



Christian Emden, David Midgley, eds. *Cultural Memory and Historical Consciousness in the German-Speaking World Since 1500: Papers from the Conference "The Fragile Tradition, Cambridge 2002," Volume 1.* Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004. 316 pp. \$61.95 (paper), ISBN 978-3-03910-160-3.



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This collection of essays launches a new series of explorations in cultural history. "Cultural History and Literary Imagination" intends to disseminate approaches to cultural studies grounded in the discipline of *Kulturwissenschaften* to an English speaking audience. *Kulturwissenschaften*, founded in the nineteenth century and operating with methodologies particular to Germany, contrast with the development of cultural studies in Britain and the United States, which originated in the study of material culture and critical theory in the 1960s. Bridging these disparate contexts and encouraging work of increasing interdisciplinarity is inherent to the project. This focus also explains the publication of the series in English (though occasionally papers in German are also included), thus reaching a wider audience. This ambitious project, the first volume of which is under review here, has already produced its fifth volume. The immediate context of its inception is as a series of conference papers and the dissemination of methodologies of *Kulturwissenschaften*. However, the wider context of scholarship has been addressed in the fifth volume, *Memory Traces: 1989 and the Question of German Cultural Identity* (2005), which bridges the three contexts of work in "cultural studies" in a properly interdisciplinary fashion.

In Germany, analyses of cultural or collective memory are particularly associated with the scholarship of

Aleida and Jan Assmann. The anthology under discussion opens with an article by Aleida Assmann, and the majority of the contributors also construct the methodological framework of their articles with explicit reference to her work. The few exceptions are contributions addressing works of historiography and literature (Wilhelm Ribhegge, Stefan Busch, Laura Benzi and Ritchie Robertson).

Structured into four thematic parts, the volume begins with four essays on the theoretical foundations of the study of cultural/collective memory followed by case studies (largely chronologically arranged) ranging from the Reformation to the Berlin Republic. Essentially, this volume is about intellectual history viewed through the analysis of texts. How the historical and contemporary "collective memories" identified here may connect methodologically with wider trends in the societies in which the analyzed texts are produced is not subject of this anthology.

Aleida Assmann's opening essay forms the theoretical backbone of the anthology and provides the methodological tapestry onto which the case studies of the other contributions can be grafted. Thus a conceptual unity underlies essays spanning 500 years and diverse genres. In characteristically succinct fashion, Assmann outlines the web of interdependent connections which lead "From In-

dividual to Collective Constructions of the Past” (p. 19). Taking her lead from French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, she develops his model of collective memory further by distinguishing between “social memory, political memory and cultural memory” (p. 22), all of which are interconnected and linked to individual memory. The strength of her analysis lies in the usefulness of these distinct but related concepts. Political memory is the category most easily identified with specific actors and processes which are engaged in the productions of political narratives of nationhood and identity. However, such direct employment proves more challenging for the other two categories of collective memory, and hence making it difficult to apply these to concrete social contexts. The following articles highlight some of the complexities of the ways in which collective memories are constructed and re-constructed in the social contexts in which they are formulated and become relevant to different social groups.

Christian Emden addresses the constructions of “antiquity” in the work of nineteenth century historians, while Ortrud Gutjahr analyses the construction of “modernity” and “modernism” in literary discourses at the end of the same century. Marc Huber’s essay on the crisis of memory at the end of the nineteenth century explores interpretations of time in its relation to memory in Nietzsche’s seminal essay “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History.” The essays of the following three sections address historiographical, literary and artistic “texts” which have re-negotiated cultural values at decisive moments since the Reformation. Susanne Rau and Ribhegge work on the historiography of the Reformation in its early stages and in the nineteenth century, while Busch and Benzi address aspects of literary production at the end of the Enlightenment period. Robertson closes

the third part of the anthology with reflections on the memory of Austrian Emperor Joseph II in literature. The final part of the collection is dedicated to contemporary constructions of memories relating to the Holocaust, war and the GDR. Kristin Veel’s contribution combines reflections on the memory work of Walter Benjamin with an analysis of Daniel Libeskind’s design of the Jewish Museum Berlin. Finally, Silke Arnold-de Simine focuses on interpretations of the GDR as represented in museums, films and literature, and Karen Leeder explores European collective memories with her study of poems written at the end of the twentieth century that re-envisioned the meaning of the Great War.

In terms of the topics chosen, the explorations are well grounded in mainstream intellectual history and their methodologies do not depart from the standard repertoire of memory studies. The extent to which the approaches are part of a hegemonic perspective on German studies could be adduced, for instance, from the absence in the volume of any attempt to problematize mainstream analyses from the perspectives of minorities. Thus, while Holocaust memory and Jewish protagonists and creators of memory discourses are examined, they are not perceived in their Jewish particularity. Similarly, more recent immigrant contributions to the German cultural scene and their constructions of a German past are not included in this collection, nor do they surface in the two following volumes of conference papers.

These limitations notwithstanding, this volume offers useful perspectives on cultural memory and historical consciousness. The following volumes and the burgeoning series “Cultural History and Literary Imagination” further the study of the construction of memory in different aspects of German culture.

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