

Introduction

The impact of monuments and related rituals upon collective memories of the Second World War is a source of recurrent political debate in all former Allied and Axis countries. The spate of fiftieth anniversary commemorations of this event served not only to reappraise national histories in light of the end of the balance of power sustained during the Cold War, but also to symbolically compensate the dwindling number of living witnesses and victims of the war period. In both cases, public representations acquired considerable political authority as means of sustaining social memories of this period. But do representations ensure that future generations remember events of the past? And if so, do they take forms which are fitting for the events, and which do justice to victims, their relatives or even to states and societies in whose name they are created? No one would doubt today that public memorials do not guarantee remembrance and that there is no single most just form. Memorials are contingent. Their meanings may partly be deduced from their artistic composition but primarily from the many ideas and expectations with which society invests them.

Yet in spite of the inherent ambiguity of monuments, which can serve equally as catalysts for remembrance and for forgetting, political strategists continue to delegate to monuments and commemorations the moral responsibility to guarantee remembrance. How and why they do this is the topic of this book, which examines symbolic and rhetorical strategies used within institutional contexts to define the singular role of public memorials in the negotiation of new national, yet unconventional historical identities. For this reason, this study focuses on debates about monuments, in particular at the moment of their production and appropriation in the public sphere when historical information and interpretations, but also artistic forms and political interests, converge and conflict in the present. It offers insight into the process by which public art and ritual foster an understanding of the past, and consequently become instruments of political representation.

Memory cultures in European countries flourished from the 1970s following numerous openings of museums, historical exhibitions and monuments, and came to a head in the 1980s and 1990s with a series of fortieth and fiftieth anniversary commemorations of the Second World War. As witnesses of the contemporary enduring fascination with the past, we are in a position to trace the process by which such historical artefacts emerge, involving individuals, institutions and lobbies that initiate them, public reactions to them, and their resulting political function. Two monuments in particular became the focus of nationwide debate in France and Germany: the *Vélodrome d'Hiver* (Winter Cycling Stadium) or 'Vél d'Hiv' in Paris, and the 'Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe' (*Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*) or 'Holocaust Monument' in Berlin. The first of these monuments was built in 1994 to mark the site of round-ups of Jews prior to deportation in 1942. The second will be inaugurated in 2005 as a central symbol of the genocide against Jews. Both have been categorised as 'national' monuments, and are unique in so far as they accord central symbolic significance to the memory of crimes of the Second World War. In spite of the etymological roots of the term Holocaust in Christian theology and anti-Judaist polemic (a term originally signifying ritual sacrifices now employed to refer to the persecution and attempted destruction of Jews during the Second World War),¹ this term has become internationally accepted as a convenient but euphemistic epithet for numerous museums, memorials and commemorative days. The tacit agreement to use this euphemistic language is perhaps an expression of our incapacity to witness and represent the past. Euphemisms are a common characteristic of memory cultures as spheres of public communication and collective memory formation. Yet although they certainly foster historical misrepresentation, they also illustrate and offer insight into the very semantic and psychological distortions on which memory cultures are founded. For the purposes of this study, I will refer to the 'persecution and genocide' of the Second World War in order to refer to the event itself, to 'Holocaust remembrance' with reference to the retrospective public memories of the event inclusive of errors and ambiguities as a fact of contemporary memory cultures, and to the Holocaust in cases where this term has gained common acceptance in proper names such as the 'Holocaust Monument' in Berlin. Naturally, the monuments investigated in this study belong to the second category of manufactured memories, the complexity of which should become apparent to the reader in Part II and Part III.

The sequence and intensity of anti-Semitic persecutions during the Second World War clearly differed from one country to the next. The sculptural, rhetorical and ritual forms with which these events are represented likewise generally vary according to the nation, region or city, or to the period in which they were erected. Yet in the case of France and

Germany, the *Vél' d'Hiv'* and Holocaust Monument triggered analogous public responses during the 1990s. Both monuments were perceived as symbolic reparation for crimes of the nation, conditions for 'national reconciliation' in France and for 'national consensus' in Germany. At the same time, they were both unique in so far as they symbolised the integration of the potentially subversive memory of criminal acts into each national memory culture. The result in both cases was a non-conventional narrative of national heritage.

This comparison of memory cultures illustrates the complexity of collective memories of the Second World War in France and Germany and beyond, for they are both shared and distinct at the same time. On the one hand, the persecution and genocide carried out during the Second World War provide a common supranational point of historical reference, as demonstrated by the fiftieth anniversary commemorations and the increasing number of official apologies. The debate over the *Vél' d'Hiv'* led to one in a series of verbal public apologies for war crimes, including that of the French Catholic Church (1997), the French police force (1997), the conditional apology of the Vatican (1998), and the apology made by the Polish president Alexander Kwasniewski for crimes committed against Jews by Polish citizens (2001), to which we may add Chirac's apology to the Harkis, Algerian soldiers serving in the French army during the Algerian war, more than fifty thousand of whom were killed in reprisals (2001). On the other hand, the Second World War is generally remembered, interpreted and represented on the basis of national and local events. It simultaneously unites and divides the populations of formerly belligerent countries not only because past enmity is remembered and still felt, but because each population experienced different events or the same event differently, and has since nourished local narratives, whether of Churchill, de Gaulle and Hitler, for example, or of displacement, exile, deportation and genocide. These narratives nevertheless overlap. There exists a common shared memory of Churchill in Germany or of Hitler in France, to which the numerous works of biographical and historical literature testify. A less obvious type of cultural analogy can be observed in the structural parallels between apparently distinct national memories, almost all of which have recourse to charismatic leaders, national media, rituals and symbols, including monuments. The two monuments examined in this study likewise testify to the analogous national dimensions of official memory cultures. On this basis, the very study of the analogies and differences between mechanisms used to uphold national memory cultures might be a first step towards breaking down or rendering them less impervious to one another.

This book contains three parts. Part I defines contemporary monuments as a genre with respect to earlier monumental forms and to its political function as public art. The fact that the artistic forms and equivocal

political significance of monuments have regularly been the object of public debate means that monuments merit particular attention as a form of ‘discursive formation’² in their own right. Prior to their material existence, the Vél’ d’Hiv’ and Holocaust Monument existed essentially in the form of debates between people who advocated or contested their form and necessity. Petitions, conferences, speeches, public forums, press articles, parliamentary debates as well as architectural exhibitions and even everyday private conversations about monuments all constituted the discursive existence of these monuments. Thus rendered in the form of verbal narratives, contemporary monuments are subjected to varying degrees of institutionalisation. In everyday communication, for example, they may foster error and limits in historical understanding, or indifference to the past when competing alongside information and advertising on billboards or in the mass media. The goal of this first part is therefore to trace theoretically the ambivalent function of monuments as artistic sources of historical or political learning, to situate them historically with respect to current national memory cultures in France and Germany, and to offer a critique of collective discursive codes used for the interpretation of memory cultures.

Part II explores the origins of and controversies over plans for the Vél’ d’Hiv’ memorial and commemorations in Paris and for the Holocaust Monument in Berlin during the 1980s and 1990s. These studies draw on local sources in order to propose a comparative assessment of the languages of memory, history and nationhood employed during the debates. Since discussions in France lasted for over three years and in Germany for over ten years, it is appropriate to analyse the media debates as a form of commemoration in their own right. These commemorations and monuments functioned as a catalyst of what James Young calls ‘memory-work’, resulting from an *unresolved* memorial.³ Details of these sites of memory will be examined systematically in both cases, in the following order: the architectural and urban context of the sites, and the chronology of their emergence as focal points of political controversy; the language of petitions and formal verbal responses by politicians including, in the case of the Holocaust Monument, sculptural responses by artists and architects on the basis of blueprints; the causes of the political expediency of these monuments; and the different propositions for ‘national reconciliation’ over the Vél’ d’Hiv’ and ‘national consensus’ over the Holocaust Monument. In this way, I explore how these sites of memory serve – via their symbolic and rhetorical constructions – to incorporate the complex and disturbing memories of collaboration, deportation and genocide into a repertoire of national symbols.

Part III strives to compare the discursive codes of nationhood employed in each debate and demonstrate how arguments of artistic, historical, pedagogical and political concern were used to legitimate memorials and

underpin official models of collective memory. At the same time, it demonstrates how the monuments provided a platform to *negotiate* rhetorical codes of national self-understanding in each country. The notion of ‘site of memory’⁴ offers a particularly effective tool for the analysis of political symbols and will be explained in relation to its implicit political assumptions and revised on the basis of the two case studies. Since the primary aim of this study is to explain public understandings of monuments *prior* to their construction, both everyday and analytical terminology will be considered as part of the commemorative process and must be subjected to the same scrutiny as the visual symbols and commemorative rituals that it describes. The intense public participation in the debates suggests that these monuments should be taken seriously as a medium of historical understanding, which I define here as ‘dialogic’ sites of memory. The broader aim of this study is therefore to assess the status of these monuments as sites of memory while paying particular attention to their political expediency in relation to the language with which they are given meaning. What do the Vél’ d’Hiv’ and the Holocaust Monument tell us about state strategies of self-legitimation with respect to the Holocaust after 1989? Popular narratives prior to 1989 were based on a narrative paradigm defining enemies without or heroes within the nation: anti-fascist ideology in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), anti-communist ideology in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and the myth of the Resistance in France. Since these paradigms largely lost credibility in the united Germany and against the background of trials of Vichy officials in France, it is of vital importance to record how popular narratives are being restructured following the end of the East–West conflict: whether it is possible for states to operate without these inherited narrative paradigms, and therefore to integrate the memory of domestic war crimes and even of victims of these crimes within national narratives without eclipsing them anew? Accordingly, the issues broached in Part I – the historical and political function of monuments in relation to their rhetorical and symbolic elaboration – are reappraised in Part III on the basis of empirical findings in Part II.

This comparative study of monuments explores how, despite the facility of international communications and travel, and despite economic and political mergers such as European unification which undermine the cultural, political and economic sovereignty of nation-states, memory cultures continue to be maintained institutionally on a national basis. The transfer of authority to a European level, for example, appears to be evolving parallel to the maintenance of memory cultures at a national level, as if memory cultures compensated for political devolution and shifting economic loyalties by upholding cultural tradition. As the sociologist Anthony Cohen remarks, ‘the symbolic expression of community and its boundaries increases in importance as the actual geo-social

boundaries of the community are undermined, blurred or otherwise weakened.⁵ Nevertheless, as noted above, the Second World War remains a transnational point of historical reference that provides a wealth of monuments, debates and rituals that are simultaneously of local, national and international significance. Various forms of monuments and commemorations therefore lend themselves to a comparison of national and local public understandings of this event as well as to an exploration of the overlap and interaction of different memory cultures. How, for example, do local associations, municipal or national governments derive legitimisation by erecting monuments recalling crimes of former dictatorships? Although historical events are remembered differently on local, municipal and national levels in different countries, there remain structural analogies between commemorative forms. The Second World War could therefore be defined as a shared multipolar site of memory. It is remembered internationally as a transnational event, but appropriated in unique ways locally and nationally. Local and national war memorials in remembrance of the Second World War likewise largely conform to an internationally recognised symbolic and conceptual language that is charged with political significance according to its specific context.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing artists, sponsors and spectators of war memorials after 1945 is the impossibility of visually or conceptually representing and therefore understanding the crimes of deportation and genocide. Whereas First World War memorials generally consisted of cenotaphs, tombs of unknown soldiers, busts of heroic victims, flags and male or female icons, Second World War memorials traditionally consisted of a list of names added to First World War memorials – stones bearing the names of fallen soldiers being a common sight on most village squares throughout Europe. It is only since the 1960s that artists and sponsors have risen to the challenge of commemorating the genocide by developing forms and concepts that reverse the traditional heroism of national memorials by striving to evoke the memory of national crimes and their victims, and to take account of the fact that people rarely identify *with* monuments but respond individually to them in a two-way dialogue.

Monuments as Focal Points of Unresolved ‘Dialogue’⁶?

Intense, creative energy has been invested in the design and definition of monuments since the 1960s. ‘Ephemeral’, ‘objectless’, ‘undesirable’, ‘counter-’ and ‘anti-’ monuments⁷ are among some of the adjectives used to describe monumental forms. Common to all these concepts is their claim to define an alternative type of monument whose qualities are measured *against* the classical model of an ornamental, figurative sculp-

tural monument. (By reversing the above criteria, as 'enduring', 'objective', 'desirable' and 'pro-', we obtain a succinct definition of conventional monuments traditionally erected until the mid-twentieth century.) Moreover, while ephemerality and objectlessness are qualities inherent in monuments, undesirability, counteraction and opposition are qualities ascribed to the monuments but which in fact originate in the social perceptions they generate. Yet these innovative norms of the production, form and reception of monuments do not take into account the large variety of existing monumental types, including countless conventional sculptural monuments which adorn and, in spite of artistic innovations, continue to be erected in public places even today. Is there a single theoretical paradigm that permits us to comprehend the various historical, social, political and artistic dimensions of monumentality in a single concept? One of the aims of this study is to provide an analytical framework for monuments which differ radically in their form, but whose production and appropriation, that is, the social context in which they arose, reveal remarkable similarities. A basic assumption here is that monuments are focal points of a complex dialogue between past and present, between historical events, producers of monuments, and successive generations of spectators who inquire into the significance of the past on the basis of historical artefacts. At the same time, monuments are also focal points of dialogue between individuals, and between artistic, academic, religious and political institutions and their representatives in the present. Architectural blueprints, oral and textual accounts, articles, reports, speeches and petitions constitute a dialogic process which generally *precedes* the creation of monuments – a process which is founded largely on rhetorical speculation over how to commemorate rather than on the interpretation of already existing monumental forms.

The two monuments that form the basis of this study aptly illustrate such a complex process. Although the issues aired during debates over these monuments differed, focusing on the rhetoric of presidential speeches in the case of the Vél' d'Hiv' and on artistic form in the case of the Holocaust Monument, they were each the product of analogous political procedure. Both monuments occupy central urban sites in the capital cities Paris and Berlin. Their origins lay in the campaigning of citizens' action groups with public petitions, leading to demands for national reconciliation in France and consensus in Germany, and to party political disputes during presidential and parliamentary election campaigns in 1995 and 1998. These monuments also provide insight into a unique process, which integrates a nation's crimes symbolically into a repertoire of national commemorations. In contrast to conventional war memorials celebrating heroes or mourning victims lost in battle, the Vél' d'Hiv' and Holocaust Monument have challenged states to integrate the memory of innocent victims of the nation's *own* crimes into cohesive narratives of

national history. The novelty, yet also the apparent incongruity, of these monuments therefore results from their use of a conventional national monumental form of commemoration in order to recall crimes of that same nation. Combined with auxiliary forms of commemorative ritual, including speeches, debates, exhibitions and conferences, they broke a national convention according to which ritual commemorations and monuments offer solace or support for the positive identification of citizens. They therefore challenge an understanding of national 'identity'⁸ founded on attachments to symbols or 'sites of memory', defined by the historian Pierre Nora as 'focal points of our national heritage'.⁹

The essays collected by Nora in *Les Lieux de mémoire* propose a conception of French history founded on sites of memory recalling distant historical moments, essentially from the nineteenth century, which today possess little immediate emotional appeal, but which are still shared with a degree of pride by members of the cultural community defined as 'French': works of literature and history, geographical boundaries, architectural symbols, historical events or cultural traditions. By contrast, the debates over the Vél' d'Hiv' and Holocaust Monument have shown that the Second World War is a source of memory that continues to unite and *divide* witnesses, participants and victims, as well as younger generations that have no direct experience of the events. Partisan approaches to these monuments were not governed uniquely by conflicting interpretations of historical events in themselves, however, but by interpretations of the rhetorical or artistic means by which they should be represented and remembered. Conflict over historical memories and over their means of transmission is inherent to democratic memory cultures. This study of memorial debates therefore provides insight into the process by which contemporary national symbols emerged out of conflict, how monuments were negotiated rhetorically in political and public spheres, and finally how negotiations appeased public emotions with respect to the issue of representation. In the aftermath of these debates, the commemorations, monuments and speeches subsist as ritual, artistic and rhetorical residues of a process of historical representation and therefore appear to fulfil the function of commemorations defined by Nora as the 'regulation of conflicts'.¹⁰

In the following study, a close analysis of language used in the debates will highlight the way in which the articulation of conflicting interests prior to the emergence of the Vél' d'Hiv' and Holocaust Monument determined their significance. In the case of the Vél' d'Hiv', the introduction of an annual national day of commemoration in 1993 and the construction of a new monument in 1994 were the result of public controversy over the rhetoric of presidential speeches. In the case of the Holocaust Monument, the debate over its form, site and purpose meant that the very substance of this long-term non-existent monument consisted purely in verbal spec-

ulation from as early as 1988 until its official inauguration in 2005. During these preparatory periods, the material by which people experienced these monuments derived essentially from verbal or textual sources. For this reason, the rhetorical foundations of these monuments require closer analysis. For the empirical case studies in Part II, I have drawn extensively on source material such as press articles, political statements, interviews, ceremonial speeches, open letters, brochures of associations representing memorials, protocols of parliamentary debates, radio discussions with politicians and historians and also, in Germany, on public conferences and forums involving representatives from political parties and associations as well as journalists, historians and participating artists. When sculptural form became the object of political debate, as in the case of the Berlin monument, I also examined the proposed artistic forms as objects of political discourse. In this way, I have tried to give a comprehensive account of the function of national symbols as they emerge, where symbolic form and political and pedagogical interests collide, expressed via monuments and via the rhetoric with which they are sanctioned in the public sphere.

Monuments and the History of Present Time

The branch of contemporary historiography known in France as the 'history of present time' takes account not only of recent history, extending backwards in time to encompass the period remembered by people still alive at any given moment, but also of the immediate past as it is fixed and given meaning for the first time by journalists, politicians, lawyers, and historians.¹¹ The history of present time pays particular attention to the influence of present-day interests on our understanding of the past and to the way in which past events continue to pervade present-day thinking and actions – a process formulated by the pioneer of contemporary historiography, Marc Bloch, in terms of the necessity to 'understand the present by the past', and to 'understand the past by the present'.¹²

One of the theoretical assumptions of this study is that rhetorical and visual communication plays a central role in the formulation and transmission of the public memory of the Second World War, an event of the past that clearly pervades historical, political and social self-understanding in the present. The responsibility of the journalistic, legal, political and even artistic professions for the representation and commemoration of the past testifies not only to a plural institutional command over what we know and think about the past, but also to the dependency of these professions upon rhetorical and even visual communication in order to make the immediate past meaningful. A logical consequence of this broad 'social demand'¹³ for history today is the intense international interest in

public memorials and museums, whose popular appeal makes them an inevitable source of historical knowledge and experience, one which deserves a central place in the study of the history of present time alongside archival, literary and judicial sources of historical scholarship. This is particularly valid when one considers that the public memory of the Second World War will in future derive from experiences gained entirely via forms of verbal and visual representation, and that successive generations of people who have neither acquired personal experience nor indirectly inherited family experiences of persecution or deportation (such as the second generation of Algerian Jews who emigrated to France during the 1960s, or even second and third generations of Turkish immigrants in Germany) nevertheless identify strongly with the victims of the persecution and genocide of the Second World War.

The historian Henry Rousso has suggested that the public memory of the Second World War during the 1990s was marked by a process of internationalisation and 'judicialisation'.¹⁴ The impact of the Eichmann trial and the Six-Day War during the 1960s, for example, heralded an international interest in the persecution and genocide such that this event today acts as 'a sort of founding "negative myth" of European identity'.¹⁵ He further argues that a judicial logic underlies the public approaches to this period, conceived in terms of judicial, financial and moral *reparation*. But although Rousso effectively demonstrates the influence of the judiciary upon the historiography of the Second World War and upon public appeals for financial and moral reparation (in the form of state apologies, for example), he overlooks other equally pervasive modes of expression of Second World War memory: the rhetoric and visual symbols on which all interventions in public memory – whether artistic, architectural, historiographical, judicial, journalistic or political – invariably draw. Since communication is indispensable to the construction of public memory, one could argue that contemporary memory cultures are characterised not only by internationalisation and judicialisation, but also by *rhetoricisation* and *symbolisation*.

Although the discussions about the Vél d'Hiv' and Holocaust Monument were founded largely on a discourse of reparation, they were not conceived as mere auxiliary symbolisations of historical research or judicial proceedings but as vectors of public memory in their own right. Moreover, the absence of rules agreed upon to govern their implementation led to prolonged and critical debate that often questioned the legitimacy of symbolisation itself. The means by which they were implemented involved artists, architects, politicians and historians in ad hoc debates focusing on sculptural forms, the price of building materials, types of architectural competition procedures, and the wording of speeches and inscriptions. It is the very complexity of monuments and the multiplicity of actors and institutions determining their meaning that render the quest

to make sense of this most complex vector of public memory all the more urgent.

Notes

1. See Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, New York: Zone Books, 2000, Chapter 1.10; Odon Vallet, 'Des mots en politique: Les noms de l'innommable', *Mots/Les langages du politique* no. 56, September 1998, 138–41; Hans-Dieter Zimmermann, 'Holokauston, holocaustum, holocaust. Die Bedeutung des Wortes "Holocaust"', *Die Neue Gesellschaft/Frankfurter Hefte* no. 12, 1997, 1120–23.
2. Stuart Hall, 'The Work of Representation', in Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi: Sage, Open University Press, 1997, 13–64, 44.
3. James Young, *The Texture of Memory*, New Haven & London: Yale, 1993, 90.
4. Studies of sites of memory have been undertaken in several countries. In France, see Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 7 vols, Paris, Gallimard, 1984–1993; idem, *The Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, 3 vols, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997–1998. In Germany, see Etienne François and Hagen Schulze, eds, *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3 vols, Munich: C. H. Beck, 2001.
5. Anthony Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Chichester, London & New York: Ellis Horwood and Tavistock Publishers, 1985, 50.
6. Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 90.
7. See Michael Diers, ed., *Mon(u)mente. Formen und Funktionen ephemerer Denkmäler*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993; Felix Reuße, *Das Denkmal an der Grenze seiner Sprachfähigkeit*, Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1995; Walter Grasskamp, ed., *Unerwünschte Monumente. Moderne Kunst im Stadtraum*, Munich: Verlag Silke Schreiber, 1992; James Young, 'The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today', *Critical Inquiry* no. 2, 1992, 267–86; Reinhart Koselleck, 'Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden', in Odo Marquard and Karlheinz Stierle, eds, *Identität*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1979, 255–276, 274.
8. For a critique of the term 'identity', see Richard Handler, 'Is "Identity" a Useful Concept?', in John Gillis, ed., *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, 27–40.
9. Nora, 'Das Abenteuer der *Lieux de mémoire*', in Etienne François et al., eds, *Nation und Emotion*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995, 83–92, 83.
10. Nora, interview with Emmanuel de Roux, *Le Monde*, 29 November 1994, 2.
11. See Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent, ed., *Ecrire l'histoire du temps présent*, Paris: CNRS Editions, 1993; Agnès Chauveau and Philippe Tétart, eds, *Questions à l'histoire des temps présents*, Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1992.
12. Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954, 39–47.
13. Henry Rousso, *Vichy. L'événement, la mémoire, l'histoire*, Paris: Gallimard, 2001, 686.
14. *Ibid.*, 43ff. Cf. Bloch's comparison of historical and judicial method, in *The Historian's Craft*, Chapter 4, 138–142.
15. *Ibid.*, 45.