocaust memorials and about 250 local and regional initiatives working on memories (cf. Kuhls 1996, 20).

Although the intensity and the spreading of these changes as well as the participation of the population on both sides cannot be compared - the West German historical shift was undoubtedly of greater significance - these developments are based on similar evolutions. The main reasons for the paradigmatic changes seem to be the temporal and social distance from the Nazi regime and the alternation of generations. That applies at

the same time to the visitors as to the staff working in Holocaust memorials. The questions of the younger generations are often free from inhibitions and less influenced by personal feelings of guilt (cf. Kuhls 1996, 97). Hence, the focus turned just as much to the different groups of victims as to the great variety of official and private resistance or to the perpetrators and their socialization.

Questions and research on the delicate theme of continuity after 1945 experienced specific dynamic and intensified public interest with the collapse of the GDR. The disclosure of the events in the Soviet internment camps between 1945 and 1950 was of great importance. After unification more and more prisoners who had survived these camps reported their fate in the media. Most of them had suffered extremely bad living conditions and some of the arrests were less due to the prisoners' activities during the Third Reich than to the arbritariness of the Soviet Secret Service[13] (cf. Ritscher 1995). While public attention and historical investigations at first tended to be one-sidedly concentrated on the instrumentalisation of history by the former governments of the GDR, younger publications take a critical look at continuities and the "construction" of truth in both states (cf. e.g. Fritzsche 1998; Frei 1996; Reichel 1995).

These essential changes were bound to have an impact on the work in Holocaust memorials. Today the historical, political and educational approach of German Holocaust memorials is especially determined by the following three aspects:

1. Holocaust memorials as learning places

For the younger generations the act of remembering cannot be one of recalling events that they have experienced, in the same way as it is still possible for the survivors. "Remembrance" today takes on the meaning of "being reminded" by oral reports and written documents of survivors or by a third party. Therefore the traditional functions of Holocaust memorials have to be amplified. Official and private commemoration remain important, but there must be space for learning activities as well (cf. Kuhls 1996, 9f). Included in the larger context of political education the memorials follow the premise that the usual "lectural didactics" consisting of guided tours through the camp have to be completed by the arrangement of open situations that permit different and individual access to history. This approach towards "facilitating didactics" not only heightens motivation, but it also takes visitors seriously in their wish to understand (cf. Faulenbach 1998, 32).

Central to contemporary concepts is the idea of offering activities to explore history on its own - on a rational and emotional level, in groups and alone. Besides the possibility of studying original documents in archives, the staff of memorials often use pictures, prepared working sheets, remnant objects etc. to facilitate a first insight (cf. Kuhls 1996, Ehmann et al. 1995).

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[13] It has been proved that there were some individuals who were arrested in both camps - the Nazi concentration camp and the Soviet internment camp (cf. Ritscher 1995, 163).

Conversations with contemporary witnesses become increasingly difficult to offer. It is seldom that groups can talk to more than one witness. Many publications point out the advantages of these meetings, with little analysis of the risks of instrumentalisation of visitors and witnesses (cf. Behrens-Cobet 1998, 14). Considering however that the views of different survivors illustrate the complexity of history[14], Holocaust memorials will surely miss this extraordinary opportunity in the near future.

Another important concept is the "search for traces". Since this kind of activity can last from one up to several weeks, a global approach is possible: while some dig for remnants of a former building, others search in archives for original pictures and documents or transpose the events that happened in the building into a play (cf. Kuhls 1996, 63f). Often integrated in international workcamps, the divergent national perspectives on the Third Reich are an important issue. Studies on intercultural historical learning (including the question of what relationship migrants growing up in Germany develop towards German history) still need to be intensified and adequate educational methods have to be tried out.

2. Handling the subject of the guilty parties and the significance of the past for our present life

It is not only the *Haus der Wannsee Konferenz* which focuses exclusively on the activities of the perpetrators that integrates the aspect of their socialization. Following the message of Primo Levi "It has happened, so it can happen again" (1990, 205), most of the contemporary Holocaust memorials emphasize a preoccupation with the perpetrator. Neither the feeling of consternation often generated in former times nor the rational attempt to explain the past seems to be sufficient for a prevention of similar events. Critical examination of the perpetrator's life, his socialization and his reasons for obedience to and support or establishment of parts of the system is necessary. Only the detection of comparable structures of thought and behaviour of that time and today can sustainably avoid the repetition or revival of Nazi terror (cf. Kuhls 1996, 96). Under the premise "comparison without equation or simple relativism", experts are increasingly convinced that the detection of parallels is necessary to assure a link to our present society and to influence its political culture (cf. Faulenbach 1998, 31f; Kuhls 1996, 99).

Since most of the memorials are also places of commemoration and mourning, the task of dealing with the role of perpetrator is difficult to accomplish. The debates about the new arrangement of Buchenwald show that some victims entertain suspicions. They

[14] In 1997, students of mine were extremely divided about the way history had been interpreted in the GDR and how it should be illustrated in Buchenwald today. We had the opportunity to talk to two persons with different perspectives on the GDR. The "authenticity" of both witnesses (O. Rothmann, a former detainee who lives in Weimar and worked at Buchenwald in the eighties, and R. Kralovitz, a Jewish prisoner who lives in Cologne and came back to Buchenwald for the first time in 1990) did not really changed their positions but convinced them of the complexity of historical events and their contradictory views. This "multiperspectivity" finally led to constructive debates.

fear that comprehension of the perpetrator may play down the atrocities of the Third Reich.

For adults the idea of approaching the perspective of the perpetrator by taking a closer look at their own profession seems to be very appropriate. Critical appraisal of one's own profession allows policemen, teacher, doctors, judges and people in other fields of work to draw a link between the discourse of their professional field in former times and today. It may permit important insights into continuities that still exist.

3. Holocaust memorials as places of dual historical significance

The example of Buchenwald illustrates the amount of "de- and reconstruction" the authentic place has seen over the last fifty years. This is not only the case with East German Holocaust memorials nor is it only a question of former times. Large parts of the concentration camp in Neuengamme near Hamburg for example were transformed and used as a youth penal institution until 1993 (cf. Reichel 1995, 162f). In the early nineties controversial debates about the future shape of Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen have attracted public attention.[15] The disclosure of the various uses of former camps has led to a new concept of the Holocaust memorials over the last years. They now see it as their obligation to point out that even "authentic" places are cultural products of a society.

As the East German memorials have to tackle the challenge of two dictatorships they have often had to go through a long and difficult process of revision. It is their advantage though that they are extremely sensitive for the multitude of perspectives on the "same" part of history. Therefore the documentation of divergent point of view since 1945 has to become a constant element of all Holocaust memorials (cf. Faulenbach 1998; Reichel 1995; Lüttgenau 1994).

The three aspects of the present work in Holocaust memorials set out above emphasize the recognition that there are no simple answers to the past and its significance for today. The genesis of the memorials and their changes over time confirm that these places cannot represent an "eternal truth" (Behrens-Cobet 1998, 18). The yearning for orientation in complex societies is strong and quite understandable, but the development of a comprehensive competency that resists the attraction of simple solutions can only be learned in a critical discourse of presentation and counter presentation. Therefore Holocaust memorials are well aware of the fact that they cannot fulfil the high expectations of politicians that tend to see the visit of a Holocaust memorial as an efficient

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[15] In Ravensbrück the dispute about the construction of a commercial centre on the ground of the former camp led to a typical inner German conflict between (especially West German) demonstrators and the local population. The latter refused to see a difference between the exploitation of a ground that the Soviet Army used for shooting practice and a supermarket. Since the centre was of importance for this region with its disadvantaged infrastructure the debate was understood as another form discrimination. Finally the centre was opened elsewhere and the building which had been almost accomplished is now used by the memorial (cf. Reichel 1995, 144f).

and universal remedy against right-wing radicalism (cf. eg. Kuhls 1996; Kaiser 1995; Lutz 1994). Looking at the permanent oscillation between defence mechanisms and procedures to with questions of guilt, it has to be supposed that debates about the different German ways to deal with the period of Nazism will probably go on for a long time and remain as contradictory as the past itself. (cf. Reichel 1995, 17)

Buchenwald

With the collapse of the GDR in 1989, the role of *Buchenwald Mahnmal* which up to that point had provided a historical and political basis for the legitimacy of the communist regime came to a sudden end. Soon quarrels started as to what aspects should be reported in future (cf. Hackett 1995, 22). In 1990, the opening of a provisional exhibition and a temporal burial site at the place of one of the mass graves caused considerable concern and tensions.

Until 1991 the future development of the Holocaust memorial was in a state of suspense. By then a commission of historians was assigned to elaborate recommendations for the new orientation of the memorial. Following these propositions in 1992, it was officially decided that at Buchenwald Holocaust memorial there should be the opportunity to remember both the concentration camp of the Nazi regime and the Soviet internment camp. The main focus though lies on the concentration camp, and the memorial place of the subordinate Special Camp No. 2 has to be physically separated (cf. Knigge 1995, 267f; Lüttgenau 1994, 118f). The commission also recommended that an additional documentation should remind of the 40 years old history of the East German memorial and its political instrumentalisation. The multiple perspectives of this approach were regarded with scepticism, and at each stage of realizing the projects new waves of quarrels emerged.[16] While the federations of persons persecuted by the Nazi regime did not want to accept the memorial becoming a place of commemoration for former persecutors, the prisoners' committee of the Special Camps tended to treat the National Socialism as equivalent to the GDR and its Stalinist period (cf. Reichel 1995, 134).

Since 1992 the memorial witnessed many transformations. In 1995, on the occasion of the fifty-year anniversary of the liberation, the new permanent exhibition of Buchenwald Concentration Camp opened. Since the beginning of 1996 library and archives provide good working opportunities. In 1997 an exhibition illustrating the history of the Special Camp No. 2 opened in a new building opposite the burial ground. Another exhibition, situated near the huge Mahnmal of the GDR and documenting the history of the whole memorial, will be inaugurated in autumn 1999.

For the educational work the opening of a meeting place (1994) has been of great importance. A staff of experts offers student groups the chance to work at Buchenwald for several days or weeks. Regularly international workcamps take place. Over the last years those meetings have contributed to the restoration work of the concentration

[16] Historical studies were subject of criticism as well. The research results of Lutz Niethammer "The 'purged' Antifascism. The SED and the red guardsmen *(Kapos)* of Buchenwald" (1994), studying the ambivalent role of the political prisoners of Buchenwald Camp that held guarding functions, evoked counter publications, like, for instance, Kurt Pätzold's "Proper Anti-Antifascism. The dispute about Buchenwald and the illiteracy of the neo-German history writing" (1995).

camp. The former train station, for instance, had been uncovered with the help of student groups.
The fact that Weimar has been selected as "European Town of Culture" for 1999 not only increased the research on the relationship of the population of Weimar and the concentration camp[17]. It also intensified the cooperation. Several events and exhibitions of the *Weimar Kulturstadtprogramm*, located in Weimar as well as at Buchenwald, were developed together with the memorial.
In conclusion, there can be no doubt that Buchenwald Memorial is eager to tackle the complexity of German history. Committed to avoid new historical restrictiveness in simply exchanging the East German perspective by the West German, Holocaust memorials of the former GDR had to look for new forms of approaching the past. The pluralistic conceptions they developped have an impact on the whole working field.

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[17] Only recently the study "Neighbour Buchenwald" from Jens Schley (Köln 1999) came out.

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