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Subjectivity and History
Approaches to Twentieth-Century
German Society

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It is a great honour and pleasure to be invited to deliver the fortieth anniversary GHIL Annual Lecture. The German Historical Institute has been a tremendous asset to the intellectual life of London and the UK; over four decades, it has enhanced and enriched our discussions and knowledge of the contentious course of German history in a wider comparative context. With its thematic as well as substantive focus, the GHIL has also often served to set perspectives on British and wider European and world history in a new light, as well as ranging over significant theoretical and methodological issues. Some GHIL conferences have sparked major debates, becoming historiographical landmarks and commanding widespread public attention; others have fostered specialist research networks, keeping areas of minority interest not merely alive but also lively.

Perhaps the most well-known of the GHIL conferences, stimulating a productive controversy that persisted over many years and still echoes today, was an early one: the conference of 1979 held in Cumberland Lodge, Windsor Great Park, in which the outlines of the ‘intentionalism-functionalism’ debate were crystallised.¹ This particular discussion has largely died down, since the intentionalists’ focus on the figure of Hitler has

been cut off from the previous totalitarian framework and combined instead with a polycratic approach to the structure of the regime, thus allowing productive syntheses, and few professional historians would now even think of situating themselves in the original terms of the debate (although students still need to concern themselves with it). But some of the underlying issues have remained highly relevant: notably, questions around the relationships between moral judgements and historical explanations, or analyses of causality and responsibility – and hence also attributions of blame.² Even one of the more recent GHIL conferences, held together with the Munich Institute of Contemporary History on the Nazi conception of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, explicitly referred back to this paradigm-changing moment.³ And heated debates over the Third Reich show little sign of abating. Current subjectivities are still closely involved even with this ever-receding, ever more distant past.

The GHIL's regular seminars too have been a great source of stimulation. I recall the early days, when the GHIL was still based in Russell Square, and the first Director, Wolfgang Mommsen, managed to enliven any discussion, even of the most apparently tedious paper, with his pertinent comments and probing questions.

One occasion in particular remains in my memory, a particularly vivid incident which – like the conferences to which I just referred – is highly relevant to the topic of my lecture today. A young historian from Germany, whose name I cannot now recall, had just given an extremely detailed lecture based on extensive research on Nazi concentration camps. It was comprehensive, indeed exhaustive – as only a talk based on research for a German *Habilitation* thesis can be. At the end of the talk, and just as the discussion was getting a little bogged down in academic minutiae, an elderly gentlemen at the back of the audience stood up and said, in a heavily accented voice betraying his central European origins: ‘When I was in Auschwitz, it was not like that.’ This single sentence completely shattered the scholarly tone and entirely altered the course of the ensuing discussion.

Most historians of contemporary history will have had similar experiences. I too was vehemently challenged by an elderly survivor when I spoke in New York about my book on *A Small Town near Auschwitz*.⁴ She had been a young women when, on 12 August 1942, she was held on the former Jewish sports ground in Będzin and, along with several thousand other Jews from the town, faced selection – between remaining temporarily

at home, being sent to a labour camp, or being herded onto the trains and taken to the nearby gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau. During my lecture, she grew increasingly restive and first walked out, then returned and screamed at me that I could not possibly convey the experiences of that dreadful day, and that I had no right to speak about it. Quite a furore ensued, despite the able attempts of the Chair to calm down members of the audience. Similarly in the early 1990s, I had the privilege of giving a talk at the then newly founded Potsdam Centre for Contemporary Historical Research (ZZF), as it is now known – though at the time still labouring under a far longer title, and ably directed by Jürgen Kocka. My main concern was, perhaps irrelevantly, with the quality of my German; unused to lecturing in a language that was not my native tongue, I had arduously written and rewritten my paper, and had a native German speaker correct any remaining linguistic errors. Facing questions at the end of the talk, I was fearful of not being able to answer coherently in German. But what then surprised me most was the vehemence of an attack that came from the back of the room. Two young historians – who have in the meantime become well-known names – stood up and argued heatedly that I, as a westerner, had no ‘right’

to research the history of the state in which they had lived, and that only former GDR citizens were ‘qualified’ to write the history of the East German dictatorship. I had the impression that, roused by this challenge, the fluency of my German improved dramatically in my response. I hope I also managed to mount a coherent answer to this fundamental misinterpretation of a historian’s role as one of championing an identity politics in which empathy across historical borders is assumed to be neither possible nor desirable.

These examples illustrate an issue which is well-known among historians: the ambiguous and potentially provocative role of the eye-witness – sometimes held to be the historian’s ‘worst enemy’ as well as essential friend and source.⁵ Indeed, the kinds of ‘knowledge’ that are attainable through experience or through research are quite different, and survivors may well be suspicious of historians’ accounts. As Elie Wiesel once put it rather sharply, in an interview for the newly founded journal of *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*: ‘In a strange way any survivor has more to say than all the historians combined about what happened.’⁶ Yet, as even Wiesel conceded, historians’ accounts are of immense value in a variety of other ways. There is a creative tension between the

perceptions and memories of participants in a historical process, and the more comprehensive depictions of historians, encompassing a wide range of evidence and multiple perspectives.

I want in this lecture to address the changing character of historical subjectivities. I shall also first spend a little time considering the ways in which historians treat the subjective accounts of contemporaries. But I think that questions around subjectivity are not restricted only to the people about whom historians write. The subjectivities of the historians and their contemporary audiences are also at stake in the enterprise of history. History is essentially a communicative craft: historians engage in a form of communication both with past participants in historical processes, and also with the contemporary worlds in which they are embedded, in the process situating themselves with respect both to the past and to the societies for which they write. I shall sketch some ideas about what might be seen as a three-way communication process between the subjectivities of people in the past, audiences in a later present, and historians. The questions addressed here are in principle relevant to all historical writing, but I shall focus my examples on aspects of recent German history,

overshadowed as it is by the crimes of the Nazi era and succeeding attempts to reckon with this past.

I. Subjectivity and historical objectivity: approaches to the sources

There are widespread suspicions about the use of subjective sources in historical writing, particularly when these are intimately bound up with emotive and moral questions concerning guilt and involvement in a contentious past. Partly such suspicions relate to the vicissitudes of personal memory, and hence what later sources can actually tell us about the past; and partly they concern the extent to which emotional involvements render subjective sources intrinsically partial, in both senses of this word. They present a view of the world from a particular perspective, both in terms of the limitations on the field of vision and knowledge, and in terms of the distinctive place of the person within a field of conflicts. These are clearly not insurmountable problems, nor are they different in principle from considerations around the usefulness of other kinds of source. Even so, it is worth right at the outset considering a little more closely some of the ways in which historians have variously shied away from or sought to incorporate subjective sources in

their accounts, and the ways in which the use of such sources affects the character of the accounts produced.

The great pioneer in the field of Holocaust history, Raul Hilberg, was intrinsically suspicious of subjective sources, and for decades emphasised rather the significance of the ‘documents’, even while pointing to the difficulties of interpreting the paper trails of the perpetrators.⁷ Like many other historians striving to produce an absolutely unquestionable and would-be ‘objective’ account of a highly contentious past, he was acutely aware of the dangers of trying to write a historical narrative that depended too strongly on survivors’ accounts. In his reflections on *The Politics of Memory*, written in the mid-1990s, Hilberg explicitly comments on what survivor accounts leave out, as well as what they are able to offer. In such accounts, Hilberg suggests, we are primarily given a psychological portrait of how individuals struggled and survived, not a depiction of their humiliation and embarrassment. Survivors are concerned, he tells us, largely with self-representation, and not with the kind of accurate and comprehensive picture of the past that historians may seek. Nor are they necessarily interested in all facets of the past that may be of interest to the historian. Survivors may, Hilberg

argues, prefer to concentrate on how they managed to live through the extremes of the concentration camp, rather than discussing their less extreme experiences of life in ghettos and labour camps.

These points have some validity, and Hilberg is not the only historian to have made them. They should not, however, necessarily lead to the conclusion that Hilberg initially drew, namely that we should not use survivor accounts as sources and should instead rely solely or even primarily on the 'documents'. As Christopher Browning argues, survivors' accounts may tell us much that is entirely missing from the documents.⁹ Nor did even Hilberg discount subjective sources entirely; he was perfectly prepared to use sources produced contemporaneously with the events they described, and was for example passionate about the diary of Adam Czerniaków, head of the Jewish Council in Nazi-occupied Warsaw from October 1939 until his suicide when ordered to assist in deportations in late July 1942.¹⁰ As the only historian 'expert witness' to appear in person in Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*, Hilberg reads extracts from this diary, effectively standing in for and identifying with Czerniaków as an eye-witness to the destruction of the Jews of Warsaw.¹¹

Hilberg's own highly personal relationship to those who lived through the past – despite an ambivalent sense of 'not quite' being a 'survivor' – is paradoxically evident both in his determination to see this diary published and in his insistence on distancing his own historical writing from any whiff of reliance on subjective sources produced by survivors after the event. In many respects, he wanted the perpetrators to be hanged on the basis of their own words, to be incriminated in terms of their own documents – but he could at the same time not evade the significance of hearing the personal experiences of those on the receiving end of Nazi policies.

An apparently quite different approach to the use of subjective sources was taken by another great Holocaust historian, Saul Friedländer. His unease with the then current practices among German historians, who saw themselves as writing 'objective history' in contrast to the supposed excess emotionality of Jewish historians, was expressed in his exchange of letters with Martin Broszat in late 1987. Friedländer took particular issue with Broszat's distinction between what the latter characterised as, on the one hand, 'scientific history' and the 'rational discourse of German historiography' and, on the other, the supposedly 'mythical memory' of the

‘victims and their descendants,’ which Broszat considered to be ‘a form of memory which acts to coarsen historical recollection.’¹² Friedländer quite rightly asks Broszat: ‘why, in your opinion, would historians belonging to the group of the perpetrators be able to distance themselves from their past, whereas those belonging to the group of the victims, would not?’¹³ In the course of the exchange, Broszat shifted his position somewhat, conceding that even Jewish historians could write ‘rational’ history as well as engaging in acts of commemoration, but this opening exchange remains the one most often cited as pointedly putting a key issue right at the heart of the debate.

This raised the question of the supposed differences between what were initially seen as ‘German’ and ‘Jewish’ approaches to the history of the National Socialist period. In the course of the discussion, it became clear to both Broszat and Friedländer that what was at stake was less the (dubious, distinctively problematic) attribution of an imputed ‘Germanness’ or ‘Jewishness’ to any particular historian, but rather the question of generation and the significance of precise date of birth for personal experiences and, among Germans, degrees of responsibility for Nazism. Broszat and Friedländer

focussed particularly on the significance of the Hitler Youth generation, to which Broszat felt he personally belonged. This generation had for the most part been quite young, either children or teenagers, during the Third Reich, and therefore did not feel the need to take responsibility for its crimes. Yet they also experienced emotional difficulties in challenging or even addressing the widespread complicity of their parents, teachers, and mentors.¹⁴ It is possible that some of the insistence among historians of this generation on 'scientific objectivity', and their tendency to focus on structures rather than subjectivities, provided ways of evading sensitive and potentially painful questions.

Friedländer made his mark, by contrast, by going on to experiment with ways of incorporating the agonising perceptions of victims into an account that still primarily leaves agency in the hands of the initiators and perpetrators of genocide. This appears at first glance to be both the fulfilment of the challenge laid down in the exchange with Broszat, and also on the surface to represent quite the opposite of Hilberg's approach; but in another sense, it can be seen as a continuation, indeed almost exemplification, of some of Hilberg's underlying concerns, or at least a variant response to a shared

question, while echoing, from a different perspective, the desire for ‘normalisation’ raised by Broszat.

Hilberg and Friedländer had in common that they were in a sense members of what is sometimes called the ‘1.5 generation’ – people who were child survivors as well as those not yet old enough to take their own decisions at the time of the Holocaust. They also had in common a feeling – not entirely justified – that they were in some sense ‘not really survivors,’ that they had not ‘really’ been ‘there,’ a feeling of distance from where the events ‘really happened.’ While their lives were inevitably and fundamentally altered by the dramatic impact of Nazi persecution on themselves, their families, and the communities in which they had their origins, they still seemed to feel that they were not themselves somehow an integral part of the catastrophe about which they wrote and to which they devoted their professional lives. Their responses to this sense are apparent in the ways in which they write.

Hilberg in his magnum opus sought to keep his own emotional involvement under control, limiting his personal responses to the use of irony and biting asides while selecting choice examples that made his case for him. Reflecting on his work, he later recalled that

the ‘methodological literature that I read emphasized objectivity and neutral or value-free words.’ Well aware of the creativity and craft that goes into history writing, he nevertheless tried as an author to be anonymous; publishers might still give personal details about him in their book descriptions, ‘but the printed pages at least would be devoted to the subject, not the person who wrote them.’ He goes on to explain: ‘To this end I banished accusatory terms like “murder”, as well as such exculpatory words as “executions”, which made the victims into delinquents, or “extermination”, which likened them to vermin. I added charts and numbers, which added an air of cool detachment to my writing.’ But, he concedes, he ‘did yield to some temptations.’ These included ‘a suppressed irony, in other words, an irony recognisably suppressed.’¹⁵ Hilberg’s moral outrage seethed to the surface, however, in his short book on *Perpetrators, Victims and Bystanders* – a book which is more of a moral indictment of those who stood by and failed to intervene effectively on the part of the victims than it is an analytical exploration of a highly complex topic.

Friedländer, interestingly, is also for the most part highly restrained regarding his personal standpoint

in his major historical works, restricting comments about his personal experiences to a couple of sentences in the preface to this two-volume history of the Nazi persecution of the Jews. But his use of subjective sources is quite distinctive; apart from some intimations of the extremely limited possibilities for resistance on the part of victims of persecution, their voices barely ruffle Friedländer's wider narrative drive. They function rather to speak for the pain, the unpredictability, the sheer un-believability of the developments for which Friedländer, as a professional historian, must at the same time provide a narrative form of explanation. In a sense, the use of subjective sources in Friedländer's account is not dissimilar from Hilberg's determination to bring Czerniaków's diary to the world. Both attribute significance to the emotions and perceptions of those victims whose voices they select and prioritise in their accounts, and have a clear desire to ensure that these voices are heard, disrupting the otherwise unbearable smooth narratives of the Nazi policies and machinery of destruction and demonstrating the human impact on those who faced destruction on this scale.

Less frequently noted is what these two historians have in common with Martin Broszat and other German

historians of his generation. Curiously, while Hilberg and Friedländer in different ways inserted the voices of the victims with whom they felt a sense of connection, Broszat perhaps inadvertently appears to have spoken on behalf of the German bystanders – representing, in a sense, the community of experience from which he himself came. When Broszat insisted on ‘normalising’ the history of the Third Reich, and portraying the ‘normal lives’ of people far from positions of power who could not be counted among the perpetrators, he assumed – in stark contrast to Friedländer – that this very ‘normality’ was not in itself intrinsically related to the atrocities which such a society had made possible. Broszat was himself part of a particular community of experience, one that was arguably tainted by proximity, however much he distanced himself from and denounced the actions that the bystander community had made possible at the time.

The question at issue between Broszat and Friedländer is, at least in part, whether there are indeed aspects of everyday life in Nazi Germany that can be treated in some way separately from the historical outcomes of persecution and genocide. An exploration of subjectivities and the changing character of subjective accounts of the Nazi past produced under changing

circumstances over many decades may help in exploring this further. I want now to turn to another possible approach to the use of subjective sources – not so much as a means of illuminating the history of policies and events, but rather as way of understanding how social relations affect the ways in which people express their subjectivities, and people themselves change over time under different circumstances.

There is an interplay between what we might consider to be a history of changing subjectivities, and the ways in which distinctive kinds of sources are produced and evaluated in particular communicative, inter-subjective contexts. To explore this briefly in the present context, I shall select a few examples: first, from the period of Nazi rule in Germany; and then from the long post-war decades in which, as the period receded, the Holocaust paradoxically appeared to grow in significance and visibility. This is a complex, intertwined history in which distinctive and partly overlapping eras may be discerned, and different aspects have slightly different chronologies. What follows will necessarily be highly schematic, but it may nevertheless serve to draw some wider issues to our attention.

II. Subjectivity and Nazi society:

Perspectives from the end of the peacetime years

There is a unique collection of ego-documents written in late 1939 and early 1940 – before the instigation of organised mass murder in the fields and camps of Eastern Europe. In the summer of 1939, aware of the momentous changes taking place in Germany, three Harvard professors – psychologist Gordon Allport, historian Sidney Fay, and sociologist Edward Hartshorne – set a competition for essays under the title ‘My Life in Germany before and after 1933’. More than 260 people sent in their accounts; although those that have received the most attention are by Jewish exiles, many are by non-Jewish visitors to or residents of Germany.¹⁶ They portray a world which did not yet know that even worse was still to come; and they provide details of everyday life which would later seem relatively insignificant, overwhelmed as subsequent accounts are by the horrors of the Holocaust.

These essays provide a remarkable prism through which to view aspects of private life in the pre-war world of Nazi Germany. As Saul Friedländer summarises it in his foreword to the collection focussing on *Kristallnacht*: the ‘testimonies [...] described what the authors deemed

to be the height of Nazi barbarism. In reality, these events were but the faintest of preludes to what was about to happen to the Jews in Germany and in occupied Europe.¹⁷ Friedländer suggests that the accounts portray ‘a wealth of aspects defining the atmosphere that suffused the world of central European Jewry in the penultimate phase of its existence, moments before its final doom.’¹⁸

There is indeed an immense richness of detail in these essays. In his review of one collection of excerpts that focuses specifically on experiences of *Kristallnacht*, Richard J. Evans draws attention to the immediacy of the accounts and the vivid details of terrifying experiences in what he summarises as a ‘riveting book.’ Nevertheless, Evans somewhat dismissively concludes that: ‘Mostly they confirm the picture we already have from other sources, though few are as vivid as these.’¹⁹ This is one way to approach these accounts: as immensely valuable sources to tell us about ‘something else’ – even if this is something about which we think we already know a considerable amount.

I want here, however, to draw attention to a rather different way of approaching these and other subjective sources from the time: that is, not so much as spotlights to illuminate or to illustrate what is going on in the

world around – although they are indeed remarkable in this respect – but rather as routes into understanding how the individuals themselves, and those with whom they interrelate in their daily lives, are changed by their experiences.

Viewed in this way, we have not only to look at the accounts of persecution by Jewish victims, but also at the accounts of others. And we have to look at the changing social relationships between individuals, on *both* sides of the growing chasm between those who were to be excluded from the Nazi ‘ethnic community’ (*Volksgemeinschaft*) and those who were not. If we focus solely on the consequences of persecution for the victims, we miss understanding how others too were changed in this process of social transformation. There are many aspects of this, and here I can provide only a few examples.

A phenomenon of particular interest in this connection is that of friendship. Friendship is not easy to define precisely, and the cultural meanings and social functions of this bond of affection between people have changed over the centuries. In the twentieth century, while friendship still often retained public functions and uses, it was largely interpreted as a private bond between

individuals who choose to enjoy each other's company in their free time, who may be entrusted with confidences, and who may be relied upon to provide support, whether emotional or practical, in times of distress. Not defined in legal terms, friendship is also beyond easy legal regulation – unlike marriage or employment relationships – and thus beyond the reach of Nazi legislation on the lines of the Nuremberg Laws. Yet one of the most striking aspects of accounts written on the brink of war is the frequent mention of friendships that were broken off during the half dozen years since Hitler came to power.

For many, this was one of the most painful experiences of their lives in Germany or Austria before emigration. The loss of close and deep personal friendships was acutely upsetting. George K., for example, chose this as the sole focus of his essay for the Harvard competition. He had wanted to write about his experiences at greater length, but in the end singled out the loss of his closest childhood friend as the key issue on which to focus.²⁰ Karl Löwith, an academic at Marburg University whose account was eventually published as a book in its own right, saw the severing of personal friendships as having been at the heart of 'the separation between Germans

and Jews'. This was a process that began for him even before Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, when his 'best friend' became a Nazi and refused to see him. This 'minor incident [...] was not discernible to the public', Löwith comments, and 'I repressed it in the years that followed, because it hit me where it hurt most.'²¹ German Jews were increasingly isolated, excluded from their former social circles – which, as we know from the work of Marion Kaplan and others, produced a form of 'social death' even before the increasing geographical isolation and eventual deportation to places of physical annihilation.²²

But read from a different perspective, these stories about the severing of bonds of friendship also tell us something extremely interesting about transformations of attitude and behaviour among those members of the wider population who were not themselves targets of persecution. They were, in effect, spontaneously implementing and enacting Nazi conceptions of the national community in areas of informal and private life that were beyond the reach of policy and legislation. The accounts repeatedly tell us of ways in which former friends sought to avoid seeing or being in a position where they might have to greet their now outcast Jewish

acquaintances. Albert D., for example, recalls that his non-Jewish friends continued for quite a while to be friendly with him if they met in private, but if they chanced to meet on the street they would become ‘cautious, short-sighted, and awkward’.²³ He noted that in a relatively small town everyone knew one another, and they all believed that they were ‘being observed, spied upon, and there was nothing one feared more than denunciation’; one would rapidly be ‘stigmatised in public as a “servant of the Jews” [*Judenknecht*], an “enemy of the people” and similar’.²⁴ Such comments are found in many accounts.

This internalisation of the new rules sustaining what Erving Goffman calls the ‘fiction’ of the ‘normal community’ was to be found not only on the part of dominant members but also among those who were now being stigmatised and marginalised.²⁵ They too played their part in trying to avoid potentially embarrassing situations. Anna B., for example, was a Jewish housewife living in southwest Germany who had for most of her life considered class to be more significant than ‘race’ in social life.²⁶ But from 1933 onwards, she saw how the behaviour of those who had previously been friendly to herself and her family adapted to the new conditions: and now she too made an effort not to talk to nor even to

see people whom it would be difficult to greet in public. There was a subtle interplay here, with an interactive process of both being shut out, made to feel different, and adapting to this in order to avoid trouble either for oneself or for others.

The motives for breaking off friendships and engaging in new avoidance behaviours appear to be quite varied, clearly depending not only on the personalities and preferences of those breaking off the friendship, but also in part on what they considered it acceptable to say in explanation to their former friends, if indeed they did offer an explanation (as many did). Fear of social ostracism, fear of their own social exclusion, considerations of career as well as standing in the local community, played a significant role in many cases. Occasionally too there is evidence of new-found ideological conviction and apparently genuine internalisation of a Nazi racial world view. And sometimes there are cases when people desperately try to maintain friendships across the new racial divides.

The relatively few accounts of sustaining friendship indicate rather precisely exactly what was at stake when people refused to capitulate to the pressures of conformity and new social norms; what was, in effect, the price of

friendship in Nazi Germany. Ernst R., for example, was a Christian who experienced a deep internal conflict between different parts of his own identity when he was increasingly made aware of the previously entirely irrelevant fact that two of his closest friends, also Christians, were of Jewish descent. He realised that he would be engaged in what he describes as ‘being a traitor to his people and his race’ (*Volks- und Rasseverrats*) if he sustained his relations with his friends; but at the same time he felt that it would be against all his strongly held Christian values to break off with them.²⁷ Unlike so many others in this position, Ernst R. remained friends with the family despite the danger of being labelled a ‘*Judenknecht*’ (‘servant of Jews’).²⁸ Following their successful emigration, he tried to lead a ‘normal life’ but to him it felt more like a ‘shadow existence’ (*Schattendasein*).²⁹ There were no serious penalties for continuing contact with his friends, although on one occasion he was called in to the Gestapo; and the SS also made it clear to him, as he put it, ‘that every Jew is a criminal; but that a “national comrade of German blood” [*deutschblütiger Volksgenosse*] who helps a Jew is to be treated and dealt with more sharply than a Jew!’³⁰ It was not these pressures or threats, however, that influenced

his own eventual decision to emigrate.

For Ernst R. it was not so much fear – which might have cowed him into conformity, like so many others – but rather religious principles and moral values that eventually took precedence. Witnessing the events of 9–10 November 1938 proved to be the turning point. Many Germans for the first time now said that they were ‘ashamed to be German’; but they generally stood by and did little or nothing to assist Jewish victims of the night of vandalism, brutality and terror. Ernst R. too was ashamed; but for him the implications were more far-reaching. He came to very clear conclusions:

As long as such vandalism is carried out, without facing any opposition, by a regime that styles itself as the standard-bearer of the ‘moral sensitivity of the Germanic race’, then my own humanity forbids me to continue any longer to consider myself a member of this state. And should the German people, as its current leaders claim, really affirm and approve of such barbarism, then I am no longer a German!³¹

When all his friends’ family had managed to emigrate – their mother only left in January 1939 – Ernst R. felt left in ‘an indescribably homeless and godforsaken state’, and was ‘filled only with one goal: to turn my back as soon as possible on this inhumane Nazi Reich’. As he put it – presciently, even well before what we think of as the

Holocaust: 'It was unbearable for me to stay any longer in a country in which my friends had no right to life.'³² Ernst R. left for England, where he was immediately interned as an 'enemy alien'; he was then sent to Australia with other 'refugees from Nazi oppression' who had also previously been interned. He penned his account, at the age of 34, from Australia; here, he sought to make an entirely new life.

This is a relatively rare example, although there are others. They include, significantly, Aryans who refused to drop their Jewish partners, either before or after marriage – which, unlike friendship, was an intimate personal relationship that was subject to legal regulation by the state.³³ It is also evident, if at times only obliquely, in the ways in which those who stayed and conformed managed to dampen down their emotions: they fell into line – to use the well-worn phrase which nevertheless captures well much of what went on – and began to look away, ignore, 'not know' what was happening to fellow Germans who were now being ostracised and ousted. In the course of the 1930s – and more rapidly in Austria from 1938 – we can see the formation of what might be called a 'bystander society'.³⁴ This provided the preconditions for participation, complicity, or passively condoning or

ignoring the far more murderous persecution that would follow in the war time years.

Is this what Broszat would have us believe was the 'normal life' that had little or nothing to do with the Holocaust? From his perspective, brought up and socialised in this atmosphere, it clearly did appear to have an air of 'normality' unrelated to the atrocities that soon followed. From the perspective of those who were ousted, even by those they had trusted and with whom they had been friends, it did not.

The essays in the Harvard competition do not constitute anything that could be called a representative sample or cross-section of the population. To understand and contextualise them, we have of course to draw on a wide range of other sources. They are however highly suggestive. Reading through these accounts, including those penned by non-Jewish Germans and foreign visitors, as well as other ego-documents – memoirs, diaries and letters held in other archives – it becomes clear that during the first few years of Hitler's rule many people learned, adopted and enacted new identities which they, in effect, 'performed' in public while retaining a degree of inner distance from what they were doing. Over the course of time, some changed from

what Goffmann would call ‘cynical performers’ to being ‘sincere performers’ who increasingly internalised the rules of the game by which they were playing.

There were different rewards and penalties for certain kinds of behaviour, in the light of which people evaluated sometimes conflicting priorities – including moral and political considerations – and varied their performances on different stages. Whether individuals acted out of fear, social pressure for conformity, considerations of career and personal advantage, or enthusiasm and conviction, the outcome was the same: the transformation of social relations that they enacted ultimately helped to create the social preconditions for genocide.

III. Subjectivity and patterns of communication after Nazism

It is now more than seventy years since the end of the Third Reich. Those who were forced into exile, or who survived through camps or in hiding, subsequently made new lives in places scattered around the world. We can develop a sketch of how their accounts changed over time, as well as tracing the changing public reception of the ‘testimonies’ of those who were eventually no longer shunned as victims but rather increasingly venerated

as ‘survivors’. Less well traced, to date, however, is the changing character of subjective accounts of those who might be called ‘bystanders’ (or who liked to portray themselves as such), not to mention those variously designated as ‘perpetrators’. What might a history of post-war narratives about personal experiences of Nazism begin to look like, if we take into account all sides of the chasm created by the policies and practices of persecution?

Accounts by survivors have been subjected to intensive and detailed analysis. A number of different phases and stages may be distinguished, according to what criteria seem most apposite. I can only sketch some of the key outlines.

In contrast to the widespread view that survivors ‘fell silent’ or ‘did not talk’ about their experiences in the early post-war years, I would argue that in fact they talked a lot, but only among those with similar experiences or significant interest in what they had to say: that is, they tended to talk only within the borders of what I would call the ‘community of experience’. Numerous personal accounts make clear that people talked with close friends, fellow survivors, or in their own families, but fell silent in the company of others who, they felt, would not

fully understand what they had been through, however sympathetic they might be.

Two points are important about this phase. First, the focus in early accounts is very much on ‘what happened’: people tried to make sense of sequences of events, chronologies, piecing together a picture of the shattering of their former lives and communities, without yet having much by way of a broader framework of understanding. The urgency of early accounts – including those produced while the war was still raging – sometimes arises from a burning desire to tell the world what was happening; sometimes it is rooted in a more immediate need to trace what became of family or friends; frequently it registers a more general bafflement and attempt to place oneself in any kind of wider picture that would start to make sense. There is a huge range and variation to be found in the early testimonies collected by institutions such as the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, the Wiener Library in London, YIVO in New York, or Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. But they have in common also with the unique early oral history recordings made in Displaced Persons Camps by the American Professor, David Boder, that the people telling of their experiences focus on what they went through in narratives or raw chronologies

that grope to make any sense of the events recounted. Even the accounts that bear the hallmark of literary polish, such as the work of Charlotte Delbo from the very early postwar years, are often fragmentary. There were however contrasting patterns of reception of early accounts. While the diary of Anne Frank was published and took off to a continuing career of commercial success, the comparable – and indeed in some respects more interesting – diary of another teenager, Mary Berg, a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto, did not³⁵.

Moreover, for those who had been ‘on the side of the perpetrators’ there were quite different communities of experience at this time, evident in subjective accounts produced in the Third Reich successor states, Austria and the divided Germany of the early Cold War period. These post-war societies were engrossed in their own preoccupations and uncertain futures. Industrialists who had been employers of slave labour from concentration camps – Heinkel, I.G. Farben and many others – wrote sanitised and self-serving accounts distancing themselves from Nazism. People who had been complicit in sustaining the Nazi regime through a wide range of occupations and roles now distanced themselves and pleaded – with a degree of self-contradiction – both

that they had ‘always been against it’ (*immer dagegen*) and that they had ‘known nothing about it’ (*davon haben wir nichts gewusst*). The photographer, Margaret Bourke-White, heard this phrase for the first time when she visited Germany in April 1945 and photographed residents of Weimar being forced to visit the newly liberated camp of Buchenwald; she heard it repeated so often thereafter that, in her view, it became something of ‘a German national hymn,’ as the German translation renders it.³⁶ [In the English original: ‘I first heard these words on a sunny afternoon in mid-April, 1945. They were repeated so often during the weeks to come, and all of us heard them with such monotonous frequency, that we came to regard them as a kind of national chant for Germany.’] She summarises their experiences in the pithy words of one of her American compatriots: “‘The Germans act as though the Nazis were a strange race of Eskimos who came down from the North Pole and somehow invaded Germany.’”³⁷

In both German states and in Austria, people scurried through the denazification processes hastily assembling autobiographical accounts that demonstrated how little they had supposedly known or done, in order to distance themselves from the past they had in fact, through their

actions or inaction, helped to sustain. And following the early flurry of trials by the Allies – discounted by many as ‘victors’ justice’ – as well as local courts, from the early to mid-1950s even judicial reckonings with the past died down. People could focus on a combination of building for a better future while complaining about their own sufferings and victimhood – Allied air-raids, bombed-out cities, bereavements and losses, as well as national humiliation, division and subjugation, particularly in the Soviet Zone/GDR. Accounts by survivors of Nazi persecution were understandably not high on any agenda of interesting reading for those recovering from the personal impact of war on the lives of themselves and their families, friends, and communities.

This is not the place to discuss in any detail the diverse patterns of previous involvement in perpetration, complicity, profiteering, self-mobilisation – as well as capitulation to the seemingly inevitable, fear and powerlessness, and constrained mobilisation against their own will – that are to be found among people who had remained ‘on the perpetrator side’ under Nazi rule. But involvement in the machinery of destruction and proximity to acts of inhumanity were infinitely more widespread than many people would later wish

to acknowledge, and any reminder stirred considerable unease. The ambivalence occasioned by awareness of previous involvement in state-sponsored collective violence left legacies that proved deeply problematic to deal with, whether in personal accounts, in courts of law, or in transmission to members of subsequent generations. Behind all the proclamations about the supposed 'era of the witness' there is an accompanying shadow story – one that has not as yet been fully explored – of the ways in which people on the side of the perpetrators variously reframed their own personal pasts to fit new criteria of moral and political evaluation.

Friendship can again suggest an interesting barometer of what was going on at a personal level. The account written by Melita Maschmann of what she portrays as youthful idealism and consequent work in the Hitler youth organisation for girls, the League of German Maidens (BDM) is frequently filleted by historians for illustrations of what was supposedly typical for girls of her class and generation in the later 1930s and early 1940.³⁸ It is perhaps more usefully read for its strategies of self-exculpation – despite the title – in the context of West Germany in the early 1960s. Stirrings of an uneasy conscience were not sufficient for Maschmann

to do more than plead that she had been effectively misled and blinded by Nazi ideology – a member of the ‘betrayed’ generation – and to downplay her own actions in betraying her former friend’s sister and the sister’s boyfriend (later husband), both of whom were arrested and incarcerated, with long-term consequences, as a result.³⁹ If we do not read this book in the context of later subjectivities, but see it merely as a source for illustrative quotations, we miss entirely its significance. But this was a time of communication largely within the borders of particular communities of experience; Maschmann’s former friend, who had emigrated to the USA, refused to take up the offer of renewed friendship, aware of the vastness of the gulf that separated them.

It is often suggested that the 1960s inaugurated the ‘era of the witness’, with the prominence of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem and the first Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt. Survivors now supposedly took the stage in a way they had not done before. This may be true of the Eichmann trial: one of the expressed aims of Gideon Hausner, the Attorney General of Israel at the time, was indeed to tell the world about what Jews had suffered, irrespective of whether testimonies were directly relevant to proving Eichmann’s guilt in the narrower sense of the

trial. But in practice the character and impact of survivor testimonies in West German trials were of widely varying significance. Often they were crucial in identifying ‘what actually happened’ and in establishing – or failing to establish – the guilt of people accused of involvement in Nazi crimes. The more perfect the murder machinery, and the fewer the survivors, the more easily those who did the killing were able to get away with it – as we see in the cases of the Bełżec trial, as contrasted with the Sobibór trial. Even when there were many survivors, however, members of the legal profession, including judges, were often apparently more suspicious of survivor testimony than they were of the accounts coordinated among perpetrators and defendants. Yet at the same time the evidence of documents was also often not quite sufficient to prove guilt. This only changed with the Demjanjuk case, by which time it was too late – far too late – to bring perpetrators to justice in courts of law.

Moreover this middle period was one of confrontation rather than communication between clashing communities of experience. If in the early period victims and survivors primarily focussed on ‘what happened’, in this middle period the emphasis in public at least shifted to ‘who dunnit’. In the era of the great trials in

West Germany, survivor testimony was often crucial in establishing precisely what happened, when, where, and by whom. It was not of interest in its own right. Indeed, it seemed almost irrelevant in Austria, where trials ceased entirely in the mid-1970s because of the difficulty of getting Austrian juries actually to convict defendants however compelling the evidence against them. In East Germany, by contrast, where subjective attitudes and personal motives were not legally central to the charge of murder, it played far less of a role in proving guilt. In the GDR, former Nazis were six or seven times as likely to be found guilty as they were in the West German state.

From the later 1970s onwards, we enter what might be called the ‘era of the survivor’. In contrast to the first and second periods, the spotlight was now on the survivors themselves: the primary question was no longer, or not only, ‘what happened’ and ‘who dunnit’, but now also ‘what did it do to me?’ This is partially evident in the private stories told in families, as – entering old age – many wanted to tell their by now adult children or young grandchildren something of their family heritage, and perhaps for the first time explicitly began to look at their own lives in a wider perspective, reflecting on the personal implications of Nazi persecution for themselves

and their families. It was also a time when the search for 'roots' began to take off among younger generations in search of identities not necessarily given by the rapidly changing present.

This inaugurated a period of communication between communities of experience on the survivor side, on the one hand, and younger communities of connection and identification on the other. There was now growing public interest in the stories of those who had survived Nazi persecution. This was certainly true of the historical profession, with the growth of oral history (not only of survivors) and new initiatives for the collection of testimony, as in the Yale Fortunoff archive. It is also true of cultural production. We have only to mention the exponentially growing audiences for phenomena such as the American TV mini-series, *Holocaust*, first shown in late 1978, or Claude Lanzmann's epic nine-hour film of 1985, *Shoah*, or the Hollywood blockbusters of the 1990s including Spielberg's *Schindler's List* as well as many others, to realise that what was now called the Holocaust was firmly on the global cultural map. It is clear that younger generations were growing up and addressing issues that had been submerged, repressed, talked around, by the more compromised members

of the generation of experience. The challenge across generations in Germany became most acutely visible with the opening of the first 'Crimes of the Wehrmacht' exhibition in 1995.

But these cultural developments are a little misleading when writing the history of subjectivities. They are more a history of cultural representations and changing audiences, not – as is often mistakenly assumed – a history of 'memory'. If we focus on survivor experiences themselves, we find that cultural representations are often skewed and miss out on many kinds of experience that remained (and in some cases still remain) largely marginalised. Homosexuals, Sinti and Roma, victims of compulsory sterilisation and 'euthanasia', forced and slave labourers – all were only belatedly recognised as victims, and found it extremely harder to gain compensation for their suffering. And even where a person had the classic 'victimhood' status, compensation or restitution was by no means assured. The growth of veneration of the survivor seems more apparent in the symbolic gestures of memorial sites and ceremonies, in museums and archival collections of testimony, than it does in the real world of suffering, pain and poverty in old age.

'Remembering' may have made some communities

feel better about an acutely problematic past; but it did not necessarily assist those who needed it the most and who still bore the physical and psychological marks of this past. Nor did the explosion of memorialisation make up for the entirely inadequate attempts to bring Nazi perpetrators to court. It almost, by contrast, served to camouflage the social reintegration and effective pardoning of those who had been most culpable – many of whom succeeded in evading direct confrontation with questions of guilt and responsibility.

Later accounts by those on the side of the perpetrators display a range of strategies for damage limitation and self-exculpation. There is generally a form of self-distancing from actions, events or places deemed to be in some way tainting. Distance could be geographical: places of evil were ‘hidden away in the forests of the east’. Distance could be informational: the claim that one had ‘known nothing about it’. Distance could even be in terms of competing or conflicting loyalties and demands, as found in the memoirs of a former schoolteacher in the town of Oświęcim. Having implausibly asserted her supposed ignorance of what was going on behind the walls and barbed wire of Auschwitz – despite the evidence of ashes on her furniture when she returned to her room in the

evening and had left the window open all day; despite socialising with colleagues whose husbands were in the SS working in the camp; despite teaching the children of Camp Commandant Rudolf Höss at her school – she jumps to claiming that sustaining the morale of German soldiers at the front was so significant that she could not risk having the news leak out and soldiers begin to doubt the national mission in wartime. This extraordinarily defensive, self-contradictory account must stand as typical for many strategies that are variously to be found among the stories of those on the perpetrator side.⁴⁰

We do not yet have even the outlines of a history of changing subjectivities and strategies of self-representation among those on the perpetrator side. Many sought, in the era of oral history and the history of everyday life to portray themselves as ‘little people’ who had led perfectly ‘normal lives’ – the lives with whom Broszat appeared to sympathise in his exchange with Friedländer – with little apparent awareness that this had only been at the expense of others who were ousted from the national community. The disavowal of personal responsibility was partly rooted in a previous division of labour, making it possible to portray oneself as having been but a small cog in the larger machinery

of persecution; it was partly rooted in a feeling that much had been a matter of putting on a public face, acting a part, without really feeling personally motivated or committed, as in the dropping of friendships; or it could be argued – as Maschman did – that one had been innocently led on by significant elders and blinded by ideology at an impressionable age. While survivors often struggled with a sense of guilt and agency that had been inadequately deployed, those on the perpetrator side appeared to have little problem in this regard, emphasising rather their former powerlessness. Despite variations in form, and differences according to context, the myth of having been ‘merely a bystander’ could function as a very effective alibi for a wide range of behaviours and actions that had in fact helped to make the Nazi system of persecution function so effectively for so long.

The much bemoaned dying out of the eye-witness generation generally focuses its attention on the deaths of the last few remaining survivors; the significance of the dying out of the perpetrator generation has to date received far less attention. I would suggest that one of the most important consequences of this generational passage is that, finally, museums and memorial sites

will finally be able to devote more space and resources to documenting not only who were the victims, but also who was actually responsible for the sufferings and deaths of those who were persecuted. There are some indications that such a shift is beginning to take place, in sites as diverse as the former concentration camp at Mauthausen and its labour sub-camps, the women's camp at Ravensbrück, and former 'euthanasia' centres; but much more remains to be done.

There is a further final aspect of the changing subjectivities of the post-Nazi period: this has to do with patterns of inter-generational transmission. The Nazi past had an impact not only among children and grandchildren of survivors – the frequently discussed 'second' and 'third' generations – but also among the families of perpetrators. Psychologists and literary critics have engaged with these issues; but what remains under-explored is the significance of historical, social and political context for the character of the impact across generations. Growing up as the child of a Nazi was very different in East Germany, West Germany, and Austria. The implications for subsequent values and actions in the world, for choices about the kinds of lives people led, were profound.

IV. Writing history for the present

Reflecting on his own work in *The Politics of Memory*, Raul Hilberg commented on the nature of historical writing: ‘To portray the Holocaust Claude Lanzmann once said to me, one has to create a work of art. [...] The artist usurps the actuality, substituting a text for a reality that is fast fading. [...] Were this transformation not a necessity, one could call it presumptuous, but it is unavoidable. [...] It is applicable to all historiography, to all descriptions of a happening.’⁴¹ Yet, curiously, few historians reflect as explicitly as Hilberg – and also Friedländer – about the ways in which they write, and the choices they face.

Moreover, Hilberg only tells us a part of the story. There is a great deal more to the role of the historian as translator between past and present than the focus on aesthetic depiction implies. I want to suggest here some ways in which historians relate to the past in order to bring it to the present – and how their role relates to that of the eye-witnesses, the *Zeitzeugen*, considered at the start.

Historians experience the past in ways that are different from those who lived through specific events. Even when they are themselves contemporaries – from

survivors of the Holocaust such as Saul Friedländer, Yitzhak Arad, Otto Dov Kulka, and many others, to the raft of German historians who professed their own objectivity but whose origins lay on the side of the perpetrators and bystanders – they have themselves personally experienced only a ‘worm’s-eye-view’ from a particular perspective at a particular age and in a particular place. Their role as professionals is to transcend this: to immerse themselves in the sources in order to amass a wealth of experiences; to engage in inter-subjective communication with the past in order better to understand a wide range of viewpoints and perspectives.

This is of course even more the case with those who did not themselves live through the period in question. Historians born later are in one sense at a remove, at least in terms of their own personal experience – or rather lack of it – of this past. But that does not mean they do not feel a strong sense of connection or identification with one or another aspect of the past. It is striking to note just how many historians of Germany across the world have some personal link with the upheavals in Europe in the mid-twentieth century that shattered lives and scattered members of their families to other shores. It is an easy

task to list innumerable Anglo-American and other historians of Germany who come from a background shaped by the Nazi exclusion and ejection of those with the 'wrong' political or 'racial' profiles. This is self-evidently true of the first generation of émigrés, refugees and survivors; the life and works of some of the more prominent scholars among them have been subjected already to considerable attention. Far less well noted to date, however, is the striking number of historians of Germany from among the 'second generation', offspring of parents whose personal habitus and outlook clearly influenced the professional interests of those who came after. There is often an underlying urgency to engagement with this past on the part of those with some kind of personal and emotional investment in understanding it.

Yet even those who have no personal connection with the issue, period or place in question do, by virtue of their immersion in relevant sources – which is the same technique for all historians – gain access to a wide range of subjectivities. They need, as a simple tool of the craft of historical research, to deploy empathy to understand world views and perspectives with which they may have very little personal sympathy. In this sense, they are drenched in multiple perspectives and can transcend the

worm's-eye-view of individual participants. And this has to be true whether or not a historian is a member of a particular community of experience or connection or identification with that specific past, or whether they are entirely detached and genuinely disinterested – which is itself, too, a situated perspective on a particular past, an alternative vantage point from which to address that past.

As a consequence of what we might call the 'drenching in sources', the historian can begin to speak different 'languages' of the past. And the point of the exercise is both to convey some flavour of those languages, those alien cultures ('the past is a foreign country: they do things differently there', as L.P. Hartley once began a novel, a phrase then picked up by David Lowenthal) and to 'translate' them for a later present.⁴²

Some of the historical depictions we find most compelling are those that do not do much by way of commentary on the translation. The 'immediacy' and 'vividness' of the accounts in the 'My Life in Germany' collection noted by Richard Evans arise from the fact that these people were still very much caught up in the events they describe. So too are the writers of diaries and other sources used by Friedländer. In Claude Lanzmann's

Shoah, there is a wilful, artistic effort to take the interviewees 'back' in their mind's eye to the place where they were closest to the liminal experiences of death: the former prisoner functionary, Filip Müller, tells us of the piles of bodies that were amassed against the doors of the gas chambers, the strongest on top, gasping for air as long as possible while crumpling the young and weak to the bottom of the heap; the Polish peasants speak of the trains going by and the noise before and silence after the killings, all of which could be seen and heard from the fields where they were still working; one of the tiny handful of survivors from Chełmno, Szymon (Simon) Srebrnik, goes back to sing his plaintive song on the boat floating along the river under the mansion house where people were stripped of their clothes and possessions and put into the vans in which they were gassed to death with exhaust fumes. Srebrnik is even made to stand among still somewhat mocking crowds of onlookers; elsewhere, we hear the lingering notes of other onlookers, as well as a few of the people involved as perpetrators. The sense that we too have in some way witnessed this past is extraordinary, and achieved through the voices and presence of those who were there, rather than through the archival remnants of old photos or film footage.

This is an aesthetic form of fostering inter-subjectivity: of opening up ways of communicating across time. Friedländer's account, with his injection or interspersing of voices from hidden corners of the past, which serve more to strike discordant notes with the general flow of the narrative, achieves a similar cinematic effect. He does not so much write an 'integrated history' – which he claims – as a shattered, fragmentary history, through the juxtaposition of jarring alternative perspectives that function to break and disrupt the narrative.⁴³

The historian, while evoking and conveying the atmosphere of the past, like the eye-witness, also moves beyond it to comment from the quite different perspective of the later present. Martin Sabrow has pointed out that in order to function as 'witnesses to the times' (*Zeitzeugen*), with their cathartic role, people must both bear the marks of the past – incorporate it in their very person – and yet be able to comment on it from a quite different moral, political or normative viewpoint.⁴⁴ Only this can reassure us that we have really 'overcome' that past. To put an unreconstructed Nazi on television may be of interest, but it would be to continue a political battle and raise the spectre that it is not really yet defeated, rather than reflecting from a safe distance on a past that is

no more. This controversy, Sabrow reminds us, became acutely clear in 2006 when former MfS officers offered their services as *Zeitzeugen* to show tourists around the former Stasi prison of Hohenschönhausen. Despite their clearly superior knowledge of the Stasi structures and techniques, it was held not to be playing the role desired of a *Zeitzeuge*. The latter should preferably be a survivor who bore the marks of past suffering and subsequent recovery: redemption in history.

To some extent the survivor accounts amassed in the Spielberg archive (USC Shoah foundation) were structured to perform a similar function. Operating according to the survival script – life before; catastrophe; struggle; survival; redemption; continuation of life, surrounded by spouses, children and grandchildren – they too were intended to convey a particular narrative and moral message for the future. Not all interviewees conform to this script, despite the trained interviewers' best efforts. More interesting in some ways are those testimonies that are less constrained by a preordained structure, such as the ones in the Yale Fortunoff archive. But the selection of survivors, and the focus on their accounts, has, extraordinarily, tended to leave the perpetrators in the shadows. And this, for many

of the latter, must be a welcome form of staying out of the limelight, keeping their former crimes and sins of omission away from any scrutiny or need to admit culpability.

The historian's role is of course very different. Historians too must portray and convey an 'authentic' sense of the past – at one remove, and preferably not bearing its marks on their own bodies – and they too must reflect and comment from a later vantage point from which the broad contours, the horizons and borders, can be sketched more clearly than by those who battled their way through the undergrowth and swamps at the time. But historians must also evaluate the accounts of those who lived through events and who narrated their tales at later stages. These accounts too have a history – one which, as far as subjectivities particularly among former bystanders and perpetrators are concerned, has not as yet been adequately outlined, for all the attention topics such as 'cultural memory' and public representations have attracted.

V. Conclusions

Where then does the ‘objectivity’ of the historian lie, in midst of this maze of emergent and evolving inter-subjectivities? I would suggest that we can attain clarity, at least, about ‘where we are coming from’; but that we need also to be highly sensitive to those aspects of accounts that bear the marks of the later date in which they were written, rather than the time about which they spoke. And we need to be aware not only of our methodologies, in the traditional historical sense – particularly the selection and critique of sources, sampling, bases for generalisations – but also our techniques and skills as creative writers. We may, unlike novelists, be bound by the facts and limited by what we can securely know or argue; but at the same time we can choose to convey our material in a myriad different ways. Choice of how to convey the subjectivities of the past is but one of many questions we face in the production of written accounts that both evoke and transcend, depict and reflect on, the complex turmoils of the past and at the same time contribute to the debates and cultural sensitivities of a later present.

There are several more general conclusions that I would like to draw from this brief discussion.

First, analysis of subjectivities in relation to particular historical circumstances, structures and events will help us better understand not only the significance of what happened at the time, but also – well beyond the policy and decision-making levels – how particular developments were made possible; and what were the consequences of personal involvement in different ways for those who lived through the period in question.

Secondly, analysis of changing subjectivities over longer periods of time will help in exploring the continuing significance of a past that has personal resonance long after the period in question is well and truly over – and even after the vast majority of those who were participants or ‘eye-witnesses’ have themselves passed away, leaving only lingering reverberations among later generations.

Thirdly, the contemporary subjectivities of historians and their audiences play a key role in the character of the historical accounts that are produced, and the ways in which they are debated and received. Any notion of ‘objectivity’ needs to be refined and sharpened to take account of the ‘situatedness’ as well as the sheer creativity of historical scholarship. Historians engage with questions about the past in the light of their own

experiences and concerns in a later present. Despite inevitably having more sympathy for one or another side in past conflicts, we need to exercise our scholarly capacity for empathy across different perspectives in order to understand what a wide range of participants at the time thought they were doing; we need to explore the changing justifications they later gave for their actions; and we need to understand the implications of any historical analysis, any rendering of accounts and re-presenting of past subjectivities, on subsequent constellations.

This is not easy, and there are many possible ways to resolve particular questions or re-present selected pasts. But I hope to have indicated that, in one way or another, the question of subjectivity is central to writing significant history; and that it is a topic that is worthy of further and more explicit discussion than I have had space for here.

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³³ See for example the fascinating account and diary in HHL, b MS Ger 91 (38), Robert B.

³⁴ This focus on social relations in a ‘bystander society’ differs significantly from approaches to ‘bystanders’ as individuals, institutions or organisations. See further M. Fulbrook, *Bystander Society* (work in progress).

³⁵ There is an enormous literature on all of this. My summary here draws on my forthcoming book, *Reckonings: Legacies of Nazi Persecution* (Oxford, 2018), where further details and references may be found.

³⁶ Margaret Bourke-White, *Deutschland April 1945*. “Dear Fatherland Rest Quietly” (Schirmer/Mosel, 1979, transl. into German by Ulrike von Puttkamer), p. 90. The original

English version is reprinted in: Margaret Bourke-White, *The Taste of War* (London, 1985), 'Dear Fatherland Rest Quietly' (pp. 213-315).

³⁷ Bourke-White, *The Taste of War*, p. 216.

³⁸ Melita Maschmann, *Fazit. Kein Rechtfertigungsversuch* (Stuttgart, 1963). For use of this by historians, see further Mary Fulbrook, *Erfahrung, Erinnerung, Geschichtsschreibung. Neue Perspektiven auf die deutschen Diktaturen* (Göttingen, 2016; series: Jena Center Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Vorträge und Kolloquien, vol. 17), pp. 181-4.

³⁹ Gabriele ('Relé') and Hans Seidel. For further details, see Fulbrook, *Reckonings*.

⁴⁰ See for further details of this and similar accounts Fulbrook, *Reckonings*.

⁴¹ Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory. The Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (Chicago, 1996), p. 83.

⁴² David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985).

⁴³ In Hayden White's view, this is a 'modernist' strategy.

⁴⁴ Martin Sabrow, 'Der Zeitzeuge als Wanderer zwischen zwei Welten', in id. and Norbert Frei (eds), *Geburt des Zeitzeugen nach 1945* (Göttingen, 2012), pp. 13-32.

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