

Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte, Vol. 1-5

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Collective review for the five volumes of the German-Polish 'Spaces of Memory' ('Erinnerungsorte')
Band 1: Geteilt/Gemeinsam, Band 2: Geteilt /Gemeinsam, Band 3: Parallelen, Band 4: Reflexionen, Band 5:
Erinnerung auf Polnisch.

Ever since Pierre Nora conceptualized the idea of lieux de mémoire in the 1980s (translated into German as 'Erinnerungsorte' and into English as 'spaces of memory'), numerous scholarly works have sought to implement and expand upon his theory that, in the tumultuous modern context, certain sites emerge as material, symbolic, and functional nexus points in collective memory. In contrast to Nora's arguably extinct milieu of memory, a space in which historical human beings are said to have generated memories (for instance, the village church as religious space embodying values collectively handed down for centuries), a lieu de mémoire is said to be a ritualized space which becomes urgent, often outside the object's or concept's original significance. A lieu de mémoire is thus said to suit an age in which memory is often a fleeting, shifting thing (for instance, the same village church as an icon of national resilience memorializing idealized imaginings of a nearby battle or reconceptualized historical personage or event). According to Nora, spaces of memory can be 'museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders' or other such spaces insofar as they function as 'boundary stones of another age, illusions of eternity' that would disappear without commemorative vigilance.[1]

In the already classic 2005 collected volume *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, Eva and Hans Henning Hahn anticipated the adaptation of Nora's theories to the German-Polish context in their article on the 'flight and expulsion' of Germans from east of the Oder-Neisse border in the aftermath of Second World War, which they framed as a crystallization point for postwar German identity and a constituent basis for the Federal Republic of Germany.[2] Also in 2005, the Silesian Museum in Görlitz sponsored the creation of an edited collection of *Erinnerungsorte* relating specifically to the German-Polish borderland of Silesia, featuring examples such as the notorious 19th-c. anti-Semitic and anti-Polish Silesian novelist Gustav Freytag, the embattled Upper Silesian Mount of St. Anne, or the paper *Erinnerungsorte* of Silesian expellee Heimat books.[3] The groundwork had thus been prepared for this massive, seven-years-in-the-making, five-volume collection on German-Polish Memory Spaces (simultaneously published in Polish as *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*), in which German and Polish experts have entered the so far largest collaborative scholarly project to compile a veritable

encyclopaedia of memory spaces. In a poignant act of scholarship, the published results of their collaboration portray the deeply interdependent historic interrelations and social imaginaries in one of the most antagonistic but also culturally rich dynamic exchanges between two neighbouring European countries.

Alongside his Polish colleague Robert Traba (chair of the German-Polish schoolbook commission and historian at Berlin's Institute for Polish Studies from the Polish Academy of Sciences), Oldenburg professor Hans Henning Hahn has continued his work on *Erinnerungsorte* by editing most of the volumes in this new German-Polish collection, which in total includes 140 distinct entries composed by leading German and Polish experts. The whole team comprised 115 authors, who met in six workshops and consulted with assistance from about 200 staff and students. The goal, as the editors observe in their introduction to the first volume, was to reinvigorate a metaphorical concept in danger of succumbing to popularized clichés and 'to spread knowledge about the richness of memorial images in both societies', because 'only when we are acquainted with images of our neighbours are we competent to proceed on our own' in scholarly analysis of sites inside national boundaries (I, p. 11). This is not to say that 'national memories' are taken as actual, collective, spiritual processes in the vein of classical organic nationalism as theorized by Johann Gottfried Herder or Johann Gottlieb Fichte; on the contrary, the editors further Nora's emphasis on the constructed, discursive quality of memory spaces as collective markers imagined as immutable but in fact subjected to constantly changing interpretation (I, p. 14). And although memory spaces are often national in orientation, they can also have regional, religious, or social dimensions that awaken the same sense of a common, collective memorial attachment. It is this theoretical perspective that contributors to this collection were charged with applying to their many and multifaceted essays on memory spaces in which German and Polish culture have shared a common relationship—interconnections that prove the international quality of memory spaces and have offered a realm for transnational discourse (or the contestation thereof).

The first two volumes, entitled 'apart and together', select memory spaces in the classic sense under the headings of geographical entities 'near and far' (such as the Polish Corridor, Galicia, and Silesia); key sites related to 'victories and defeats' (such as the battles of Liegnitz (Legnica) and Tannenberg (Grunwald) and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising); groups or people 'foreign and our own' (such as Copernicus, Günter Grass, and Jews); 'revolutions or utopias' (as diverse as America, Polish Jazz, and Pope John Paul II); concepts tied to 'pride and shame' (such as the Teutonic Knights, Guest Workers, and the Lamsdorf (Łambinowice) internment camp); and concepts or people 'holy and accursed' (as diverse as St. Hedwig, Karl Marx, and the Holocaust). To illustrate the general approach, one can select Jörg Hackmann's examination of the memory space 'Hansa' as a historically mutable 'ideal for future developments' (I, p. 93). Ever more popular across contemporary Europe as a nascent predecessor for the decentralized and transnational EU and still resonant as a German memory space symbolizing medieval qualities of German seafaring entrepreneurialism (although the national element diminished after 1945 in both East and West Germany), the Hansa has found new interest as a memory space in Poland. No longer just an emblem of German exploitation and oppression blocking Polish access to the sea (the longstanding nationalist view), local urban histories (still somewhat polonized) have appropriated Hansa identities that tie them to a larger European cultural realm.

Meanwhile, in one of the most ambitious articles, Juliane Haubold-Stolle and Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska unpack the challenging and disparate memory space surrounding the formerly German metropolis of Breslau as it was remade as the Polish city of Wrocław after the Second World War. Whereas West Germany saw both public and private commemoration of the previously German city (usually without the context of Nazi Germany's wartime

excesses which had made this loss possible), in East Germany expellees mourned their lost home in private, at times investing their mourning into their new place of settlement in Dresden, which had taken on a publically acceptable victim status through its wartime firebombing (I, p. 239). Meanwhile, increased contact between German Breslauer and Polish Wrocław's inhabitants during nostalgia trips also allowed for a more nuanced view of this dear memory space, to the point that since 1989 demographic realities among the last expellees have turned the space into a realm of 'childhood paradise' (I, p. 243). In contrast, the Polish memory space of Wrocław officially excluded the German heritage and was tied to propaganda of the 'return to the motherland' of a medieval Polish city, which motivated prioritizing the reconstruction of medieval architectural monuments as memory spaces alleging the city's eternally Polish identity as tied to the Polish Piast dynasty—a memory space some have claimed was hardly believed by the new population. Simultaneously, legends propagated by Lwów (L'viv) intellectuals in Wrocław created the rival memory (officially banned but tolerated) that Breslau and the surrounding 'Recovered Territories' were compensation for Poland's lost *kresy* borderlands. More recent obsessions with the city's equally eternalized multicultural heritage coexist with continued evidence of the Piast cult, not least through the construction of a statue to medieval Polish King Bolesław the Brave on the prominent site where the monument to Kaiser Wilhelm I had stood before the war. Given these many overlapping, competing narratives, this so-called 'city with amputated memory' is perhaps the ultimate example of a layered and constantly metamorphosing German-Polish memory landscape.

The third volume, entitled 'parallels', places German and Polish memory spaces side-by-side in comparative context (such as Poland's Eastern *kresy* borderlands and Germany's Eastern territories, the Rhine and the Vistula, Ludwig van Beethoven and Frédéric Chopin, and each Communist state's secret police). An admittedly 'superficial comparativeness' for 'fully different historical phenomena', this volume is explicitly meant to be 'provocative or even irritating' in order to prompt critical awareness and reflection about national narratives (III, p. 17). In some ways, this makes volume three the most unique and valuable of the collection, in that it juxtaposes and proves the kindred nature of longstanding national imaginaries. For instance, Leszek Żyliński successfully uses the concept of 'mental maps' to compare longstanding greater German conceptions of Central Europe with the imagined greater Polish space of an *Intermarium* between Baltic and Black Sea. In both cases, ideologues and politicians in an emerging national state called for a vast federal body to be dominated by their own national core in the midst of what might otherwise be a power vacuum at the heart of Europe—hence often describing this attempt at national aggrandizement as a distinctly 'European' problem. Today, both eastward-oriented imaginaries continue 'only as metaphorical and art historical memory spaces' as expressed through nostalgic travel experiences in each nation-state's former Eastern territories and the retention of certain myths (III, p. 105). Just as conceptually dazzling is Jerzy Kałużny's comparison of how the failed constitutions of the Frankfurt Parliament in 1848/49 and in Warsaw on 3 May 1791 sustained strong impetus for future conceptions of historical progression, not least in the light of ongoing regime changes and traumas throughout the 20th c.

Volumes four and five (the latter edited by Peter Oliver Loew and Traba) turn their attention to methodological questions. German-Polish memory sites are explored in volume four in a transnational, pan-European, and interdisciplinary context and in light of methodological controversies about scholarship on memory and forgetting. Building on a host of recent literature, not least by Andrzej Tomaszewski and Arnold Bartetzky, Beate Störckuhl's contribution on the role of architectural style and selective monument preservation offers useful insights into how material surroundings can be willfully interpreted with specifically national features (such as

the supposedly 'German' Gothic style), such that a prized monument or reconstructed (even wholly invented) palace can become a touchstone of eternalized national memory. When the German Empire constructed 'German Romanesque' behemoths like the Metz main station and Posen (Poznań) imperial palace, it was to 'manifest the historically grounded claims for the annexed provinces in the urban landscape and thus in the everyday life of the residents' (IV, p. 293). The nationalizing great power's attempt to forge a memory space, and so prove that the city's very stones had always spoken German, was spectacularly undermined by the ceding of eternalized German borderlands to other nation-states. That Polish (or French) preservationists like Tomaszewski have nonetheless sought to retain many of these problematic monuments is a service towards retaining a historically honest and layered urban landscape.

Especially intriguing and perhaps also irresolvable are the attempts by Heidi Hein-Kircher (and in part Hubert Orłowski) to distinguish between memory spaces, which Hein-Kircher claims are based on a real context and can have meanings assigned 'from below', and political myths such as *polnische Wirtschaft*, which she sees as long-term, mainly 'top-down' stereotypes. For Hein-Kircher, although both forms are based upon selective memory, 'in principal memory spaces summon "only" fundamental associations of membership in a community, while political myths function more distinctly as generators of meaning and thus must possess an interpretive authority whose power can be used to occupy the public sphere'. Of course, even when myths are classified as a 'subset' of memory spaces more distinctive as 'political weapons', it is in practice very hard to disentangle the two (IV, p. 135). Hence, more in keeping with the intentions of the series editors that 'political myths are potentially found in memory spaces' (I, p. 27), I would argue that it is counterproductive to try to identify and exclude myths from analysis of memory spaces. In fact, as most entries in this collection attest, almost every memory space is itself host to manifold and ever shifting, politically exploited myths and stereotypes, whose critical analysis and refutation should be part of the scholarly endeavour.

Of particular interest is volume five, which offers the first systematic German translation of historic Polish contributions on sensitive themes and theories pertaining to cultural memory. Both because Polish memory spaces have been generally unknown in Germany (and internationally), and because Polish theoretical approaches to memory have been generally unknown to the non-Polish-speaking world (V, p. 9), a look into this previously occluded world of historic Polish memory discourse is enlightening. Already in 1938, Stefan Czarnowski was pondering how the modern present remakes the past, how eternalized traditions become transient. The institution of a formal school of woodcarving in Zakopane had destroyed the original whittling tradition in the region and ultimately yielded mass-produced kitsch. In this light, 'the past continues on in the present, but it succumbs to broad quantitative and qualitative changes' generally determined by the ruling classes (V, pp. 41-43). A series of further interconnected theoretical essays ultimately leads to Anna Sawisz's insights on generational memory transmission in 1990. Applying ideas dating back to Czarnowski, she informs his view of power relations through her own recent experience, in which the Communist authorities' social memory had been successfully contested by its opponents. Due to the state's perceived illegitimacy, its opponents had prevailed in transmitting memories (such as the Katyn massacre) that had become more valid for most members of Polish society than those encouraged by the state (V, p. 96). Among the articles on 'memory in conflict', Janusz Tazbir offers a lucid analysis from 1997 about the ways in which Polish patriots had used monuments to spread collective national memory among their chosen countrymen. For instance, monuments to Kościuszko in Galicia (and especially Cracow's Kościuszko mound) had attracted national pilgrims from the Prussian and Russian partition zones and won funding from Polish emigrants around the

world (V, p. 244). Particularly sober is Feliks Tych's recent 2009 assessment of Polish consciousness of the Holocaust, namely its lesser status in a country where national identity is based on a sense that Poles were the greatest victims, and Jewish victims were not seen as Polish victims—a memorial blindness also made possible because in postwar Polish society the Jewish minority has been small and dwindling (V, p. 253). It is hoped that these historic and ongoing Polish memory analyses gain a wide readership and application in scholarship. In the end, this expansive German-Polish compendium offers keen and collaborative analysis of key memory spaces which have previously been prey to generations of nationalizing hubris. Much as the German-Polish textbook 'Understanding History, Forging the Future' overcame past national agendas by giving students a common German-Polish historical narrative,[4] this five-volume set (in which some of the same scholars contributed) does an immeasurable service by offering the present generation of scholars and informed readers essays that touch on sensitive historical issues with researched analyses whose goal is lucid impartiality. May these essays stand as a reference point for coming generations of scholars, who, it is hoped, will continue the work furthered here, and engage in transnational scholarship that attempts to put aside national agendas to find a critical common narrative.

[1] PIERRE NORA: Between Memory and History: 'Les Lieux de Mémoire', in: *Representations* (1989), 26, pp. 7-24, here p. 12.

[2] EVA HAHN, HANS HENNING HAHN: Flucht und Vertreibung, in: ÉTIENNE FRANÇOIS, HAGEN SCHULZE (eds.): *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, Bonn 2005, pp. 332-350.

[3] MAREK CZAPLIŃSKI, TOBIAS WEGER (eds.): *Schlesische Erinnerungsorte: Gedächtnis und Identität einer mitteleuropäischen Region*, Görlitz 2005.

[4] KINGA HARTMANN (ed.): *Geschichte verstehen—Zukunft gestalten. Ausgewählte Aspekte der deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen in den Jahren 1933-1949. Ergänzende Unterrichtsmaterialien für das Fach Geschichte*, 2nd edition, Dresden—Wrocław 2009.

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