

FROM ONE, MANY: RUTH KLÜGER'S *WEITER LEBEN* AND THE  
EVOLUTION OF HOLOCAUST MEMORIES

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## ABSTRACT

In her 1991 memoir *weiter leben*, Ruth Klüger attacks the development of the culture of remembrance that has sprung up surrounding the Holocaust. She views rituals such as Holocaust tourism and memorial visitation as misguided and ineffective, and works to destabilize the very idea of memorial practice. However, the appearance of these arguments in a memory-based text is paradoxical and calls into question the extent to which memorials and memoirs can fulfill the proposed goals of moral improvement and historical change.

Klüger's memoir provides a compact introduction to the pervasiveness and complexity of memorial discourse and practice in the Western world today. The use of memoir, a genre defined by veracity, introduces the importance of finding an essential and objective truth in the Holocaust. How and where this truth is to be found is subject to much debate, and the discussion encompasses speculation on the intrinsic importance of place and the power of the Holocaust to instruct through mere exposure.

This paper analyzes the present memorial culture through the lens of *weiter leben* and posits that the high visibility of the Holocaust as a theme in Western, and especially American, culture and education has spawned modes of remembrance that depart from the core of the event. These modes of remembrance take root in the individual, calling into question the nature of education, the existence of truth, and the idea of the Holocaust as a discrete historical incident.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Megan Eaton was born in Marquette, MI on July 26, 1985. She graduated from Marquette Senior High School in 2003 and attended the University of Michigan. She graduated in April 2007 with High Distinction with High Honors in German, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in German and English. Megan attended the Goethe-Institut in Schwäbisch Hall, Germany, for eight weeks during the summer of 2006. In the summer of 2009, she spent two months in Sweden working as a research assistant for the Cornell University Program in Swedish and studying advanced Swedish at the Uppsala International Summer Session. Megan was awarded a teaching assistantship by the Pädagogischer Austauschdienst in 2009, and spent one year working as an English-language teaching assistant at Schiller-Gymnasium in Hameln, Germany. She will receive her secondary teaching certification in German and English from Northern Michigan University in Fall 2011.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographical Sketch	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Table of Contents	v
Introduction	1
The Truth of Memory	6
The Place of Memory	14
The Practice of Memory	21
The Teaching of Memory	32
From One, Many: Conclusions	46
Works Cited	51
Works Referenced	54

## INTRODUCTION

“We hold these truths to be self evident”  
*The Declaration of Independence*

“For all intents and purposes,” writes Helene Flanzbaum, “the Holocaust is a current event” (Flanzbaum 9). The Western world, and perhaps especially the United States, is constantly bombarded by images and stories of the Holocaust. The event has been the subject of numerous popular and critically acclaimed works in recent decades -- highlights include *Schindler’s List* (1993), *Life is Beautiful* (1997), *The Counterfeiters* (2007), *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), and plentiful film and stage versions of *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. Popular culture is not the only source of this exposure: Flanzbaum estimates between 300 and 500 Holocaust-related stories appear *per year* in major American newspapers, and the subject is a stronghold on syllabi from elementary school to university (ibid.). Half of college students surveyed at the University of Michigan reported that Anne Frank’s diary had been required reading in their secondary school careers (Flanzbaum 1). In my school district, all students read *Number the Stars* in fourth grade, studied the history of the Holocaust and watched *The Diary of Anne Frank* in seventh grade, and watched and wrote about *Schindler’s List* in ninth grade. The event has taken on a central importance for children growing up today who are exposed to many manifestations of Holocaust history before they reach adulthood.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Holocaust is also physically omnipresent. When James E. Young published his study of Holocaust memorials, *The Texture of Memory*, in 1993, “the number of monuments and memorial spaces in Europe, Israel, and America dedicated specifically to the mass murder and resistance of Jews during World War II [...] reache[d] into the thousands, with dozens more being proposed and erected every

year” (*Texture* ix).<sup>1</sup> Since that time, the United States has erected and opened the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* has overcome great controversy to open in Berlin. The practice of memorializing the Holocaust has been so widespread that nearly a decade after Young’s work on memorials appeared, author and scholar Ruth Klüger labeled the movement a “memorial cult” (Klüger 313). Members of this cult are primarily guilty of trying to “impose the contents of [their] minds on [their] grandchildren” (*ibid.*). Those engaged in intentional remembrance of the Holocaust are practicing something forceful and unnatural. Inevitably, younger generations “will remember what they need to remember and forget the rest, as society has always done” (*ibid.*). Klüger makes a strong point, but for one hiccup: in 1991, Klüger, herself a Holocaust survivor, published *weiter leben*, a memoir detailing her life as a young Jewish girl in Anschluss Austria, her time in the Nazi concentration camps, her escape, and her postwar life in Germany and the US. This written act of memorialization seems to contradict Klüger’s negativity toward a mass movement of remembering the Holocaust.

Spurred by this tension, in this paper I use Klüger’s memoir as a central point of reference as I seek insight into the practice of and reasons for organized Holocaust remembrance, with emphasis on memorial practice in the United States. In the first section, “The Truth of Memory,” I examine memoir, a genre predicated on the assumption of the narrative’s objective truthfulness. The English version of *weiter leben*, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, drew biting criticism from the American press for its stylistic and content-based departure from other memoirs of the Holocaust. This criticism serves as a case study as I observe how the designation of

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I use the words memorial and monument according to the guidelines established by James E. Young in his book *Texture of Memory*. That is, both can be mournful or celebratory, but “all memory sites [are] memorials, the plastic objects within these sites [are] monuments” (*Texture* 4).



memoir affects expectations of a text and what, in turn, those expectations reveal about the search for truth that inform Holocaust remembrance in America.

Following this discussion, I turn to the “Die Lager” section of *weiter leben*, which serves as both an anchor for my argument throughout this paper and a guide for my discussion. “The Place of Memory” examines this short section, in which Klüger offers her reflections on the memorials that now stand on the sites of former concentration camps. Using close reading of Klüger’s critique of memorial culture in tandem with data on memorial form and practice, I scrutinize the cultural beliefs that surround historical sites, namely that they carry ineradicable, authentic traces of the past, which in turn offer intrinsic lessons for the present-day. Though my evidence suggests that this is not the case, the act of memorialization remains fixated on *in situ* monuments and authentic artifacts, spurring on the rituals of Holocaust tourism and monumentalization that Klüger finds so objectionable.

Continuing into the third section, “The Practice of Memory,” I delve deeper into the performance of Holocaust memory to examine motives, reasons, and excuses for the excess of Holocaust memory today and the insistence on reverence of that memory. Klüger’s memoir again provides a framework for a discussion of the dark side of the practice. When they remember via the Western memorial rubric, people operate according to a social contract, seeking validation, pride, or moral superiority. They also seek a sense of control, attempting to explain their own memorial actions as medicine against future ills. In order to do this, comparisons to other events must be considered as signs and symptoms. Comparing the Holocaust to other events may mean diminishing its importance, and that importance has become central to Western thought. The colossal singularity of the Holocaust makes meaningful comparison nearly impossible, and yet the event has seeped into contemporary parlance, suggesting that,

in 21<sup>st</sup> century American culture, the meaning of the term “the Holocaust” may in fact have little to do with the truths memorials and memoirs strive for.

From here, I look at “The Teaching of Memory,” seeking the origins of ingrained modes of remembrance in the curricula of schools and universities, where many people learn about the Holocaust for the first time. I feature two distinct approaches to Holocaust education, which have been expressed both by individual educators and by educational institutions. One side of the debate advocates a curriculum in which historical accuracy is of paramount importance; the other prizes moral instruction empathic identification with the subject matter as the primary goals of Holocaust lessons. Each of these approaches recognizes the moral value of locating a “truth” of the Holocaust, but they assign different importance to that truth. Asking how and when to implement this moral education leads to uncertainty surrounding the definition of very education. Here, Klüger’s outspoken resistance against “inflicting” memory on coming generations provides a rubric for comparing inculcation and reflective practices as elements of Holocaust education (Klüger 313). I address Klüger’s critical attitude toward Holocaust education in *weiter leben* and her pedagogical agenda against misinformation and sentimentality in memory practice leads to the notion that, while education may claim to disseminate truth – or even succeed in this pursuit – from a position of implied authority, cultural appropriation of the Holocaust and the development of certain modes of remembrance have fundamentally changed the event to fit in with contemporary, individual goals.

Despite Ruth Klüger’s disappointment in the ability of humans to accurately perceive and speak about the Holocaust, and the memorial culture that has built up around these flawed practices, she herself has a hand in perpetuating the very methods of remembrance she struggles against in *weiter leben*. *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, the English version of Klüger’s memoir, appeared not as a

translation, but as a new version altered to be better understood by an American audience. Klüger, after all her insistence on correcting the popular record of the Holocaust, essentially reshapes the truth of her memoirs for a new cultural context, and in doing so, cements the separation of “The Holocaust” spoken of today from its original historical definition. Extensive selfish and individualized memory practice in search of the truth of the Holocaust and the consequence of that truth has guaranteed that no such truth can be easily found.

## THE TRUTH OF MEMORY

“But O the truth, the truth! the many eyes/  
That look on it! the diverse things they see!”  
George Meredith

In 1991, Ruth Klüger, professor emerita of German at the University of California, Irvine, published *weiter leben: Eine Jugend*. The text is an account of Klüger’s childhood in Vienna, her internment in Theresienstadt, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Christianstadt, her escape in Germany, and her emigration to and postwar life in the United States. The text is easy to classify. The Oxford English Dictionary defines memoirs as “records of events or history written from the personal knowledge or experience of the writer” (*OED*). By this definition, *weiter leben* is a memoir, and it can be further categorized as a Holocaust memoir. Berel Lang emphasizes that memoirs specifically “evoke and rely on the reader’s belief in their verisimilitude” (Lang 21). Without this belief, a text loses the generic distinction that makes it something unique and something uniquely valuable.<sup>2</sup> The importance of truth is central to discussions of Holocaust representation. A memoir in this context is especially compelling and important because these events are assumed to have happened to a real person, an assumption that allows for easier reader identification. This seems to be especially true in the case of an extreme event like the Holocaust. When Holocaust curricula is developed in secondary schools, David H. Lindquist notes that “the matter of historical accuracy is especially critical” and believes that literature chosen for a course, even if not a memoir, must fulfill a “promise of truthfulness” (Lindquist 28). No agent has made this promise; it is simply what is

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<sup>2</sup> To understand the high stakes of this belief, one must only look back to the 2006 public outcry after James Frey’s bestselling memoir of addiction, *A Million Little Pieces*, was revealed to be highly embellished and, in some areas, falsified. The author noted that he and the publishing company debated “whether to publish [the manuscript] as fiction or as nonfiction” (Wyatt).

expected from events of such a prominent and terrific nature. Lindquist's views on history, to which I return below, highlight the central tenet of a 'best practices' for the Holocaust memoir as a genre. Personal experience and the implied veracity of that experience define all memoirs, but in the case of memoirs of the Shoah, the stories are judged to be particularly useful on the basis of this truthfulness and authenticity. There is something to be learned from contact with a narrative that is true. A memoir is written with the intention of providing factual information from the author's point of view, and readers read the text for this same reason. So prominent is the Holocaust in 21<sup>st</sup> century minds that the authenticity is viewed as a "promise" one should expect to be fulfilled.

Such a high stakes definition of the Holocaust memoir genre, though hallowed and widely accepted, leaves the door open for complaint and criticism. First, there is the simple question of "the whole truth." Lindquist notes that when reading survivor testimony, it is important to remember that the accounts may be isolated from the "larger contexts" of the Holocaust (ibid.). They only express one point of view separate from the vast complex of what is known about the Holocaust. "Time causes survivors' memories to become embellished and distorted" – the fallibility of human memory must be acknowledged (ibid.). In *Memento*, (2000) Leonard Shelby, who has no short-term memory, summarizes this danger well: "Memory can change the shape of a room, it can change the color of a car. And memories can be distorted. They're just an interpretation, they're not a record, and they're irrelevant if you have the facts" (*Memento*). Memory is impressionable and comprises one person's word on a given event. Most importantly, memory does not equal fact. In the case of memoir, the power of the passage of time and outside influences to alter memories, to which I return below, may be further compounded by the act of writing itself. Jeffery C. Blutinger quotes a Holocaust survivor and memoirist on the realities of writing

personal history: “you have more time to phrase your words...in a book, you’re also trying to be poetic – you’re trying to write” (Blutinger 276). The act of writing is a conduit between experience and text that has the potential to distort the authenticity that defines the genre. These larger issues affect the truth claims of all memoirs. Holocaust memoirs, however, are part of the larger practice of Holocaust memory and are held to unusual standards of content and truthfulness.

*weiter leben* is not a typical Holocaust memoir. The text is structurally a “notable exception” to the genre due to the large percentage of the text dedicated to Klüger’s post-Holocaust experience (Popkin 60). Klüger also wrote in a “matter-of-fact tone” and seems to “[privilege] facts over emotions” in her reflections (Duttlinger 221). For these reasons, *weiter leben* has been particularly vulnerable to criticism. When Klüger published *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, an English language version of *weiter leben* geared toward American readers, the American press was able to read the memoir for the first time. Reviewers were quick to respond to the memoir’s singularities. In doing so they revealed deep-rooted American expectations for the Holocaust memoir genre.

Writing for the *Women’s Review of Books*, Eunice Lipton describes her discomfort surrounding Klüger’s positive description of aspects of life as a child in the Theresienstadt ghetto. In the ghetto, Klüger made friends and had positive learning experiences, which she writes about openly in *weiter leben*. Lipton admits, “this information about Theresienstadt irritated me, as if in appreciating a single positive thing that occurred in a concentration camp, I was being coerced into denying its fundamental horror” (Lipton 12). Horror defines the Holocaust, and Lipton is suspicious of a narrative that is not permeated by this horror. Her suspicion of this anomaly in the Holocaust memoir genre goes as far as to accuse Klüger of coercing her into a thought she did not want to have. Lipton’s allegiance to the Holocaust

memoir, a genre that “[drenches] us with the unbearable smell of mortal terror,” is threatened by Klüger’s unbiased inclusion of her own memories, and this threat triggers in Lipton a guilt reaction. There exists a way she feels she must think about the Holocaust. When reading Klüger’s memoir contradicts that accepted mode of thinking, Lipton lashes out and blames the author. Yet Klüger’s own memories are meant to be the definition of memoir. Beyond blaming Klüger for this moral misstep, Lipton finds the quality of Klüger’s writing to be compromised by the absence of traditional Holocaust markers: “without the horror, the narrative loses its force. Of course, we *know* about the pain, but in the book very little of it is experienced” (ibid.). Although Lipton admits that American readers today are well versed in the horrors of the Holocaust, without another first person rehashing of the details of the atrocities Klüger’s Holocaust memoir cannot be viewed as compelling. Rather more than a reflection on the text, Lipton’s review provides a very clear picture of today’s socially accepted moral stance toward the Holocaust, a stance that is here granted no leeway. One must ask how readers who have not reacted this way are meant to feel when they encounter Lipton’s review, and perhaps more to the point, how a potential reader’s experience of the text would be colored by the review. A review of this type is a very clear representation of the moral reaction expected when one is exposed to Holocaust information.

In *The New York Times*, Lore Dickstein also took issue with the unconventional traits of *Still Alive* and *weiter leben*. Dickstein disapproves of what she calls Klüger’s “vendetta” against her mother and breezily glosses over the events of the first half of the narrative, describing the conditions in Anschluss Vienna as merely “increasingly unpleasant” (Dickstein). When Klüger and others are finally deported, Dickstein seems to have found something she can sink her teeth into: “The descriptions of the rail journey and the arrival at the camp have the preternatural,

crystalline clarity and searing detail typical of Holocaust testimony. Time has not blurred or faded these memories” (ibid.). Here Dickstein tips her hand, revealing that Holocaust testimony has developed into a category that *has* “typical” indicators beyond the definition of memoir, and that the presence or lack of these traits has the power to either lend credibility or devalue the narrative. Memories that are deemed to fit this schematic are the ones that have remained whole and are reliable; only these memories are fit to define a memoir. Likewise, the portion of the book that takes place after the war “seems anticlimactic after the high drama of the war years” (ibid.). Again, Dickstein prizes the spectacle of the Holocaust over Klüger’s description of life thereafter, and judges the text based on the rubric of convention. This convention is not defined and there appears to be no single enforcing agent. Rather, Americans participate in a nebulous social contract that offers strong reactions in exchange for strong images. Though Lipton and Dickstein write their reviews to express their opinions, they leave no room for others’ opinions. The Holocaust has a truth, and *weiter leben* is not it.

Linda Schulte-Sasse responded heatedly to Dickstein, Lipton, and others. In an article for the *German Studies Review* she chides these critics for imposing on *Still Alive* assumed criteria of “Holocaust reverentialism and memorialism” (Schulte-Sasse 470). The reviewers, operating under a preconceived notion of how the Holocaust *should* be remembered, want Klüger’s memoir to be more horrific, more moving, and more climactic. Schulte-Sasse argues against these requirements and warns readers and critics against dismissing Klüger’s memoir because it depicts a less sensationalist account than they are used to. It is not a universal truth of the Holocaust that is missing from *Still Alive*, but rather familiar emotional manipulation that usually helps to “affirm [the reader’s] identity as outraged moral [subject]” (ibid). According to Schulte-Sasse, readers of Holocaust memoirs have been players in a cultural



phenomenon. Based on the assumption that memoirs are true, readers have responded to survivor testimony of incomprehensible horror with outspoken indignation, which has created a set pattern of stimulus and response. Survivors relate their tales with heavy emphasis on tragedy, and readers, impotent in their position as after-the-fact observers, take up a self-consoling stance of outrage.

Klüger's straightforward style and avoidance of sentimentality disrupts this pattern. Linda Schulte-Sasse asserts that Klüger's text is that much more important as an addition to Holocaust literature precisely because it supplies an atypical voice. The very fact that critics reacted so strongly to the text's unique structure and tone must serve as a reminder that "to think about the Holocaust [...] is to think about thinking about the Holocaust" (ibid). Thinking about the Holocaust is a distinct, if intangible, Western and American cultural activity, with established rules for right and wrong. Klüger's memoir transgresses the accepted boundary walls that keep sentimental, reverential accounts of horror quarantined from the critical, practical, and unsentimental. Linda Schulte-Sasse's defense of Klüger highlights memorialization as a practice rife with self-awareness and constant assessment, all based on the question, "How should the Holocaust be remembered?"

The answer remains unclear, but what does seem to be cut in stone is that the Holocaust is something that must be remembered. This grammar reveals that the Holocaust as object requires a subject to perform the remembering. The literary manifestation of this subject is the "morally outraged" reader alluded to by Schulte-Sasse. Other forms of remembering, namely memorial spaces and monuments, also require remembering agents. Physical memorials, like texts, have "fundamentally interactive, dialogical quality of every memorial space" (*Texture* xii). The memorial space necessitates a give and take between subject and object. For a memoir, this

dialogue is between writer and reader; for a memorial, between site and visitor. James E. Young explains:

Public memory and its meanings depend not just on the forms and figures in the monument itself, but on the viewer's response to the monument, [...] how its figures enter into other media and are recast in new surroundings. [...] Memorials [are] dependent on visitors for whatever memory they finally produce" (ibid).

In effect, memorials and their visitors meet each other somewhere in the middle, each contributing ingredients to a recipe that produces diverse memories depending on the person. I have edited other, no less important echoes of memorials out of Young's summary in order to focus on the points most significant for my argument. It is easy to understand the claim that memorials are what visitors make them. Each person brings with them their own experiences, prejudices, and idiosyncrasies, all which shape their impression of the information they take in. As the examples of the reviews show, reactions can be drastic. Ingrained expectations preclude the possibility that one can visit a memorial with a blank slate. And, though a memorial site is, by nature, public, and the act of reading tends toward the private, both have the same implicit goals of preservation and instruction. Ruth Klüger uses the forum of her memoir to comment on the memory practice of visitors to public memorials, revealing that, regardless of genre, all who work to remember the Holocaust must also be prepared to be judged for the way they do so.

## THE PLACE OF MEMORY

“What place is this?  
Where are we now?”

I am the grass.  
Let me work.”  
-Carl Sandburg

Part Two of Ruth Klüger’s memoir *weiter leben* is entitled “Die Lager.” This section follows Part One, “Wien,” which contains memories and descriptions of Klüger’s childhood in Vienna. Based on this continuum, and working with the established Western cultural assumptions about Holocaust memoirs, a reader would likely expect from “Die Lager” factual, perhaps gruesome, account of Klüger’s experiences as an inmate in concentration camps during World War II. Klüger, however, denies fulfillment of this expectation. In her initial remarks she breaks with her reflective narrative and provides an opinion piece on the status of the camps today as memorial sites dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust.

Das Volk der Touristen, das heute nach München strömt, geht erst zum Marienplatz, um das hübsche Glockenspiel zu genießen und die putzigen Holzpuppen zu bewundern, die am Rathausturm pünktlich ihren Tanz aufführen, und fährt dann nach Dachau zu den Baracken. Wer Goethes und seiner Christiane Gartenhaus zu Weimar in freundlicher Erinnerung behalten will, besichtigt auch gleich das Mahnmal in Buchenwald in ehrerbietiger Bestürzung. (*weiter leben* 69)

By juxtaposing time-honored tourist destinations with Dachau and Buchenwald, Klüger very quickly betrays her disapproval of using these sites as memorials. The length of the description of the tourism sites – three lines for the Glockenspiel as reproduced here versus half a line for Dachau – and their position before the

concentration camps in the list of destinations, suggest an absurd subordination of the import of the camps to that of the other locations. Sites of torture, starvation, and mass murder become incidentals on a whirlwind tour of important places. The contrast between the cheery terms used to describe the tourist sites, “hübsch,” “genießen,” “putzig,” and “freundlich,” and the words associated with the Holocaust, “Baracken” and “Bestürzung,” reveals the act of Holocaust tourism as a bizarre mixture of the quaint and the unimaginable.

The relationship between Klüger’s first example, Dachau, and this tourism is especially extreme. In James E. Young’s analysis, “Dachau has come to serve as a Holocaust icon in the eyes of Western tourists, taking on a life of its own in the culture of travel. [...] Its historical significance seems to have grown in direct proportion to the success of the memorial” (*Texture* 70). Dachau is indeed an example of grotesque inversion, in which popular success has rubbed off on historical success, as it were. This symbiotic relationship is also evident in the case of Anne Frank, another iconic Holocaust figure. The popularization of her story has led to a particular subset of Holocaust tourism similar to that at Dachau. Tourists experience prohibitively long lines at her family’s former home in Amsterdam. At the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp near Celle, now a memorial site, a commemorative gravestone for Anne and her sister Margot sits separate from the mass graves where the girls are actually buried, along a path that leads visitors through the grounds. An Internet image search reveals that the gravestone is constantly covered in flowers, notes, photos, and trinkets; the Bergen-Belsen Memorial site itself lists an address on *Anne-Frank-Platz*. Bergen-Belsen, a supposed purveyor of memory, has constructed itself around the Anne Frank myth. Popular success of this sort reveals the murky territory that Holocaust memorials occupy. Tourists, if they act as alleged by Klüger, are responding to an understanding of what they should visit, of what a duly horrified traveler *should* do

when visiting an area directly affected by the Holocaust. These tourists are not, as Young suggests, meeting the memorials in the middle. Rather they arrive preloaded with fixed ideas of how the memorials function and what they can hope to learn.

Tourism implies the act leaving one's familiar surroundings to visit a new place, with a subtext, I would argue, of learning something. At the very least, one expects to know "how it is there." Whether or not this experience is authentic is questionable, but the expectation is inherent. Every traveler returns home with descriptions of what he saw or did, and these stories come to define the destination for him. When speaking of Holocaust tourism, for example to Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, or the apartment where Anne Frank hid from the Nazis, the destination is the site of a historical tragedy. The tourist expects his own presence on the site to serve as a conductor for some sort of information, be it academic information from a museum or a sense of the victims' experiences on that very point. Holocaust memorials – indeed, any sites designed to preserve or commemorate an event that happened on that spot – seem to operate on this assumption that something inheres in the location that will evoke the events in question for anyone who sets foot there. Memoir, as I have shown, promises the same experience. The powerful truth of memoir is the genre's *raison d'être*. Memorial visitors and readers of memoirs may be said to be seeking the same thing: exposure to authentic experience that they have been told is important, but have no way of obtaining first hand.

Ruth Klüger, however, does not believe that a person who did not experience the event in question first hand possesses the capacity to feel, remember, or understand the Holocaust. In the 1980s, Klüger herself unwillingly visited the Dachau Memorial of which she is so critical with American houseguests. Although much of it has been preserved, she notes that the camp is cleaned up and quiet: "man brauchte schon mehr Phantasie, als die meisten Menschen haben, um sich vorzustellen, was dort vor vierzig

Jahren gespielt wurde” (*weiter leben* 77). The mere existence of the place where some of the crimes of the Holocaust took place is insufficient to impart these experiences to visitors. Human imagination, capable of creating intricate fictions and fantasies, falls woefully short of conceptualizing the reality of the Holocaust on mere suggestion. Nor is this view unique to Klüger. As part of James E. Young’s project on memorials, he interviewed visitors to Dachau, and his findings support Klüger’s frustration that the experience of memorials at former concentration camp sites. “[The tourists] have come to Dachau to ‘see what it was like,’” he explains, and “being told that this is not what Dachau was like, but only what its memorial was like, may leave some visitors bewildered as to why they have come at all” (*Texture* 70-1). Whether or not the tourists are ever confronted with this disconnect is a different matter that remains unclear, but Klüger believes that the answer to Young’s “why” can be conceived of as a type of haunting. She refers to the persistent memories of the Holocaust as ghosts that haunt the rememberers, both survivors and others. The superstition surrounding ghosts in general, and haunting Holocaust memories specifically, operates on the belief that “die Gespenster gerade dort zu fassen seien, wo sie als Lebende aufhörten zu sein” (Klüger 76). Place is primary. Sharing with Klüger what seems to be a specific Holocaust vocabulary, Young speaks to the memory-space connection as well, generalizing that “houses come to be ‘haunted’ by the ghosts (memory, really) of their former occupants” who lived, and in most lore, died there (*Texture* 119). By visiting memorials, people *want* to be haunted, to feel a presence. They expect something authentic to reach out to them through the decades and tap them on the shoulder, instilling them with direct contact and the resultant understanding.

Klüger writes of the ghosts of memory from the point of view of one of the few who was there, who knows the way it was then and the way it is now, and Young is a scholar, trained to carefully and deeply consider aspects of his subject. The

premium on location in memory practice has also taken root in the popular discourse on memorials. In a *New York Times* article on the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff points out that “the location could not be more apt. During the war, this was the administrative locus of Hitler's killing machine. His chancellery building, designed by Albert Speer and since demolished, was a few hundred yards away just to the south; his bunker lies beneath a nearby parking lot” (Ouroussoff 1). The memorial takes on specific significance for Ouroussoff because it is near the place where the memorialized deaths were orchestrated; the memorial gets the last laugh, in a way. The organization that built and maintains the memorial is aware of this connection and does its utmost to avoid acknowledging it. In the informational pamphlet, the question “Warum wurde das Denkmal an diesem Standort gebaut?” is answered with vagaries concerning the “öffentlichen Charakter” of the memorial and its central location in Berlin’s embassy district (*Informationen*). However, further down in the list of frequently asked questions, the unavoidable finds voice: “Liegen Bunker aus dem 2. Weltkrieg unter dem Denkmal?” (ibid.). The brochure briefly lists the facts concerning Goebbels’ bunker, which was actually under the memorial site, and Hitler’s, which was nearby. The foundation’s attempt to deal delicately with this issue by not listing the bunkers as an answer to the question of “why here?” and Ouroussoff’s eagerness to point out the historical significance of the site approach the issue from different sides, but both examples illuminate the crucial and unavoidable association between place, history, and experience. The memorial organization anticipates the very reaction that Ouroussoff performs in his article and, regardless of their attempt to skirt the issue, the group is forced to address the question that will inevitably be asked.

Ruth Klüger is deeply aggravated by the cultural insistence that a location bears ineradicable and important traces of its history. Time’s ability to occlude

understanding of past events is a concept Klüger finds is essential to understandings of history, writing, and specifically the Holocaust, especially in connection with the debate about location. In seeking to explain why present day memorials neither redeem the past nor adequately explain it, Klüger invents the word “Zeitschaft” – literally, timescape – “um zu vermitteln, was ein Ort in der Zeit ist, zu einer gewissen Zeit, weder vorher noch nachher” (*weiter leben* 78). The “Zeitschaft” restricts the characteristics of historical events to their locations *and their times*. Simply placing a monument at the place where a crime was committed does not create a one-to-one correspondence between the event and the memorial. The keystone of the catastrophe has crumbled and the original structure is irretrievable. If, as Klüger alleges, the ability to convey an authentic sense of the memorialized events to visitors is so crucial to the memorializing process, then any attempt to do so in the present day is deficient by default. Even if a place bore these traces, humans do not possess the ability to perceive them in their original intensity. This can be further extrapolated; if the place itself does not suffice, how can “heaps of scattered artifacts” in museums, or facts in a classroom – an idea to which I will return later – be expected to be effective in this way? (Young 78). And what possibilities remain for the Holocaust memoir? The questions will still appear in the pamphlets and tourists will still flock to memorial sites. The answers are rooted in the memorializers themselves and the choices and cultural prompts that shape their memorial practice.



## THE PRACTICE OF MEMORY

“We can remember minutely and precisely  
only the things which never really happened to us.”  
-Eric Hoffer

In *weiter leben*, the memorial visitor plays two roles, both of which are shaped by the memorials: one in relation to Holocaust and one in relation to other members of society. A visitor, as I have established, is not a blank slate. A visitor expects something. In Klüger’s view, as memorializers of a historically pervasive cataclysm, visitors expect, “daß Ungelöstes gelöst wird, wenn man nur beharrlich festhält an dem, was übrig blieb, dem Ort, den Steinen, der Asche” (*weiter leben* 70). Unable to prevent, affect, or comprehend the Holocaust, memorials and their creators and visitors have adopted a technique Klüger identifies as *festhalten*. The code of this coping strategy is simple: at all costs, one must never forget the Shoah. In service of this remembering, one must preserve all extant tangibles and intangibles. This includes, of course, camps, clothing, and physical diaries, but also testimony. Klüger, however, contends that memory of such a “tear in the fabric of society” will endure no matter what (Klüger 313). Indeed, it seems almost silly to suggest that something so extraordinary could ever be forgotten. However, Klüger also asserts that by nature memory “rests or at least becomes blurred, the weights shift, different events become foregrounded, others move to the back burner” (Klüger 313). The transience and pliability, discussed above as a threat to the genre of memoir, constitutes the natural state of memory. “Festhalten” seems to interrupt that order.

This widespread resistance to the natural course of memory reveals a central aspect of Klüger’s edict: Holocaust memorials and monuments – specifically former concentration camp sites and museums that collect “authentic” objects – are not for the dead. Klüger writes, “wir sammeln und bewahren [diese Sachen] weil *wir* sie

irgendwie brauchen” (ibid.). Three times in this short passage, Klüger uses the second person “wir,” in effect drawing the reader into the group of memory hoarders. In a way, *Gedenkstätte* have nothing to do with the millions who perished; they are for everyone else: survivors, *Nachgeborenen*, foreigners, new generations, and tourists. Klüger is easily classified a survivor, but it is impossible to determine each reader’s relationship to the Holocaust. “Wir” seems to be anyone who knows anything about the Holocaust, for to know is to be burdened with analyzing how to think about it. But the fact remains that only those living and who have an impetus, self-driven or otherwise, can perform remembering and memorializing. Memorials never have been and never will be for those they memorialize.

Choice may have little to do with a visitor’s drive to remember. Klüger asserts that the diverse “wir” *needs* the memorials to confirm that they are reacting to and feel appropriately about the Holocaust. This is the memorial visitor’s second role: member of a (memorial) society that has rules that dictate how to feel – but not think – about the Holocaust. Linda Schulte-Sasse interprets Klüger’s criticism of concentration camp and similar memorials. These monuments make the Holocaust “*all too bearable* in its capacity to affirm our own identity as outraged moral subjects” (Schulte-Sasse 470). Rather than feeling unbearable confusion and anguish when faced with the unfathomable, a memorial visitor accepts a role as a moral subject who feels anger, sympathy, disgust, or outrage, and clicks into a comfortable moral position. A visitor’s energies are focused on conducting himself with appropriate gravitas and expressing appropriate outrage, rather than confronting the event head-on.<sup>3</sup>

Klüger notes with disdain that visitors are “stolz [...] zu empfinden,” implying the self-conscious positive recognition that one has done something well according to

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<sup>3</sup> This calls to mind the process of blood donation, an act that appears altruistic on the surface, but which is orchestrated by drives that call upon donators to “do something good,” and is rewarded with self-congratulatory stickers that let others know a positive social function has been performed.

an established standard (*weiter leben* 76). This pride goes by other names as well. Condemning the Holocaust is given a “high degree of moral prestige” by the general society (Mintz 174). The hordes of tourists who visit Holocaust memorials and museums threaten to turn remembrance into a “self-congratulatory spectacle” (Young 82). The memorials are not just for the visitor; they make the visitor feel good. The trajectory of the memorial is outward, toward the visitor and “weg von den Gegenstand” (*weiter leben* 76). In fact, Klüger refers to the desire to somehow atone for or redeem the past through *festhalten* as an attempt to exorcise the very ghosts memorializers covet (*weiter leben* 75). Exorcism (“bannen”) implies a removal of the affliction, in this case memory. It also denotes a weight lifted from the afflicted one – here, the rememberer. Both actions can be understood as outward, away-from motions. The act of memorialization takes yet another step away from the Holocaust itself. This is in no way to assert that Klüger advocates banishing or dismissing memory of the Holocaust, but rather to illustrate how complicated the act of memorializing becomes. The Holocaust in particular is so politically, historically, and socially thorny that process of memorializing the event quickly loses direct relevance to its subject.

The reason most consistently given to justify this obsession with the persistence and maintenance of Holocaust memory is that constant remembrance has the power prevent a similar catastrophe in the future. In 1979, President Carter initiated an official American policy of Holocaust remembrance, “so that we may seek to learn how to prevent such enormities from occurring in the future” (Carter in Young 72). Carter expresses what has become popular sentiment, but his phrasing also betrays inconclusiveness on the connection between remembrance and action. By remembering, Americans will not prevent another Holocaust, nor will they learn how to prevent one. They will *seek* to learn to prevent. Memory and action are three times

removed, and the link between them is weak, but the idea has accumulated great power as the incidence of memorials and museums has increased. Ruth Klüger recognizes “let us remember, so that the same thing doesn’t happen again” as a recurrent and futile premise in memorialization (Klüger 313). This slogan, Klüger states, is the “favorite mantra” of the memorial cult she finds so objectionable (ibid.). The term “mantra” typically denotes the repetition of a phrase to reach a spiritual goal; this can take years to achieve, if the goal is ever achieved at all. Written with Klüger’s pen, “mantra” smacks of compulsively repeated platitudes from the mouths of the misguided in pursuit of a vague and ultimately unachievable goal. The repetition of “never forget” with the belief that it will change something is naïve, lazy, and self-serving. Klüger counters the catchphrase with a sharp retort: “a remembered massacre may serve as a deterrent, but it may also serve as a model for the next massacre” (ibid.). Though I read the second clause of this quote as making a point rather than voicing an earnest concern, the statement provides a provocative extension of Klüger’s views in *weiter leben*. The issue of memorializing is not as simple as preventative medicine against future social ills. Rather, rituals surrounding Holocaust memory are rife with contradictions and are, as a rule, meaningless.

One problem of the memorial mantra is its keen focus on the singularity of the Holocaust as a historical event that carries great import for the future. Klüger finds traces of this historical prioritization in concentration camp memorials. Such memorials demonstrate “ängstliches Abgrenzen gegen mögliche Vergleiche, Bestehen auf der Einmaligkeit des Verbrechens” (*weiter leben* 70). Fear of comparisons inheres in Holocaust monuments. Preservation of specific plots of land and structures as monuments to the Holocaust asserts the exclusive eternal importance of this catastrophe for generations to come. Similarly, the slogan “let us remember, so that the same thing doesn’t happen again” implies that dogged remembrance and continued

designation of memorial sites can prevent another unfathomable breakdown of humanity. This is to be achieved by keeping the horrors of the Holocaust at the front of the public's minds, a persistent stopgap against whatever caused it in the first place. Widespread memorialization of this sort causes the Holocaust to be viewed separately from other genocides by singling it out and deeming it implicitly bigger, worse, and more important. In this way, a Holocaust memorial should remind people that the limits of horror have been transgressed once and its memory should serve as a rubric for what *not* to do as a people. Not memorializing would not only symbolize a letting down of guards, but would present a moral quandary in a culture that has come to set great stock by memorial practice. Failure to memorialize so intensively would also serve as an admission that the event was not exceptional or distinctive from other tragedies. The extreme circumstances of the Holocaust have led to an extreme reaction that has echoed through the decades. Remembrance should elevate and isolate, but for the purpose of providing relevant signs and symptoms.

To Klüger, a belief in the power of memorials is a delusion on precisely these grounds. She reminds the reader, "Teile dessen, was in den KZs geschah, wiederholten sich vielerorts, heute und gestern, und die KZs waren selbst Nachahmungen (freilich einmaligen Nachahmungen) von Vorgestrigem" (ibid). Simply stated, all occurrences consist of common parts, all of which have happened before in some combination and can happen again in a new combination. This assertion threatens to destabilize the memorial culture in several ways. First, by resisting comparison between the Holocaust and other historical – or contemporary – events, chanters of the memorial mantra turn a blind eye to cues that might signal a new combination of horrific events from the past. Keeping an open mind to comparisons would also crush the hope that merely making a pilgrimage to the former site of a concentration camp can have any real historical effect, thereby undermining

the social contract of the memorial. Resistance against and knowledge of one particular combination of events, albeit a particularly terrifying one, will not necessarily prevent other combinations. Based on these potential versions of events, Klüger additionally sees memorialization to be an attempt to inflate the separation of the already separate. She writes, “Dasselbe geschieht sowieso nicht zweimal, insofern ist alles Geschehen, wie jeder Mensch und sogar jeder Hund, einmalig,” (ibid). Although history in Klüger’s view necessarily repeats itself in new permutations, every event in history is one of a kind. The anxious drive to emphasize singularity and monumentalize the Holocaust is unnecessary and, it seems, somewhat presumptuous. Regardless of human action or intent, catalytic circumstances will not – indeed cannot – be repeated in the same way. The Holocaust is a new sum of old parts. And yet the memorial cult persists and grows.

The notion of comparison in the drive to monumentalize and memorialize may also be dangerous in a more concrete way. James E. Young views the Holocaust as a “national standard for suffering” in the United States (Young 74). Helen Flanzbaum calls it “a measuring stick against which all oppression is measured” (Flanzbaum 14). Likewise, Peter Novick notes that the Holocaust has become the “emblematic atrocity” in the western world (Novick 256). Together, these claims create a powerful image of the Holocaust in the context of 21<sup>st</sup> Century America. Again, one may note that the crux of the issue is not the event itself; the Holocaust becomes a control against which other events are measured in the vast experiment of post-Holocaust world history. Echoing Linda Schulte-Sasse’s concern about negative emotional reactions to Klüger’s pragmatic memoir, Novick asks, “have we made resemblance to [the Holocaust] the criterion by which we decide what horrors command our attention? Is the [...] result that horrors which don’t meet that criterion seem insufficiently dramatic, even a bit boring?” (ibid.). Novick poses these harrowing

questions based on the monumental proportions to which the Holocaust has grown in western minds and the assumption that constant remembrance can continue to effect change today. The assumption that exposure to and supposed understanding of the Holocaust as the height of atrocity will teach something to memorial visitors and memoir readers is backwards. Though it is the ultimate example, the Holocaust also makes a very poor example, because “the very extremity of the Holocaust, and the extremity of the circumstances in which it unfolded, seriously limit its capacity to provide lessons applicable in our everyday world” (Novick 244). Not only, as Klüger suggests, will circumstances in the future always be unique, but the Holocaust may be so extreme that its relevance to life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is void. Novick’s point is especially strong for its emphasis not only on the defining facts of the Holocaust, the murder of millions of Jews and other oppressed groups, but on the convoluted matrix of historical circumstances that allowed it to happen. Novick understands that “we want, if we can, to emerge [from contact with Holocaust history] with useful lessons, to understand [...] the human potential” (Novick 244-5). Human motives are, if self-serving, also pure, but the approach is faulty. Novick points to Stanley Milgram’s obedience and conformity experiments as an example of potential violence among ordinary Americans that is “more enlightening” and “more terrifying” in contemporary contexts (Novick 245).<sup>4</sup> I would also offer the example of the Stanford prison experiment as an illustration of a quick shift in morals possible in a post-Holocaust world, especially because it was not designed with World War II in mind.<sup>5</sup> Both experiments took place in controlled settings and used as their subjects

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<sup>4</sup> In the 1960’s, Yale psychologist Stanley Milgram social “ordered his subjects to give what they thought were painful and possibly lethal shocks to complete strangers. Most complied” (Dreifus).

<sup>5</sup> In 1971, researchers at Stanford University created a mock prison and “randomly assigned 24 students to be either prison guards or prisoners for two weeks. Within days the ‘guards’ had become swaggering and sadistic, to the point of placing bags over the prisoners’ heads, forcing them to strip naked and encouraging them to perform sexual acts” (Schwartz).

Americans who mere days or hours before were merely students or professionals. The extremes to which participants in the studies carried their powers were not contextualized by raging world war and in a climate of decades long political turmoil. One should find a reference point in examples like these experiments, Novick argues, for here the scale is smaller and the players recognizable. These things are happening around us – right now.

Though meaningful comparison may be unfeasible, juxtaposition continues to occur often. Even the mere act of stepping into former concentration camps is unethical according to Ruth Klüger for the implicit comparison it makes. In the time elapsed since 1945, the sites of the camps have fallen into “neue Konstellationen” (*weiter leben* 75). Similar to the way all historical events are made up of similar parts, so have the parts – in this case, the sites – remained the same, but been rearranged in their new historical contexts. Dachau, Auschwitz, Buchenwald and other former KZ-sites are constellations of “Gedenkstätte und Besucher, und was könnte weiter entfernt sein von der Konstellation Gefängnis und Häftling?” (*ibid*). In this powerful parallel statement, Klüger places “Gedenkstätte” in direct comparison with “Gefängnisse.” The words are morphologically similar, and yet fundamentally opposed. The first is a place designed to evoke or create memory in those who visit of their own free will; the second is a place where the innocent were held against their will, often until they no longer had the ability to create memories. The parallel established between “Häftling” and “Besucher” cements this contrast. The latter is helplessly static, the former freely in motion. With this parallelism, Klüger makes vivid her focal question: how can a memorial visitor begin to grasp the experience of the Holocaust when the unspoken comparison is made between two such impossibly divergent roles?

The extent to which the Holocaust remembrance has been inflated, and the necessary chronological distance between modern-day memory and the event, has



created unbreachable barriers to modern day access to the Holocaust. Despite these barriers, the terms of the Holocaust have found a place in the daily life of Americans as go-to metaphors, the ultimate derision. Helene Flanzbaum laments the “inflammatory casualness” with which the Holocaust and the Nazis are invoked in American speech. Flanzbaum’s central example is the OJ Simpson trial, during which lawyer Johnnie Cochran compared the Los Angeles Police Department to Nazis “carrying out a Holocaust against black youths” (Flanzbaum 7-8). More recently, Newt Gingrich compared those who would build a mosque near the site of the September 11 terrorist attacks to Nazis erecting a billboard near the Holocaust museum in Washington (DeLong). Peter Novick catalogues other typical examples of invocation of the Holocaust and Nazi practices, including comparisons made to big government, legalized abortion, the gun control lobby, the work of a Harvard sociobiologist, the AIDS crisis, the lifestyles of non-vegetarians, and the importance of Christian parenting (Novick 241).

Undoubtedly some of these comparisons were uttered with great conviction, but what they all have in common is the desire to make a point, and a big one. In fact, as evidenced by Novick’s comments on the extremity of the event, comparing something to the Holocaust exceeds the mark and makes a poor comparison. However, the social contract of Holocaust remembrance and reverence supports what many might view to be cavalier usage. All Holocaust memory practice discussed to this point is predicated on the near-unfathomable wickedness symbolized by the Holocaust and the resulting drive to atone for that evil by acknowledging it, paying homage to it, and swearing it will never happen it again. Though the comparisons listed above may drastically overshoot the mark or be considered inflammatory, such use of comparison to the Holocaust merely demonstrates the understanding that the speakers have constructed their understanding of evil based on their prior knowledge,

a classic example of constructivist learning principles. For members of a memorial cult(ure), that prior knowledge is a black and white split between bad and good, with the Holocaust as the upper limit for bad. Whether or not the comparisons are meaningful or ethical becomes a moot point. They exist in each individual, depending on how that person has internalized the event. An examination of Holocaust education will help locate the beginning of this internalization.

## THE TEACHING OF MEMORY

“Human history becomes more and more  
a race between education and catastrophe.”  
-H.G. Wells

In addition to writing about Holocaust memorials, James E. Young sat on the committee in charge of commissioning the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, in Berlin. He relates some of the key questions the committee asked themselves while judging submissions from artists and architects: “What are the national reasons for remembrance? Are they redemptory, part of a mourning process, pedagogical, self-aggrandizing, or inspiration against contemporary xenophobia?” (Young 73). Thus far, each of these approaches to remembrance has been important to my discussion. Pedagogical modes of remembrance are perhaps the type least explicitly engaged with in *weiter leben*, yet Klüger’s select allusions to the educational aspect of Holocaust memory open the door for an examination of how memory is taught, and in turn provide essential insight into the questions regarding the hows and whys of memorials and memorialization.

Of living people who know about the Holocaust, only a miniscule percentage still have first-hand experience; traditional classroom instruction is now the first place nearly all people come in contact with the idea of the Holocaust.<sup>6</sup> In the United States today, “educators and Holocaust education experts widely accept Holocaust education as a morally significant addition to America’s middle and secondary classrooms” (Shoemaker 191). Although the Shoah has become an integral part of the curriculum in many American classrooms, the “nature of education in American,” makes the

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<sup>6</sup> The word “holocaust” has come to refer almost exclusively to “The Holocaust”, or “the mass slaughter of European civilians and especially Jews by the Nazis during World War II” (“holocaust” *Merriam Webster*), in part because most people encounter the subject in school before the more general definition would become part of their vocabularies. Thus, for example, hearing James Stewart profess his love to Katharine Hepburn in *The Philadelphia Story* with the words “you’ve got fires banked down in you, hearth-fires and holocausts” could come as quite a shock to today’s post-Shoah viewers.

ground particularly fertile for debate about how to teach the Holocaust (Shoemaker 193). States are responsible for setting academic standards and the particulars of the curriculum is often decided locally. Each school is likely to have some control over how to teach the subject and as a result scholars and educators have sought to shape what is taught and how.

David H. Lindquist, an educator for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., points out the “complexity” of the historical subject matter. Due to this intricacy, he believes teachers must first and foremost “establish the rationale for teaching the topic in question and the goals that are to be achieved” (Lindquist 27). Teaching a subject that is considered so important requires teachers to clearly articulate what they hope to accomplish. This articulation must be accompanied by reasons for bringing the Holocaust into the classroom. Lindquist offers no examples of what those reasons might be, but assumes teachers will find them. Interestingly, Lindquist’s insistence on reasons and goals seems to come after the decision to include the Holocaust. Again, an inherent importance comes to the surface. For Lindquist, this importance lies in the facts and the goal is historical accuracy. He bemoans the existence of textbooks that “distort the historical record” and advises teachers who use literature to teach the Holocaust to be cautious: “teachers must draw a careful distinction between historical truth and literary truth” – in other words, the facts must be differentiated from the “essence” of the event (Lindquist 28). The truth of the representation is of utmost importance. Lindquist distances himself from the idea of the essence that the reviewers sought in Klüger’s memoir and that tourists seek in memorials. He draws attention to the likely incidence of distorted memories in survivor testimony and concludes by acknowledging the vastness of the topic. Yet Lindquist assigns teachers the task of imparting “factual knowledge” and helping their students develop “accurate perspectives” (Lindquist 32). The entire

article is predicated on the assumption that teaching the Holocaust with one hundred percent historical accuracy is vital, but no reason or method appears. Lindquist's insistence on an accurate historical record and truth at all costs mirrors the parameters of the memoir genre. Veracity is valuable and is in itself a goal worth seeking, but beyond this reasoning becomes muddled and Lindquist falls back on.

Lindquist does make some mild concessions to his dogged insistence on "just the facts." First, he notes that as more historical evidence is unearthed, the record changes and new interpretations of that record emerge. He also acknowledges one of the core debates in Holocaust education: intellectualization versus "the human element" (Lindquist 29). Lindquist quotes Marla Morris, who implies that when scholars argue about how to talk about the Holocaust, they may somehow devalue or even change the event. "History is about people," Morris chides, and "getting lost in scholarly debates might serve to prevent the researcher from really thinking about these horrors" (Morris in Lindquist 29). James E. Young laments the same trend when he speaks of authentic artifacts in museums, which lack the connections "that made these victims a people" (Young 79). To Morris, formal memorialization and the cerebral debates surrounding it stand separate from the event and represent a *lack* of thought. Academic debate on the subject might also be a "defense mechanism" (ibid.). Scholars, architects, curators, and others involved in the discussion turn away from a traumatic subject and seek refuge in debate. Based on Morris's words, Lindquist advises teachers to attempt a "balance" between the historical and the personal to avoid "diminishing" the event (Lindquist 29). He provides no explanation of his own regarding how emphasis on the factual diminishes the event or why this may be important. Lindquist's vague language in tandem with Morris's quote hints at an educational and academic paradox riddled with self-consciousness. Lindquist has written elsewhere about Holocaust education, fleshing out specific facets of Holocaust

education, such as the study of human behavior and the development of civic awareness, but these works are also rooted in the primacy of an accurate historical record. His sheepish interlude in the article in question, hidden among the repeated insistence on fact and accuracy, is revealing. Though his historical approach to Holocaust education is valid on its merits and constitutes his opinion – to which he is entitled by default – Lindquist feels he must pause to accept criticism from Morris, to momentarily hang his head for not treating the subject with sufficient reverence. Lindquist and Morris represent two perceptions of Holocaust truth. These truths seem to approach mutual exclusivity; at the very least, Lindquist’s truth experiences pressure from the shared expectations that have grown up around the subject.

Jeffrey C. Blutinger is aware of a similar tension between two truths of the Holocaust, which he finds to be inherent when school lessons cover relationships between oppressors and oppressed. In education, instructors tend to “focus on historical actors,” or the oppressor, which leads in turn to “teaching [the Holocaust] from a German-centered perspective,” as opposed to a Jewish perspective (Blutinger 269). Blutinger sees perceived historical fact as the realm of the historically powerful. He therefore assumes a curricular neglect of the victims, the human side. The solution he proposes is “deceptively simple”: teachers should make sure to also teach the Holocaust from the victim’s perspective (*ibid.*). As one might expect, Blutinger’s plan centers on the use of survivor narratives. However, the omnipresent fundamental importance of “truth” complicates the premise of victim-centered instruction. First-person narratives are “skewed” and provide only “distorted” views, since they are necessarily representative of only one “exceptional case” (Blutinger 273-4). The truth factor may be outweighed by the narrow view provided by survivor testimony. As Lindquist asserted, this is not the whole truth. Blutinger extends the argument, pointing out rather obviously that the worst of the Holocaust, the genocide that defines

the event, is forever “unknowable” – in the case of contemporary accounts written by those who were killed, death could not be written (Blutinger 274). Blutinger also references the potential for memory distortion during the writing process. Survivors who commit their experiences to paper are “trying to write” – they are conscious of how the words sound and flow together, and force direct memories through a filter that is vastly more transformative than extemporaneous speech (Blutinger 276). This distorts pure historical accuracy.

Heavy Holocaust saturation in Western culture also has unexpected consequences for the malleable memories of survivors. Blutinger cites a staggering study that shows many survivors may have incorporated images of the Holocaust from popular media into their own memories. The Holocaust has become an important and perpetuated part of the global consciousness, which paradoxically undermines present-day learners’ unfettered access to the diminishing pool of direct experience. While this potential for distortion should be acknowledged, the problems it creates are easily glossed over by one fact: as Blutinger sees it, a victim-centered perspective will “create empathic connections with the material” (ibid.). Focus on individual stories that privilege emotion allow for increased identification. In contrast to Lindquist, Blutinger examines the state of Holocaust education and concludes that the human side of the issue, the “essence,” trumps the minutiae of the historical record with its power to affect students emotionally. These emotional reactions constitute the lessons of the Holocaust, proving, for Blutinger, that students have internalized the information and related it to themselves.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the group Facing History and Ourselves (FHO) argue the two sides of this issue on an institutional level. As one might expect from Lindquist’s association, the Museum “sets out to teach the history of the Holocaust [and] FHO pays more direct attention to teaching the moral and

ethical *lessons* of the Holocaust” (Shoemaker 193). The Museum states, however, that part of its mission is to teach “what it means to be a responsible citizen” (Shoemaker 191). Here the groups agree: as stated at the outset of this section, the Holocaust is significant to education on moral grounds. Despite this overarching theme, how to approach the moral education of children with regards to the Holocaust remains in question. William Kilpatrick opposes early introduction of the Holocaust “for fear of increasing [children’s] ‘tolerance for differing viewpoints and behaviors’” (Shoemaker 195). Before they are primed by the memorial cult, children *are* a blank slate. Kilpatrick believes that if children are exposed to large-scale subversion of morals at a young age, they will incorporate these behaviors into their understanding of what is acceptable. Moral instruction must be undertaken before ideas that challenge it are introduced.

Ruth Shoemaker’s analysis of this debate contains a striking moment that raises an essential point about the definition of education:

[Alfie] Kohn rejects Kilpatrick’s character education-influence belief that “sometimes compulsion is what is needed to get a good habit started” in favor of his own mantra: “when education is construed as the process of inculcating *habits* –which is to say unreflective actions – then it scarcely deserves to be called education at all.” (Shoemaker 196)

Kohn draws a clear distinction between education and inculcation. Kilpatrick advocates forceful insistence on building a scaffolding of vetted ethics, which must not be challenged before the glue has dried. Education, by contrast, is a practice of reflective synthesis and the ability to come to terms with all available information. Kohn’s denial that inculcation equals education parallels Ruth Klüger’s indignation when she writes, “the present memorial cult seeks to inflict certain aspects of history



and presumed lessons on our children” (Klüger 313). Education is, in a way, necessarily forced. In the United States, schooling is compulsory and children do not set the curriculum, but if a method of instruction is to be called education, it must foster a capacity for independent thought, allow time for personal reflection, and train students in the ability to determine right and wrong. Kilpatrick would create children in an ideal image and “inflict” them with his morals. Undoubtedly, children educated by this method will make exemplary memorial visitors in the future.

Writing in 1980, Chaim Schatzker found himself subject to similar dilemmas, even as the discourse on Holocaust education was in its comparable infancy. Thirty years before I began to write this paper, he wrote with seemingly clairvoyant insight, that, “paradoxically, the further we get away from it, the more the Holocaust turns itself into a symbol which constitutes a reality in our lives and influences our consciousness and reactions in times of crisis, perplexity, and desolation” (Schatzker 219-20). The further history moves away from the event, the more memory becomes a reflexive and intentional practice. Natural traces fade and the archive grows, and if society, as Elie Wiesel and others have done, decides that Holocaust education is a universal goal, remembrance must be deliberate and techniques for it must be explicitly taught. According to Schatzker, learning is a thoroughly cognitive process: “The various components of learning processes, such as cognition, perception, analysis, causalities, connections, conceptualization, and deduction, differ from the psychological mechanism rooted in memorial days and ceremonies” (Schatzker 223). Schatzker taps into the same dynamic previously mentioned, the split between logos and pathos in Holocaust remembrance. If Schatzker is correct, it is no wonder visitors to memorials experience difficulties. They expect to learn something cognitively, to perceive what the Holocaust was like, and to make connections to their own lives, processes which Schatzker views to be separate from memorial practice. As I have

established, the truth of Holocaust experience cannot be transmitted through a memorial. Visitors' individual psychological and emotional reactions to the memorial may be interpreted as factual learning, recalling Klüger's insistence that there is little of the actual Holocaust to be absorbed from memorial visitation.

Klüger is fully aware of the widespread use of Holocaust or other similar memorials as educational tools and is skeptical, though for different reasons. In "Die Lager," the young Germanists who fulfilled their *Zivildienst* at Auschwitz complain about the number of school groups that visited each day. The presence of the young hordes at the memorial is so visible that it forms a major part of the students' impressions of the job. One of Klüger's friend shares a personal tale from her postwar childhood, in which she led fellow children through the recently abandoned camps. Now, however, it is "die Lehrer selber, die solche Gruppen [leiten] und den Schülern ihre Reaktionen zu diktieren [suchen]" (*weiter leben* 76). To Klüger, memorial visitors' feelings about the Holocaust are an outfit to be adjusted and examined in the mirror of society. Here, she reveals that the outfits are in part selected by those professionally responsible for the transmission of knowledge. Notably, in this section Klüger includes ruminations on the memorial at the site of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and the groups of "Schulklassen japanischer Kinder, in ihren englischen Schuluniformen" whom she witnessed there (*weiter leben* 70). Memorialization is a widespread impulse and the attempt to use memorials to teach a common goal. Again, as far as Klüger is concerned, this is interference of the natural order. One might here imagine that Klüger would agree with Alfie Kohn's view of education, that children should be exposed to broad knowledge and be trusted – if guided – in their synthesis of that information. As it stands, memorials are a factory through which the children are students are led, hopefully to come out on the other side with a sheen of "moral prestige."

Yet *weiter leben* as a text is also invested in pedagogy of its own. According to Berel Lang, all Holocaust writing, fiction or nonfiction, has a “significant pedagogical function [...]: first, by representing the *fact* of the Holocaust, and, second, by bringing that fact to the attention of a broad and diverse public who might otherwise know little about it” (Lang 49). As a true historical event, any material relating to the Holocaust is responsible for what people will learn about it. The act of publishing makes the work inherently public, as the etymology would suggest. The dual pedagogical/public classification in fact relates to writing as well memorials like those discussed by Klüger, which claim authenticity and invite the public to attend. Klüger’s lesson plan in *weiter leben* largely involves setting the collective memorial record straight. This is partly evident in the matter-of-fact tone in which she wrote the memoir, but it is more explicitly visible in individual vignettes in the memoir. An acquaintance of Klüger’s expresses shock upon hearing racist comments from an Auschwitz survivor. Klüger’s reaction is explosive: “Auschwitz sei keine Lehranstalt für irgendetwas gewesen und schon gar nicht für Humanität und Toleranz” (*weiter leben* 72). Her reply attempts to correct two misconceptions. First, those interred in concentration camps, though they were all victims, were not necessarily kind, fair, or good people. The victim-oppressor dichotomy does not translate easily into good-bad, a point Klüger makes repeatedly. The second correction is another manifestation of the impermanence of the *Zeitschaft*. Though Auschwitz was not meant to teach anything and did not try to do so, the memorials on these sites *do* attempt to instruct. Indeed, per Berel Lang, they cannot avoid it. The danger in this is that memorials may mislead visitors by perpetuating the popular beliefs and popular forms of remembrance that Klüger disagrees with. In a culture where people have been primed by school and society to remember a certain way, memorials delude visitors beyond their self-satisfying acts of remembrance into thinking they actually understand.

Klüger is also confronted with fallacies that directly challenge the legitimacy of her personal experience. She remarks that people often ask – or even *tell* – her, “Aber Sie waren doch viel zu jung, um sich an diese schreckliche Zeit erinnern zu können” (*weiter leben* 73). She overhears a second woman remark that Klüger was too young to have been a victim of the Holocaust at all. Comments of this type are particularly vexing to Klüger for they are both false and represent an inaccurate recounting of commonly *taught* information. “Sie hätte sagen müssen,” Klüger writes of the second woman, “‘Die war zu jung zum Überleben,’ nicht zu jung um dort gewesen zu sein. [...] Denn daß auch Kleinkinder, viel jüngere als ich, verschleppt wurden, gehört zur Allgemeinbildung der Deutschen, wie es zur Allgemeinbildung der Juden in aller Welt gehört” (*weiter leben* 74). I would argue that the presence of children in the concentration camps should be familiar even to those whose Holocaust knowledge has its basis in popular culture. Klüger has high expectations for formal education as an authoritative and accurate source of information, and indeed it is hard to pinpoint where the transmission of Holocaust information is going wrong. If the schools are indeed teaching accurate information, as Klüger believes, then the human mind and human memory is indeed altering the data.

Deficient sources of Holocaust information are likely to blame for this. In Klüger’s opinion, the key sign of a bad source is sentimentality. The emotional charge involved in over-romanticizing an event functions as a “mirror,” reflecting a person’s high moral position back at him, and stripping the event of its gravity and monumentality (Schulte-Sasse 70). The discussion of Holocaust memory in this paper has been riddled with instances of sentimentality, most notably the outrage surrounding *Still Alive* as expressed by American critics. Sentimentality is most often encouraged by isolating one person’s story and highlighting the dramatic moments in that story. Anne Frank is perhaps the most well-known example. In *Schindler’s List*,

the little girl in the red dress is the only figure to appear in color in a black and white film, prompting the spectator to follow her story in particular. Such individual tales extracted from larger events are colloquially spoken of today as “making the story personal” or “bringing it home” by providing a single figure for identification, considered by some to be a primary source of Holocaust experience for students and citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Klüger also provides an example of this individualizing phenomenon. A plaque at the Buchenwald memorial relates the story of a young Jewish boy who was daringly rescued from the camp. The emphasis of the boy’s story, which was also made into a novel, obscures the horrors that occurred at Buchenwald and elsewhere in Europe by performing what Klüger calls “verkleinern,” minimizing (*weiter leben* 75). Focusing on one story and its extraordinary qualities reduces systematic murder of six million Jews to one maudlin story of triumph. In J.D. Salinger’s *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters*, Seymour Glass, a writer, explains to his brother that “we are being sentimental when we give to a thing more tenderness than God gives it” (Salinger 67). Where Klüger sees reduction and exclusion, Salinger sees expansion and exclusion. People love Holocaust stories of narrow escape and mortal danger so much that they prize these stories over others. Love is an uncomfortable word to use in this context, but it is essentially correct. The emotional pull of these few prized Holocaust stories, and specifically the ease of an individual emotional connection, makes them appealing as touchstones – and also, resultantly, as sources of knowledge.

While older students, especially at university, are more likely to have the opportunity to synthesize and evaluate available information, in an elementary or secondary environment, the teacher is an authority figure who dispenses reliable information and guides children’s budding moral and memorial development. Ruth Klüger complains about her acquaintances’ misconceptions of commonly taught

Holocaust information, and thereby expresses both implicit trust in the authority of the schools and disappointment in her contemporaries and their inability to learn what they are taught. As David H. Lindquist complained, the schools may very well be offering inaccurate information. Regardless, these mediocre students of the Holocaust may in fact be doing exactly what they have been taught. The extremity of the Holocaust causes the event to be both ever present in memory but incomputable in reality. The women who dispute Klüger's memories act as authorities on the Holocaust, which education and cultural exposure have been made them believe they are, and they work to make their encounter with a survivor harmonize with their everyday experience and prior knowledge. Education is a powerful tool. In the case of the Holocaust, education serves to make students comfortable with discussing a complex and harrowing topic from an early age, which in turn perpetuates a memorial culture in which anything – as long as it supports the good-bad dynamic – goes.

## FROM ONE, MANY: CONCLUSIONS

“What I am going to tell you now [...] may sound incredible.  
But then, when you’re not accustomed to history,  
most facts about the past *do* sound incredible.”  
Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

In *weiter leben*, Klüger describes a psychological study she read in the newspaper. The study examined the differences in the daily lives of concentration camp survivors suffering from nightmares. Although the study is predicated on Holocaust experience, the directors of the study neglect to consider the particulars of what happened to each participant in the camps. The study conflates all Holocaust experience into The Holocaust Experience. Perhaps some were whipped and this is why they have nightmares and others do not. For what seems like the hundredth time, Klüger must verbalize something she feels should be perfectly clear: “In Wirklichkeit war auch diese Wirklichkeit für jeden anders” (*weiter leben* 83). Though dictionaries and history books define the event in the singular, in effect there was not one Holocaust, but millions – one for each person who experienced it. When Jeffrey C. Blutinger cautioned that using survivor testimony could bias students’ understanding of the Holocaust, he also indirectly acknowledged the mirror image of the same matter. Those who are not survivors – or who were not born until years or decades after the event – also have a unique perception of the Holocaust that has been shaped by when and how information has come to them.

The evidence in this paper reveals that, as a culture, the United States may have a typical way of feeling and thinking about the Holocaust. Certainly, the information to which Americans have easy access takes a particularly interesting journey. If, as has been suggested above, place is held to be primary in the performance of remembrance, the United States is at a disadvantage. A Holocaust

memorial located in North America will never possess the allure of the authentic location and cannot “invite visitors to mistake the memorials for the events they represent” in the same way as converted concentration camps (Young 71). Beyond this necessary spatial and chronological distance, American understanding of the Holocaust has been distilled and filtered during its journey to this continent. American knowledge of the Holocaust is particularly like to be transmitted “by way of representations, and representations of representations, through editors and publishers, producers and directors” (Flanzbaum 4). I have listed numerous examples of this circuitous transmission, including films, novels, translations, and museums. The questions surrounding memorialization, when divorced from automatic importance of the historical site, are thrown into sharp relief: why in America? Young posits that the best reason for putting a Holocaust museum on the National Mall is that, “by remembering the crimes of another people in another land, it encourages Americans to recall their nation’s own idealized reason for being” (Young 72). In other words, the Holocaust museum and its lessons help to define American by its opposite: “this is what it means not to be American” (Young 73). Of course, what it means to be an American is also up for debate, but the visibility of the attempt to pin down an explicit reason is striking. The United States has imported Holocaust memory and adopted it as its own, and must continue to justify that relationship.

The idea of an American version of the Holocaust is particularly relevant to a discussion of Ruth Klüger’s memoir. The English version, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, to which I referred above, is not a linguistic translation, as are the Dutch-, French-, and Italian-language versions (Schaumann 325). *Still Alive* is a new rendering, written a decade after *weiter leben*, and, if it can be called a translation at all, perhaps the most appropriate term is cultural translation; Klüger has rewritten her memoir not in English, but in *American*. Rather than send the book off to be



translated, Klüger reserved for herself the task of creating a new version, waiting, the story goes, until after her mother's death to publish *Still Alive* in the United States. The two texts are largely similar in tone, and Klüger has preserved the general structure of the memoir as well as the major themes and plot points. Yet existence of the two versions results in a splitting of history. Between the two texts, "the Holocaust is conceptualized and verbalized for two different audiences, a German and an American one" (ibid.).

This split is characterized in *Still Alive* by a general scrub of references to German literature and culture from the text, one may presume to head off any lack of understanding by non-Germanists. The names concentration camps that Klüger selected as section headings for *weiter leben* were meant to serve as "Brücken" to encourage admittedly unlikely identification with Holocaust history (*weiter leben* 79). In *Still Alive*, the section titles are replaced with descriptors: "Ghetto," "Death Camp," and "Forced Labor Camp." Klüger replaces traces of German culture with American slang and illustrates many of her points with nods to American cultural icons and historical events. For example, the graduate students she meets who spent time whitewashing fences at Dachau remind her of Tom Sawyer. In making these changes to her original text, Klüger ostensibly sought to increase the chances that American audiences would be able to process the information in her text by using cultural fixtures as guideposts. The notion that this was necessary or advisable points to low expectations of American readers, but more importantly, it indicates that the truth of the Holocaust is changeable, and that these changes ultimately change nothing.

Klüger has removed some sarcastic references to Americans in *Still Alive*, ostensibly to avoid causing offence (Schaumann 330). One telling reference does survive, however, and it points directly to the version of the Holocaust that permeates American thought. In "Die Lager", the section of *weiter leben* that has formed the

keystone of my argument, Klüger reports that the graduate students in Göttingen complained specifically about “all die Amerikaner!” at the Dachau memorial (*weiter leben* 69). Though the “Die Lager” section is somewhat abridged in *Still Alive* and contains a host of American references – Tom Sawyer, John Doe, earthquakes – the exasperation remains: “All those Americans!” (*Still Alive* 64). This is the picture Klüger holds of Americans vis-à-vis the Holocaust. Americans perpetuate the sentimental image of the Holocaust. They are the tourists who visit the Glockenspiel before Dachau and who lay flowers at Anne Frank’s mock grave and not at the mass graves of Bergen-Belsen. I do not intend this as an accusation against Klüger. Rather, she has pinpointed exactly the strain of Holocaust memory that has been adopted into American culture. The Holocaust is a destination both in the physical world and in discourse with which America has become infatuated.

By insisting on a readjustment of her personal Holocaust experience to better fit the American cultural context, Klüger has pinpointed the rub of the issue of Holocaust memorialization: there is no longer an inherent truth of the Holocaust. As Peter Novick states, the lessons of the Holocaust are not actually “drawn *from*” the event, but lessons “brought *to* it” (Novick 242). The Holocaust is the AB blood type of history, the universal recipient. Nothing in the Western consciousness approaches the Holocaust in terms of scale, and yet the event has become universally applicable to almost any situation. This comes as a result of the drive to memorialize and monumentalize the Holocaust as a singularly important and incomparable event. The memorial culture that has developed in this climate has primed, and will continue to prime, generations of people with information, materials, and rituals surrounding the atrocity. These practices are self-perpetuating and ever multiplying as each subject engaged in remembrance constructs his own version of the event. As Klüger states, future generations “will remember what they need to remember and forget the rest”

(Klüger 313). In this case, each person will take what they need from the glut of information and proceed comfortable in the fact that they are completing a necessary task. As Holocaust remembrance advances into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the notion of “The Holocaust” as a moral guidepost must be reconsidered as a fragmentary concept with near infinite expressions, none and all of which are the truth.

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