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Symbols That Face Two Ways: Commemorating the Victims of Nazism and Stalinism at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen

THE COLLAPSE IN 1989 of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) regime in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the unification of Germany in 1990 precipitated in eastern German society a wrenching public assessment of its postwar political history. More recently, investigations of the common strands of authoritarianism and repression in the Nazi dictatorship and the socialist regime put in place in the eastern zone by Soviet power have created a crisis of historical commemoration.

The complex, uneasy confrontation between eastern Germany's Nazi and Communist pasts is inescapable at the former concentration camps at Buchenwald, outside Weimar, and Sachsenhausen, north of Berlin. These are the sites where the SED regime elaborated its founding narrative of the triumph of Communist-led resistance over fascism. But in the woods outside each camp, mass graves of Germans who died at the hands of the Soviet occupying forces have recently been uncovered. These "new" graves contained the bodies of Germans interned by the Soviet authorities between 1945 and 1950.[1] Their existence was not made public until after the GDR was taken into the Federal Republic of Germany in the spring of 1990. According to data in Russian archives, the Soviet military government confined a total of 122,671 Germans, of whom 42,889 died of exposure, starvation, and disease.[2] Other sources (including the present German government) give higher estimates ranging from 160,000 to 260,000 prisoners and 65,000 to 80,000 dead.

Under the SED regime, the history of the "special camps" (*Speziallager* or *Sonderlager*) could not be investigated, much less written. There was, however, private knowledge of what had happened, and with the collapse of the GDR, the families of some who had died in the *Speziallager* erected wooden crosses in the areas where graves were found. The administrators of the memorial sites of the Nazi camps began to include the history of the Soviet camps in their presentations. In response, groups representing survivors of Nazi persecution—Jews, Gypsies, and political antifascists—objected vehemently to what they perceived

as an equation of the two regimes. Thus the discovery of mass graves from the Soviet period at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen created a crisis of commemoration by requiring that Nazi and Stalinist pasts be memorialized in the same physical and symbolic settings.[3]

Place and Commemoration

After 1945, the task of memorializing recent history in Europe relied heavily on marking and preserving the sites of terror and destruction rather than erecting traditional monuments to the war dead and their leaders in battle. Whole portions of landscapes where mass killings had occurred were set aside, such as the towns of Oradour (France) and Lidice (Czech Republic). The beaches where U.S., British, and Canadian forces landed and concentration-camp sites in East and West Germany, Austria, and Poland were dedicated as memorials. Such commemorative sites derive their power precisely from their materiality; they are regarded as immutable evidence, unmediated testimony, of what happened there. The presupposition is that the site has one story to tell. Oradour and Lidice, for example, were historically unremarkable until their inhabitants were wiped out by the Nazis, and nothing noted by historians has happened in those places since. If, however, a site was the scene of more than one important event, the custodian of the site has a more complex task. Since the logic of site-based memorials is that one commemorates that which occurred where it happened, the custodian cannot, in good faith, withhold acknowledgment of other related and significant events that took place at the same site. Unlike the writer of a book or the director of a museum, the custodian of a memorial site is not free to select what to tell and what to leave untold.

This essay traces the explosion of commemorative debate over Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen since 1989. The situation is fluid and still evolving, but it is already clear that concentration-camp sites, having played an important role in eastern and western German self-conceptualization since the war, will continue to be a touchstone for the post-1989 German identity now in the making. How Germans decide to address their "double history" at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen will have important implications for how they come to see their historical past, their political present, and their future.[4]

The Old Days

In all the European societies that came under Nazi domination during World War II, resistance to the Nazis was the basis of postwar claims to political and moral legitimacy. The struggle to claim this legacy was carried out (among other ways) by preserving particular sites, erecting memorials, and otherwise

inscribing specific dates in the national memory. In France, all parties except those of the Right could call on some record of resistance for moral and political inspiration.

West Germans had a harder time finding a tradition of resistance. Though there were indeed several resistance circles, opinion polls taken in the first years of the Federal Republic registered a deep ambivalence toward those who had resisted. The Christian Democratic government was loath to recognize the systematic resistance that had come from the Left. Conservative resisters from the Kreisauer Kreis, the group around General Goerdeler and the Confessing Church, were fairly well ignored by the political establishment. The commemoration of the anniversary of the plot to kill Hitler on 20 July 1944 became the only event to receive consistent official attention. But the fact that the attempted coup was a belated action by members of a conservative elite weakened its symbolic power, and veterans' associations bitterly criticized honoring members of the plot as a defamation of those who had continued to fight until the end of the war.

It was different in the other Germany. Nowhere in Europe was the use of commemorative sites to establish a postwar national identity more conspicuous than in the GDR. Alone among the postwar European states, the GDR set about defining a historical tradition and creating the iconography and symbolic landscape for a newly invented state with no previously accepted physical, cultural, or linguistic boundaries. East Berlin alone still conveys a sense of the extraordinary effort put into creating a landscape dense with political landmarks (many of which are now slated to be removed).[5]

At the founding of the German Democratic Republic in 1949, the Communists of the SED claimed exclusive rights not only to the legacy of the German workers' movement of the nineteenth century, but also to the record of antifascist resistance to the Nazis as the basis for "the better Germany" (*das bessere Deutschland*). In the official ideology, the struggle against fascism continued in the form of opposition to the capitalist society of West Germany, which could, it was asserted, become openly fascist at any time.[6]

The regime placed the sites of National Socialist concentration camps at the heart of East German commemorative and political culture. The first concentration camps had been set up by storm troops, Stürmabteilung (SA), in 1933 in the aftermath of the Reichstag fire to intern political prisoners—many of them Communists or Socialists. While the Soviets stamped the civic landscape with heroic memorials honoring their soldiers as liberators and conquerors, the SED regime claimed its share in the successful fight against fascism.[7] In 1955 the GDR founded a "Board of Curators for the Building of National Memorial Sites at Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, and Ravensbrück." A law passed in 1961 designated these sites of Nazi terror as "National Sites of Admonition and Remembrance" (*Nationalen Mahn-und Gedenkstätten*).[8] In West Germany, on the other

hand, it was the survivors who initiated the preservation and memorialization of concentration-camp sites—often against the objections of the government authorities and a decade later than in the GDR.[9]

Buchenwald

To reach Buchenwald, one drives up a wooded mountainside that overlooks the small city of Weimar in the east German state of Thuringia. In July 1937, the SS brought inmates from the camp at Sachsenhausen to clear 370 acres of forest above the town which, as the home of Goethe and his meeting place with Schiller, symbolizes classical German culture. The Nazis spared one magnificent oak, known to be a favorite of Goethe and his love Charlotte von Stein, and made it the center of a concentration camp built to imprison and work to death Hitler's opponents and victims.[10]

The irony was not lost on people of the time. In May 1939, just before his death, the Austrian Jewish émigré novelist and journalist Joseph Roth devoted an article to the "Goethe Oak":

> Symbolism has never been as cheap as it is today. Between the laundry and the kitchen [in the camp] stands the oak tree of Madam von Stein and Goethe—and as such it is a protected historical monument. Every day the prisoners of this concentration camp pass by this oak tree, or rather: they are made to pass by it.[11]

In the eight years of the Buchenwald camp, 250,000 people were imprisoned there. Sixty-five thousand of them were killed.

In early April 1945, as Allied troops advanced through Germany, the SS frantically sought to clear Buchenwald of prisoners and to get away themselves. They marched thousands of inmates out of the camp and shot them. They loaded others into boxcars and shipped them toward Dachau. On 11 April 1945, as the American Fourth Armored Division approached, the SS withdrew from the camp. At this point the highly organized camp underground, led and controlled by Communist prisoners, stormed the watchtowers and the gates of the camp.[12]

The first leadership of the GDR designated Buchenwald as its principal pantheon to heroic resistance fighters and made the "self-liberation" (*Selbstbefreiung*) of the camp the focus of an immense memorial complex erected about a mile from the site of the concentration camp. Dedicated in 1958 by the Minister President and SED party leader Otto Grotewohl, the *Mahnmal* commands a wide view of the Saale River valley (fig. 1). A bell tower looms above a statue depicting a determined group of eleven resisters rising up to liberate the camp. Some are armed, others raise a fist in defiance. The central figure holds up his thumb and first two fingers in the gesture of the "Buchenwald Oath" which, in the GDR, became the symbol of the antifascist resistance fighters.[13] The victorious resisters overlook the hillside and a gigantic set of steps which leads down to three mass

FIGURE 1. Aerial view of the Buchenwald *Mahnmal* and the statue of "self-liberation," from the time of the GDR. Photo: VEB DEFA Kopierwerke Berlin.

FIGURE 2. The Street of Freedom at Buchenwald, with bell tower in background.

graves in the shape of enormous craters. The graves are bounded by a wide stone promenade, the Street of Nations, where eighteen pylons symbolize each country in which, in the words of GDR guide literature about the camp, "the antifascist resistance fight developed into a people's battle." One climbs back up the hillside by way of the Street of Freedom, a set of steps studded with seven stone blocks depicting scenes of camp life and inscribed with verses of an epic poem (figs. 2 and 3). The purpose of the memorial was not to commemorate the victims of Nazism but to celebrate the antifascist resisters and warn (*mahnen*) against the continued threat of fascism from the capitalist West.[14]

The camp itself is on a human, not a monumental, scale. One enters through a wrought-iron gate bearing a motto that faces inward: "To each his own" (*Jedem das Seine*)—a cynical reference to the SS system for classifying prisoners. The barbed-wire enclosure stands empty except for the crematorium and a three-story stone building (the old storehouse) which now houses the museum. One's eye is caught by the outline of the barrack floors traced on the ground and filled in neatly with gravel. Walking along the paths of this windswept, sloping field one can find the stump of a tree, filled with concrete to keep it from rotting away, duly marked: "Goethe-Eiche" (Goethe's Oak) (fig. 4). Rough-hewn stone memorials pay tribute to murdered Jews and Soviet prisoners of war at places where they were held.

Until the events of 1989, the exhibit at the Buchenwald museum told almost exclusively of the underground political organization in the camp and the role of the Soviet army in the fight against National Socialism.[15] Visitors (four hundred thousand a year during the time of the GDR) learned that the SED regime was born of the heroic activities of political resisters in the camp—the original and true victims of the Nazi persecution. Only leaders of the Left received significant mention as individuals. At the courtyard of the crematorium, a bronze column and a plaque indicated that Ernst Thälmann, a leader of the German Communist Party who became the principal hero of the GDR, was murdered there. Other victims of Nazi state terror (Jews, homosexuals, Christians, conservative resisters, the physically and mentally handicapped, Jehovah's Witnesses, Gypsies) remained in the background. In the GDR's interpretation of history, the Third Reich had waged a class war to enslave the working class and destroy Communism and the Soviet Union in the interest of German capital;[16] the systematic murder of the Jews was considered a secondary consequence of the Nazis' repression of the Communist resistance.

This state ideology of antifascist resistance (often abbreviated in the GDR as *anti-fa*) exonerated East Germans from guilt for Nazi crimes since, according to the *anti-fa* myth, their country was free of malefactors, the high-level Nazis having fled west at the end of the war. Since the roots of fascism had been eradicated in the GDR, where antifascist fighters had won out and established a state committed to peace, there was nothing to apologize for. This sense of distance from

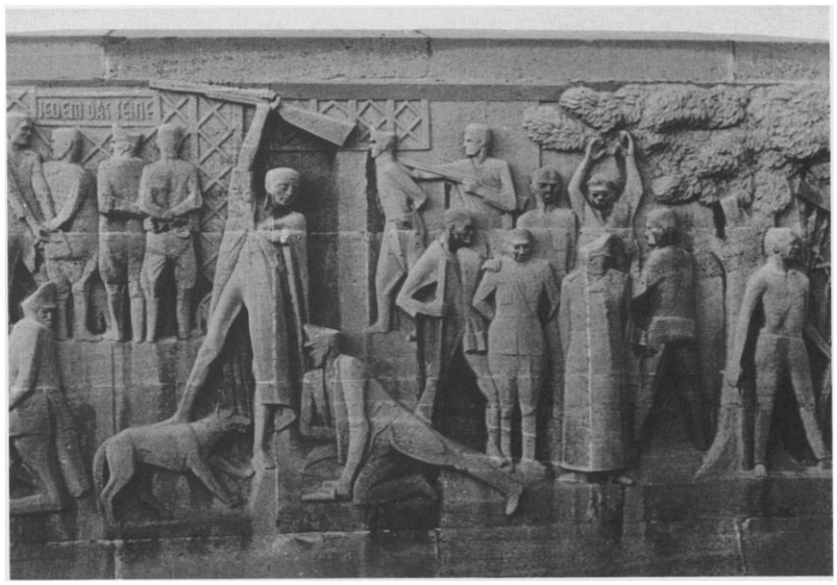

FIGURE 3. Detail from one of the Street of Freedom monuments, depicting the "self-liberation" of of Buchenwald.

FIGURE 4. Goethe's Oak with crematorium in background.

Nazi perpetrators and of moral superiority to the Federal Republic permitted some in the postwar generation of East Germans to develop a sense of national pride rare among their West German counterparts.[17] The unification of Germany in 1990 has complicated what Germans call *Erinnerungsarbeit*, or "the task of recollection," since concentration-camp sites are sites of national shame for western Germans and sites of national pride for those in the east.

With the assimilation of the GDR into the Federal Republic in 1990, East-German-trained functionaries who had charge of commemoration at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen were soon discharged and replaced by western Germans.[18] Historians, politicians, survivors' groups, and the newly appointed custodians of Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen moved to correct the partisan nature of the historical presentation of the museums in the camps.

Difficult enough undertaken alone, this task was further burdened by the revelation that the Soviet-occupation authorities had interned and abused Germans in the same camps. In August 1945, only months after Buchenwald had been emptied of survivors of the Nazi persecution, the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) transformed the concentration-camp site into "Speziallager 2." Among the first to be arrested were active Nazis; members of the SS and security services, Sicherheitsdienst (SD); low- and middle-level Nazi functionaries (such as Hitler Youth leaders); and large numbers of teenage boys suspected of belonging to the *Werwölfe* (a last-ditch Nazi guerrilla organization later accused of seeking to sabotage the new Soviet order). They were later joined by Communists, Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, and Liberals who opposed the Soviet occupying power and the eastern German regime then taking shape.[19] The Soviet secret police also interned some of their own citizens who had been prisoners of war in Germany or who had served on the German side.[20] It is believed that during its five years of operation from 1945 to 1950, the Soviets imprisoned thirty-two thousand Germans in Buchenwald of which an estimated six thousand to thirteen thousand died of starvation, disease, and general neglect.[21]

Since the autumn of 1990, this history has begun to be commemorated at Buchenwald. One room in the camp museum houses a small, provisional exhibit concerning the Soviet internment camp. Here the visitor can examine a handful of objects donated by former prisoners and can read testimonies of a few individuals about the circumstances of their arrest and conditions in the camp. In contrast to the main exhibit, which presents materials embedded in a fully elaborated and institutionalized historical narrative, the objects from the *Speziallager* are like shards excavated in an archaeological dig: incomplete, fragmentary, almost cryptic.

By the spring of 1991, international organizations of Nazi camp survivors, as well as the *anti-fa* veterans in eastern Germany, were protesting any configuration

of the memorial site that would place the history of the *Speziallager* side by side with the story of the Nazi camps. They argued that the introduction of the story of the *Speziallager* not only diminished the impact of the principal commemoration but equated Nazi terror with Stalinist terror. From previous and ongoing debates, they knew that anti-Communist rhetoric sometimes seeks to lay the Nazi past to rest by drawing attention to Soviet crimes.[22]

The intensity of the protest is palpable when one visits the graves of Germans who died in the *Speziallager* and experiences the spatial interplay between the various components of the memorial landscape. The graves from the *Speziallager* lie in the woods behind the camp museum on the other side of the barbed wire that encloses the designated camp site. To reach them, the visitor leaves the camp by the main gate, turns left, and after passing the crematorium, takes a dirt path leading down the hill. In the summer, overgrowth blocks the view of the camp and the scene is peaceful. In the midday heat, butterflies dance among wildflowers. Forest has reclaimed most of Buchenwald's surroundings, left untouched by the East Germans who took over the site in 1950. Woods conceal the remains of an armaments factory bombed by U.S. aircraft at the end of the war. Trees hide the SS officers' villas.

After walking a few hundred yards, one comes to the edge of the woods. Signs inform the visitor that on either side of the path lie the mass graves of thousands who died in the Soviet "special camp" and that more graves are to be found at other areas nearby. The ground underfoot changes from dirt to a neatly bordered gravel walk that descends to a clearing. Here, in 1990, relatives of those who died in the *Speziallager* set up a cluster of handmade, polished wooden crosses.

Most inscriptions give only the name of the individual and dates of birth and death. A few provide clues to the identity of the men: "Here rests in God / Emil Honke / District Forester in the Sudetenland / 1904–1946" (fig. 5). This man was part of the German administration of annexed Czech land, and the reference has a ring of irredentist nostalgia. A small boulder honors the mayor of an unnamed town: "1929–1945 / Mayor / Berthold Burthard / 1887 to 1947" (fig. 6). From the dates on the stone it is evident that the deceased was a mayor under the Weimar Republic and remained in office until the end of the war. One can assume he carried out general instructions; but without knowing who he was and where he was mayor, it is impossible to say how directly this individual may have participated in Nazi repression. Yet it is understandably troubling for many to see the death of a Nazi collaborator commemorated within a few yards of the place where the Nazis inflicted suffering and death on thousands.

In the summer of 1991, in response to the need to reinterpret the site and the controversy over incorporating the history of the Soviet camp, the Ministry

FIGURE 5. "Here rests in God / Emil Honke / District Forester in the Sudetenland / 1904–1946."

FIGURE 6. Handmade crosses and an engraved stone mark the site of the mass graves of the *Speziallager* at Buchenwald.

for Science and Culture in the state of Thuringia established a commission of historians from western German institutions to make recommendations for the "reorientation" of the Buchenwald site.[23] The appointment as chairman of Eberhard Jäckel, a historian of Nazi ideology who, in the *Historikerstreit*, had insisted on recognizing the uniqueness of the National Socialist killing of Jews, demonstrated the good faith of the government of Thuringia in confronting the contentious issue of historical comparison at Buchenwald. In the spring of 1992 the committee presented its findings, which have since been accepted by the Thuringian government.

The commission concluded that both the Soviet period and the Nazi period should be commemorated, while stressing from the outset that, in the words of Eberhard Jäckel, "these two periods can be compared but they should not be equated."[24] It was proposed accordingly that the commemorative and historical presentations of the Nazi and Soviet periods be kept physically separate in order to reflect the different nature of the two camps: "They had different causes and pursued different ends; therefore, two separate sites of remembrance are planned."[25]

While the exhibit in the camp museum, according to the commission, would touch on the history of the *Speziallager*, more extensive material on the Soviet internment camp would be presented on its own in a long, low building to be erected behind the main museum. This structure would cross the barbed-wire enclosure and serve as a bridge between the site of the camp and the forest graves of Germans who died in the Soviet *Speziallager*. The new museum could be entered from either site. Visitors could, if they chose, see the exhibits at the Soviet camp or the Nazi camp, without having to see both.

Though it recommended that the history of the Soviet camp at the commemorative site be incorporated, the historians' commission affirmed that the Nazi period should remain the primary emphasis of the site. They suggested redesigning the main museum display to include more information about the fate of victims other than German Communists and Soviet prisoners taken by the German army, who had been the primary focus in the GDR exhibit. The historians' commission also recommended that more focused attention be given to the role of Nazi perpetrators whose activity had intentionally been kept vague in the GDR interpretation of history.[26]

In presenting the more recent layers of Buchenwald's history to the public, it was to be acknowledged that the site had had three uses: as a Nazi concentration camp from 1937 to 1945; as a Soviet internment camp from 1945 to 1950; and as a memorial to enhance the "*anti-fa* legend" of the GDR from 1950 to 1990. The commission recommended using different areas of the memorial landscape to commemorate different histories: the original camp site would testify to the Nazi period; the graves in the woods would evoke the Soviet period; and the memorial complex (the *Mahnmahl*) would illustrate the use of Buchenwald to

invest the former GDR with legitimacy. By physically delimiting the areas representing these different histories, the hope was to keep confusion to a minimum, and to avoid encouraging simplistic parallels between the Nazi and Soviet camps.

The visitor to Buchenwald becomes aware that the inclusion of the Soviet period, as inevitable as it may have been, creates a profound dissonance at the site. There is a fundamental tension between the German recollection of the suffering Nazi regime inflicted on its victims and the commemoration of what was done to individual Germans at the hands of the Soviet victors who beat back Hitler's army.[27] Recounting the multiple, overlapping histories, a task imposed by the logic of site-based memorials, turns out to be much more complex than the comparatively straightforward task at western German sites of showing the horrors of Nazi barbarity.

Sachsenhausen

The camp at Sachsenhausen presented similar difficulties. In 1990 the state of Brandenburg appointed a commission of historians to recommend changes to its commemorative sites. But before their recommendations were made, the interim director at Sachsenhausen, appointed in 1991, added the story of Soviet misdeeds to the old account of the Nazi camp in ways that seemed to equate their significance. His actions demonstrated that using the same built landscape to tell more than one story does not guarantee a more balanced interpretation or lessen the political stakes in telling the history of the camp.

Constructed in 1936 in the town of Oranienburg, twenty-five miles north of Berlin, Sachsenhausen was a training ground for concentration-camp commanders and security personnel. The so-called *T-Gebäude* (T-building) housed the central office of inspection for all the concentration camps.[28] From 1936 to 1945, 204,000 men (of forty-seven different nationalities) were imprisoned in Sachsenhausen. The Nazis killed one hundred thousand prisoners in medical experiments, with gunshots, or by working them to death. In the last days of the war, six thousand inmates died on a forced march from the camp toward the Baltic, where the camp guards intended to drown them.[29] On 22 April 1945, Soviet and Polish troops freed the camp, where they found three thousand prisoners still alive.

Only a month later, the Soviet authorities began using the camp of Sachsenhausen to intern Germans, much as they had at Buchenwald. They imprisoned fifty thousand to sixty thousand men at Sachsenhausen—the biggest of the *Speziallager* in the Soviet-occupied zone. Estimates of the number who died range from fifteen thousand to thirty thousand. About one thousand prisoners were deported to the Soviet Union. In 1961, the GDR opened the site of Sachsenhausen as a *Nationale Mahn-und Gedenkstätte* (fig. 7). In 1990, and again in 1992,

FIGURE 7. Sachsenhausen memorial site.

the state government of Brandenburg announced that it had uncovered mass graves at locations around Sachsenhausen.[30]

The confusion and tension over how to represent publicly Germany's "double history" were even more visible at Sachsenhausen than at Buchenwald. The visitor in 1992 found the administration groping to identify its public. Visitors had new reasons for coming, and their numbers had declined since unification. No longer an obligatory destination for school groups, trade union members, National People's Army recruits, and other organizations, Sachsenhausen saw its annual number of visitors steadily decrease from 406,164 in 1989 to 220,161 in 1992 to 153,945 in 1993.[31] On arriving at the memorial site, visitors were asked to fill out a questionnaire designed to reveal the motivation and purpose of their visit and to identify the phase in the camp's history of primary interest to them.[32] Unsure how to reinterpret its mission in light of the recent upheavals, the camp administration was seeking some direction from the public.

Meanwhile, the interim director of Sachsenhausen from mid-1991 to the end of 1992 added the story of the Soviet internment camp to the memorial site. Gerhard Emig, a high-ranking civil servant in western Berlin and member of the Free Democratic Party, who had been imprisoned in the *Speziallager* at Bautzen, erected a large sign just inside the entrance to the memorial site. It read:

Dear Visitor!

This memorial site was built and designed by the Communist power holders before

perestroika and the turning point [of 1989] in order to commemorate the victims of Nazi criminals.

The end of Communist domination, and the unification of our country in peace and freedom, makes it possible also to commemorate those who, under the Soviet occupying power and under the lawless GDR state after 1945, sacrificed their freedom, health, and their lives in resistance.

The necessary redesigning of this memorial site is now underway.

—The Administration of the Commemorative Site

The attack, posted at the entrance, on the original sponsors of the memorial undermined the tribute to the victims of Nazism, and there was little sense of commitment to telling the history of the original Nazi camp. The sign represented all those interned after 1945 as resisters, which they were not. Also disturbing was the distant reference to all in authority. "Nazi criminals," "Communist power holders," and "the Soviet occupying power" appeared only as external, abstract agents of domination. Paradoxically, this sign recapitulated the *anti-fa* rhetoric of the GDR by tacitly denying that the German population bore any responsibility for Nazism or that German aggression had led to occupation by a foreign power. Brochures made available to the visiting public gave equal attention to the Nazi and Soviet camps, but provided no basis for comparing or differentiating between them.

References to the history of the *Speziallager* were introduced within the site itself.[33] Former prisoners from the Soviet period had placed a stone memorial on the inside of the enclosing wall: "To the Victims of Stalinist Arbitrariness / 1945–1950." The camp museum (Museum of the Antifascist Freedom Struggle of the Peoples of Europe) had been closed for renovations and a revised exhibit placed in the building which once served as the prisoners' kitchen. A sign on the outside of the building reads "Camp Museum / 1936–1945 and 1945–1950." One enters through rooms that display material from the old GDR exhibit. A sign informs the visitor that changes are planned to acknowledge those who were persecuted because of their religious beliefs or race—in particular, Jews and Gypsies. A new room has been devoted to the history of Speziallager 7. Here one finds documents and biographical sketches of people who were in the internment camp.

In 1993, Gerhard Emig was replaced by a new director. In coordination with the Brandenburg historians' commission and the newly established Foundation for Brandenburg Memorial Sites,[34] the administration of the memorial site is now moving to implement a solution similar to that reached at Buchenwald: commemoration of the two periods will be physically set apart from each other. Areas devoted to the Nazi and the Soviet periods will have separate entrances. In the words of Brandenburg's minister of science, research, and culture, "[One] who wants to remember can do that without feeling disturbed by someone else."[35] (The authorities acknowledge that visitors may well seek out the historical nar-

rative most congenial to them—the one that best fits, that is, the preconceptions with which they arrived at the site.)

As the first move in this effort to untangle and physically separate the multiple narratives now being told at Sachsenhausen, Emig's successor, Günter Morsch, began by removing the controversial sign at the camp entrance.[36] The administration of the Sachsenhausen memorial site also plans to change the configuration of the site to include the history of the Soviet *Speziallager*. It will incorporate the internment camp's stone barracks, which lie just outside the present wall. An internment-camp gravesite rediscovered in the same area has been consecrated and a marker placed there. The command post and political department of the *Speziallager* will also be made part of the memorial site.[37]

Mass graves of those who died in the Soviet internment camp are also located a few kilometers away, outside the jurisdiction of the memorial site, at the end of a sandy path in the midst of a pine forest. A plaque set into a boulder was dedicated here in 1991 by the families of those who died and the nearby community of Schmachtenhagen, which owns the land. Handmade wooden crosses are spread out on the forest floor (fig. 8). Many refer to individuals who died in the "concentration camp" of Sachsenhausen. The appropriation of the Nazi term "concentration camp" to describe the postwar Soviet camp produces two effects: it denies the particularity of Nazi terror and implies that those who died in the internment camp were victims, pure and simple.

In the forest, as well as in the camp museum, visitors have posted requests for information about relatives who were arrested, brought to the internment camp, and never heard of again (fig. 9). These signs and the forest grave markers at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen, placed there without official sanction, are a reminder that although politicians, civil servants, and academics may be the official custodians of public memory, the families of those who suffered or died form an enormous and powerful constituency in shaping how these events are conceived of and remembered. The efforts of the historical experts to distinguish between the Nazi and Soviet camps will most likely continue to run counter to the tendency of some Germans to blur the distinctions between the suffering inflicted at Sachsenhausen in the different phases of its history.

How will Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen develop as sites of German national identity? During the GDR regime, these concentration camps served to establish East German political identity as shrines of international Communism. With the disintegration of the Soviet empire and the resurgence of nationalism in former Eastern-bloc countries, Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald have come to serve as sites for eastern Germans, as a people, to articulate a sense of a shared fate growing out of the experience of fascism and the lost war. Despite the horror

FIGURE 8. Schmachtenhagen Forest.

FIGURE 9. Sign in Schmachtenhagen Forest placed by a woman looking for information about her father.

and destruction visited by Germany on the rest of Europe, a sense of victimization plays a fundamental role in this understanding of what it is to be German. Although there are now efforts to give more attention to such victims of the Nazis as Jews, homosexuals, and Gypsies, the recollection of German suffering under the Soviet occupation may come to overpower the image of the suffering that the Nazis inflicted on others (including Germans, who were their principal victims until 1939).

Since unification, the feeling has grown among many eastern Germans that they have been repeatedly victimized by outsiders: first by the Nazis, then by the Soviet occupation, and, since 1990, by western Germans (*Bundesrepublikaner*). Resentment of western German carpetbaggers, and a perception that westerners have a prurient interest in revelations about East German complicity with the secret police of the GDR regime (the "Stasi"), has led some eastern Germans to compare their present travails to the suffering of the Jews. When André Brie, the deputy leader of the PDS (the successor party to the SED), resigned his post after admitting to seventeen years of contact with the Stasi, *Neues Deutschland* (once the party organ of the SED) published an opinion piece which began: "Nun muß auch Brie seinen Judenstern tragen" [Now Brie also must wear his Jewish star].[38] One finds a similar comparison in a statement made by Heinrich Fink, who was fired from his job as president of the Humboldt University for having worked with the Stasi. Recalling that during the Nazi period Jews were obliged to identify themselves as such by taking either Sarah or Israel as a middle name, Fink told an East Berlin audience: "I have often considered calling myself Heiner Stasi Fink, as once ancestors were called Israel." A newspaper account of these remarks goes on to say that "for this comparison with the persecution of the Jews he received strong applause."[39] By referring to himself first as Heiner (his alleged Stasi code name) and then using Stasi for a middle name, the former university president claimed a victim status analogous to that of the Jews during Nazi times.

This conflation of the persecution of Jews and the treatment of East German civil servants and politicians who informed for the Stasi has antecedents in the political culture of the GDR. The *anti-fa* interpretation of events stipulated that during the Nazi dictatorship, both Communists and Jews had been threatened by a "common enemy": capitalism transformed into fascism. East Germans, and anyone else who would listen, were reminded that future leaders of the SED, such as Erich Honecker and Otto Grotewohl, had been incarcerated by the Nazis.[40]

The tendency to blur distinctions between victims and perpetrators has long been evident in some western German historical writing and commemorative activity—the bungled ceremony of German-American reconciliation at Bitburg in 1985 is but one well-known example. Last year, Chancellor Helmut Kohl perpetuated similar confusion in his plans for the renovation of the Neue Wache in Berlin. The Neue Wache (New Guardhouse) was designed in 1816 to celebrate

the Prussian victory over Napoléon. A notable example of German classicism, it stands in the middle of Berlin on Unter den Linden, east of the Brandenburg Gate. In 1931 the Neue Wache was transformed into a memorial for Germany's dead of World War I. Severely damaged in World War II, it was rededicated by the SED regime in 1960 as the "Memorial [*Mahnmal*] for the Victims of Fascism and Militarism."

In January 1993, following Chancellor Kohl's wishes and without introducing the subject for parliamentary debate, the Kohl cabinet voted to redesign the Neue Wache as the "central commemorative site of the German Federal Republic." Kohl chose this site, a new inscription, and the statue to be placed there: a mourning mother cradling her dying son in her lap, an enlargement of a 1937 sculpture by the renowned pacifist and socialist artist Käthe Kollwitz. The artist described the original statue, an intimate figure fifteen inches high, as "so etwas wie eine Pietà" (something like a Pietà).[41] In explaining his choice of the Kollwitz "pietà" for the Neue Wache, Kohl said that mothers suffer most from the consequences of war and tyranny; the new inscription in the Hall of Remembrance (*Gedenkhalle*) reads: "To the Victims of War and Tyranny." The Neue Wache was rededicated in a ceremony on the national Day of Mourning (*Volkstrauertag*), 14 November 1993.

This new configuration of the Neue Wache unleashed a variety of protest and criticism. In this setting, a mother mourning her son seems to refer to a dying soldier. The new memorial seeks to reconnect with an older European tradition of war commemoration centered on the sacrifice of soldiers and does not address the full range of human loss as a result of National Socialism and its war. The statue does not give expression to the experience of deliberate extermination of civilians. It expresses maternal sorrow without saying what is to be mourned, and the Christian connotations of the figure further shut out Jews. Finally, the inscription makes no distinction between victims and perpetrators or among the ways in which people died. In a critique of the memorial, historian Reinhart Kosselleck suggested a more appropriate inscription: "To the Dead—Fallen, Murdered, Gassed, Died, Missing." In this way, he added, all the dead would be remembered, not just "our" dead.[42]

The controversy over the Neue Wache, like the disputes at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen, is at once the catalyst for and one effect of a rethinking of German history. Many western Germans initially expected that the eastern Germans would soon join them in a reasonably comfortable national identity based on economic well-being, extensive social benefits, a stable democratic political life, and a noninterventionist foreign policy. Although the current examination of the recent past started by looking east, the fashioning of a post-1989 German national identity will entail a broader rethinking of the national past which will include the history of the western states as well as the former GDR.

At the present time, "professional specialists in memory—anthropologists, historians, journalists, sociologists"[43]—believe that it is right to accommodate,

even celebrate, the plural nature of social memory and identity. James Ingo Freed, the architect of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, has remarked: "Memory is important, letting that memory be sufficiently ambiguous and open-ended so that others can inhabit the space, can imbue the forms with their own memory."[44] This point of view is sympathetic to the variety of experience and memories that visitors to a memorial bring with them. Thus the custodians of a site-based memorial can exert less control over their memorial space than can designers of traditional museums or monuments. Freed chose to endow his building with a certain openness. At the Neue Wache, Chancellor Kohl made a political decision to blur important distinctions in order that Germans not be made uncomfortable. At Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen, however, the historical record and the logic of site-based memorials have forced administrators and historical experts to contend with competing claims made on the sites. As preservationists they must strike a balance in displaying the traces of the multiple uses of the two camps, a very different task than the design of a museum or monument that is created for a single purpose. Memorial landscapes have a material persistence of their own that can disrupt the intentions of those who choose to preserve them.

Notes

In 1992, the Robert Bosch Stiftung provided me the opportunity to work for the eastern Berlin newspaper, the *Berliner Zeitung*, during which time I explored the questions treated here. Angelika Stricker accompanied me on trips to Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen, and her observations helped me formulate my original questions. Mitchell Ash and Beate Thewalt have kept me abreast of the recent developments at these sites. I am grateful to Mitchell Ash, Kenneth Cmiel, David Schoenbaum, and Randolph Starn for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

1. The Soviet organization for internal security ran a total of ten camps in the Soviet-occupied zone at different times between 1945 and 1950. These camps, numbered 1 to 10, existed in Mühlberg, Buchenwald, Berlin, Bautzen, Fürstenwalde (Ketschendorf), Lieberose, Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg, Torgau, and Neubrandenburg. As the prisoner population diminished, a number of camps were abolished or consolidated. In 1950 three camps remained: Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg, Buchenwald, and Bautzen. The last camp closed in 1951.

   The Soviet organization for state security was known as the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) until 1946, when it split into two successor organizations: the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the Ministry of State Security (MGB).
2. Hermann Weber, foreword to *Einzuweisen zur völligen Isolierung: NKWD-Speziallager Mühlberg/Elbe 1945–1948*, by Achim Kilian (Leipzig, 1992), 7–8; and Paul Stoop, "Wo die Sowjets Andersdenkende quälten," *Der Tagesspiegel* (Berlin), 20 October 1992.
3. The crisis at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen raises questions similar to the *Historikerstreit* (historians' debate) of 1986, which erupted over the question of how to compare

Nazi and Stalinist crimes. All of this is part of the debate in the Federal Republic of Germany about how to relate the Nazi period to the longer course of German history. Despite nuances of argument and opinion, one can sketch a fundamental divide between those who, in order to reclaim a positive image of German national history, would like to lay the Nazi past to rest and those who wish to keep the probing of this period open and ongoing.

4. The effort to define the nature of the relationship between the Nazi period and fifty years of the GDR is what Germans mean when they now speak of "how Germans deal with their double history."
5. Kommission zum Umgang mit den politischen Denkmälern der Nachkreigszeit im ehemaligen Ost-Berlin, report, Berlin, 15 February 1993.
6. For a detailed analysis of the antifascist myth see chap. 4 of Alan L. Nothnagle, "Historical Myth-Building and Youth Propaganda in the Soviet Zone of Occupation and the German Democratic Republic, 1945–1989" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1994).
7. The most notable of the Soviet memorials to the Red Army is the enormous memorial complex of Treptow Park in East Berlin. The visitor enters by a triumphal arch and makes his or her way past a series of stone tablets depicting war scenes and inscribed with gold-lettered excerpts of wartime speeches by Stalin. At the far end, framed against the sky, stands a colossal Soviet soldier. He strides forward with a young girl, rescued from the rubble, on his left arm. In his other hand he clasps a sword to crush a swastika at his feet.
8. Although this designation rings with socialist didacticism, it may be noted that the word *monument* comes from the Latin *monere*, which means not only "to remind," but also "to admonish," "to warn," "to advise," "to instruct": the very meaning of the German *mahnen*.
9. See Barbara Distel, "Entstehung und Funktion der KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau," in *Zur Arbeit in Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus—ein internationaler Überblick*, Wulff E. Brebeck et al. (Berlin, 1988), 159–77; and Harold Marcuse, "Das ehemalige Konzentrationslager Dachau: Ein mühervolle Weg zur Gedenkstätte 1945–1968," *Dachauer Hefte* 6 (1990): 182–205.
10. The first concentration camps in Germany were set up by the SA in 1933, mostly around Berlin. In 1936 the Schutzstaffel (SS) planned Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen as permanent base camps with barracks for prisoners and extensive housing projects for the SS. The first prisoners were political: Social Democrats, Communists, and church people. After the pogrom of November 1938, the first Jews to be arrested because they were Jews were sent there. (For most of the war, Jews were never a large part of the Buchenwald camp population because they were, for the most part, sent east to the extermination camps.) As the war proceeded, inhabitants of annexed and conquered countries were deported to the camp: Austrians, Czechs, Poles, Gypsies. Starting in October 1941, thousands of Soviet war prisoners were sent to Buchenwald. At Buchenwald those who died were beaten, shot, hanged, or worked to death. It was not on German soil, but in the extermination camps of Chelmno, Treblinka, Majdanek, Auschwitz, Sobibor, and Belzec that the SS gassed massive numbers of prisoners.
11. Joseph Roth quoted in Bernd Eichmann, "Der Alltag war Hunger, Folter, und Sterben," *Das Parlament* (Hamburg), 21 February 1992, 17. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.
12. For a detailed description and analysis of the functioning of Buchenwald and the camp underground, Eugen Kogon remains the authority. Kogon, a writer and editor

born in Munich, was imprisoned from 1939 to 1945 in Buchenwald, where he played a key role in the camp underground. Of the German Communists he writes:

> In contrast to men of liberal views, they had always been inured to absolute party discipline, and in methods and means they were almost the only ones who were the enemy's match. . . . The positive achievement of the Communists on behalf of the concentration-camp prisoners can hardly be overrated. In many cases the whole camp literally owed them its life, even though their motives seldom sprang from pure altruism but rather from collective interest for self-preservation in which the whole camp joined because of its positive results.

Eugen Kogon, *The Theory and the Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the System Behind Them*, trans. Heinz Norden (New York, 1950), 231–32.

13. With the Buchenwald Oath, members of the international camp committee (formed by Communist resisters immediately after the liberation of the camp) swore to continue their struggle against war and fascism. These were the oath's words: "We will only halt our struggle when the last perpetrator stands before the judges of our people! The extermination of Nazism with its roots is our slogan. The building of a new world of peace and freedom is our goal. We owe this to our murdered comrades and their families. As a sign of your readiness for this struggle, raise your hands and repeat after me: WE SWEAR!" Quoted in Nothnagle, "Historical Myth-Building," 270.
14. When Bertolt Brecht was asked by the sculptor Fritz Cremer for advice on the design of the memorial, Brecht suggested erecting "an uneven number of giant men, liberated prisoners facing southwest [the direction of the Federal Republic] in the direction of the as yet not liberated regions." Quoted in John Czaplicka, "Revisions in the Commemorative Landscape: Monuments and Memorials to Resistance in the Successor States to the Third Reich" (paper presented at the Institute for Contemporary German Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, D.C., November 1993).

    This remained the purpose of "memorial work" (*Gedenkstättenarbeit*) in the GDR right up to the end. As stated by the camp director in 1985: "The staff of the National Memorial Site at Buchenwald considers it a societal challenge to preserve the legacy of the fight against German fascism and to keep alive among our people the great traditions of struggle, the devotion, activism and resoluteness on the part of the German as well as international forces." Quoted in Peter Sonnet, "Gedenkstätten für Opfer des Nationalsozialismus in der DDR," in Ulrike Puvogel, *Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* (Bonn, 1987), 769–70.
15. This museum, housed in an enormous stone storage building, was installed in 1985 for the fortieth anniversary of the liberation of the camp. It replaced the much smaller, original museum installed in 1958.
16. Nothnagle, "Historical Myth-Building," 257.
17. Cora Stephan, "Die DDR, das 'bessere Deutschland.' Ein historisches Gutachten," *Kursbuch* 3 (February 1993): 99–110.
18. Stephanie Endlich, "Was wird aus den Gedenkstätten in der ehemaligen DDR? Den meisten Mitarbeitern droht die Entlassung—Gedenkenaustausch in Buchenwald," *Der Tagesspiegel*, 12 October 1990. The documentary film *Sachsenhausen* includes an interview with a former department head at the camp museum who had been a member of the SED and worked closely with the Communist youth organization FDJ. The letter announcing her firing condemns in sharpest terms her involvement in corrupting youth in an "unjust regime." Asked for her reaction, she says, "I was totally devastated. I thought I was doing something good for young people all these years."

Walter Krieg and Dieter Vervuurt, *Sachsenhausen* (documentary film shown in rough cut at the 1994 Berlin Film Festival). I am grateful to Mitchell Ash for providing this reference.

19. In the absence of access to the pertinent Soviet archives, information about the camps comes almost entirely from former prisoners. Much work remains to be done to provide adequate historical documentation for the history of the *Speziallagern. Zur Neuorientierung der Gedenkstätte Buchenwald: Die Empfehlungen der vom Minister für Wissenschaft und Kunst des Landes Thüringen berufenen Historikerkommission* (Buchenwald-Weimar, 1992), 22; and *Empfehlungen zur Neukonzeption der Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten* (Berlin, Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kultur des Landes Brandenburg in Zusammenarbeit mit der brandenburgischen Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, January 1992), 12, 34.
20. *Empfehlungen zur Neukonzeption der brandenburgische Gedenkstätten*, 12.
21. Eichmann, "Der Alltag war Hunger."
22. Of course, this works the other way around as well. Given the nature of East German history writing and commemoration, antifascist rhetoric served to distract from various affinities and collaborations among the German Communist Party, the Soviet Union, and Hitler before and after 1933.
23. In Germany's federal system, cultural questions remain in the purview of the individual *Länder* (states); there is no central ministry of culture. The federal government can provide up to 50 percent of the funding for the maintenance of cultural patrimony deemed of national significance (which has been the case for the major concentration-camp sites).
24. Eberhard Jäckel, interview by author, Stuttgart, 27 November 1991. See also Eberhard Jäckel, "Die doppelte Vergangenheit," *Der Spiegel*, 23 December 1991, 39–43.
25. Eberhard Jäckel, foreword to *Zur Neuorientierung der Gedenkstätte Buchenwald: Die Empfehlungen der vom Minister für Wissenschaft und Kunst des Landes Thüringen berufenen Historikerkommission* (Buchenwald-Weimar, 1992), 5.
26. Ibid., 10.
27. This issue is further complicated by the fact that German victims of the postwar internment at Buchenwald included not only former Nazis but also some Social Democrats who were locked up there twice—first for opposing the Nazis and later for opposing the Soviet authorities.
28. Located outside the boundaries of the present-day memorial, the former *T-Gebäude* and the surrounding buildings, once SS barracks, became the subject of their own debate after unification. During the GDR regime, the *T-Gebäude* housed the offices of the finance bureau (*Finanzamt*) and the police headquarters (*Polizeipräsidium*) of the city of Oranienburg; the former barracks were used by the East German army (*National Volksarmee*). The city would now like to develop this area by building lodging, commercial centers, and a school. Proposals were solicited in an international architectural competition, which set off intense debate in the pages of the Berlin press. Determined to avoid an international scandal like that unleashed by the 1991 attempt to build a supermarket at the edge of the concentration camp of Ravensbrück, the city of Oranienburg has been consulting the organizations of former prisoners of Sachsenhausen as well as the Central Council of Jews in Germany. "Empörung in Oranienburg über Gutachten zu Sachsenhausen," *Berliner Morgenpost*, 12 December 1992; and "Oranienburg veut recycler ses casernes SS," *Libération* (Paris), 10 May 1993.
29. The route of the death march is commemorated by plaques along the way. It ends at a monument on the edge of the city of Schwerin (the capital city of the state of

Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) that marks the site where American and Soviet troops liberated the prisoners.

30. "Weitere Massengräber in Brandenburg vermutet," *Der Tagesspiegel*, 26 September 1992; "Vorhöfe zur Hölle," *Der Spiegel*, 28 September 1992; "Schläge mit Stacheldraht," *Der Spiegel*, 2 April 1990, 130–31.
31. *Berliner Morgenpost*, 11 August 1993.
32. Under the category "reason for your visit," one was asked about: a) stimulus for coming; b) whom one wishes to honor (relatives, pre-1945 victims, post-1945 victims, or "oneself [as] a victim" (*selbst Betroffener*); c) subject of interest (history of the concentration camp, history of the internment camp); d) where one comes from (western Germany/western Berlin, the former GDR, abroad).
33. Like the other concentration-camp memorial sites, the memorial site at Sachsenhausen takes up only a small portion (16 hectares) of the vast area (380 hectares) that comprised the original camp complex. At the Ravensbrück camp, for example, almost the entire site had been used by Soviet troops with only a thin strip of land serving as the memorial.
34. This public-trust foundation was founded on the suggestion of the Brandenburg historians' commission to coordinate the care and administration of the commemorative sites of Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück and a documentation center to be established at the penitentiary of Brandenburg-Görden. This independent foundation is funded by the *Land* of Brandenburg and the federal government.
35. "Streit um Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen beigelegt," *Der Tagesspiegel*, 19 March 1993.
36. Günter Morsch, interview by Mitchell Ash, Sachsenhausen, November 1993.
37. Günter Morsch, interview by author, Sachsenhausen, 30 May 1994. The Central Council of Jews in Germany has accepted the solution of separate areas within the memorial accessible by separate entrances. But groups of eastern German "antifascist" veterans of the Nazi camp remain perturbed by the dismantling of the GDR's commemorative culture, which placed their contribution center stage. Last year, at the annual celebration of the liberation of Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen, *anti-fa* veterans voiced bitter complaints. "Streit um Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen beigelegt: Kulturminister und Zentralrat der Juden finden Kompromiß," *Der Tagesspiegel*, 19 March 1993; Wilfried F. Schoeller, "Doppelgedächtnis—in diesem Wort liegt der Anspruch," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 15 April 1993; "Überlebende Gedenken der Opfer in Sachsenhausen," *Der Tagesspiegel*, 19 April 1993. Members of *anti-fa* groups voice their criticisms in Krieg and Vervuurt, *Sachsenhausen*.
38. Isso Issew, "Zur Sache," *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin), 30 October 1992.
39. "Ein Minderheitenschutz für Ossis. Prominente aus Ost und West rufen Bürger zur Selbsthilfe auf," *Berliner Zeitung*, 13 July 1992.
40. Cora Stephan, "Perplexed Germany: United State, Divided Nation" (paper presented at the Center for European Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 16 November 1992).
41. The statue had an autobiographical element: one of Kollwitz's own sons was killed as a soldier in World War I.
42. Reinhart Kosselleck, "Stellen uns die Toten einen Termin?" *Frankfurter allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 August 1993.
43. The phrase is from Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York, 1992), 99.
44. James Ingo Freed, quoted in James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, 1993), 283.