



UNIVERSIDADE
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PORTUGUESA

LITERATURE AS A PLACE TO REMEMBER –
MEMORY OF THE GDR IN THOMAS BRUSSIG'S "AM KÜRZEREN ENDE
DER SONNENALLEE"

Dissertation submitted to Universidade Católica Portuguesa
to obtain Master's Degree in
Culture Studies / Literary Cultures

By

Magdalena Claudia Seidenspinner

Faculty of Human Sciences

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Under the supervision of Prof. Alexandra Lopes

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Abstract

This dissertation is concerned with the relationship between cultural memory and literature. Focussing on the memory of the Cold War-period, the present work examines a piece of contemporary German literature, namely Thomas Brussig's 1999 novel *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee*, and analyzes it according to three central research questions: First, how is life in the GDR represented in Brussig's novel? Second, what are the narrative, stylistic and linguistic tools, motifs and themes through which this very representation is achieved? And finally, how does the novel and its representation of the GDR contribute to the cultural/collective memory of this specific moment in time and space?

In order to be able to conduct a well-grounded analysis of the literary object, a thorough theoretical and methodological framework has to be established. Following Mieke Bal's approach on cultural analysis, the cultural memory concept is discussed by taking into consideration different perspectives and conceptualizations surrounding it, including early theoretical approaches on collective memory as well as contemporary insights.

After taking into consideration the most important theoretical aspects of the cultural memory concept, the interlink between memory and literature is further explored. Literature, and fictional literature in particular, is examined as a medium of memory, and the essential characteristics of the literary representation of memory contents are pinpointed. Finally, the question of how literature impacts contemporary memory culture will be at the center of interest, for these theoretical reflections guide the following literary analysis.

The second part of the dissertation is dedicated to the analysis of the literary object. In order to be able to evaluate the novel's contribution to memory culture, a structural analysis as well as an analysis of the novel's content are conducted, taking into consideration the central plotlines, motifs and narrative techniques the novel's representation of the GDR is based on. The outcomes of the analysis are then brought together with the memory concepts established in the theoretical section of the work in order to be able to assess the interplay between cultural memory dynamics and the novel's characteristics. Finally, the results of the literary analysis are summarized and final conclusions regarding the novel's impact on memory culture are drawn.

Keywords: Memory, Cultural Memory, Collective Memory, Literature, Cultural Memory Studies, German Literature, GDR, Identity

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*Memory is a complicated thing,
A relative to truth, but not its twin.*

Barbara Kingsolver

1. Introduction

The research interest:

“All dates are conventional, but 1989 is a little less so than some” (Latour, 1993: 8). With these words, Bruno Latour opens a chapter of his work *We Have Never Been Modern* entitled “1989: The Year of Miracles”. And it was a miraculous year indeed: The year which brought an end to almost a century of war and global conflict, the year in which the Iron Curtain fell, and a country which had been torn apart for so long was finally reunited.

While the Cold War had tremendous impact on all nations of the world, no other country experienced the divide between East and West the way that Germany did. A country which was still recovering from the destruction of two World Wars was once again at the center of conflict when the allies decided to canton the defeated territory into four sectors. However, it soon became clear that the four victors of the Second World War had drastically different opinions on how the future of the world, and of Europe in particular, was going to look like. Eventually, those tensions could no longer be appeased on any common ground: In 1961, a wall was constructed which was to tear in half a city, a country, and finally Europe itself.

For almost three decades, Germany was deeply divided, ideologically as well as geographically, and while the western part of the nation slowly recovered from the horrors of the war, the eastern part was once again suffering under the firm hand of an extremist regime. In the shadows of the wall, people could only imagine what life on the opposite side must be like. This political divide indicates that the Iron Curtain had not only ripped apart lives, families and friends, but it had extinguished the country’s capability of identifying as a unit of belonging, of shared history and of commonly coming to terms with the experiences of the horrific past.

Only the year of 1989 – the year of ‘miracles’ – brought an end to this bipolar era of disruption. When the Berlin Wall fell in October 1989, people were overwhelmed by what they were facing on the other side: On a personal level, long lost family members and friends were reunited after decades of separation. On a collective level, however, the end of the

bipolarity between East and West unleashed something entirely different: After years of suppression, all the nations that were merely categorized as ‘East’ and ‘West’ for decades, now brought forward a number of individual cultural traditions, practices and memories which had been silenced by the dominant cultural narratives of their suppressors and hence had been ‘frozen’ for many years during the Cold War (Assmann, 2010a: 62). In addition to that, the long period of separation had created new memories within each of the divided parts, memories that no longer fostered a sense of community, as they were lacking a common ground of experience. For the young nations emerging after the downfall of the Iron Curtain and the collapse of the Soviet Union, these circumstances caused some serious issues in terms of the construction of a new, common notion of identity: With so many different narratives of the past, which one should become the new dominant one? Which version of history, which memories and cultural practices should be chosen as the ones redefining the *renaissance* of Europe and of Germany as a nation of union, a place where everybody could belong again and where people that were physically and ideologically divided for three decades could find their way back together? How can one decide which past, which memories, which traditions and which experiences are the ones to rely on?

Walter Benjamin, who wrote much on issues of history, comes to the conclusion that a ‘multiplicity of histories’ is key to understanding the past. He suggests that “the multiplicity of ‘histories’ is closely related, if not identical, to the multiplicity of languages. Universal history in the present-day sense is never more than a kind of Esperanto” (Benjamin, 1940: 404). For Benjamin, every single historical moment is constituted by a large amount of details, different perspectives and elements that only together bring about a single moment in time. This ‘dialectical image’ emerging from this moment can never be the same for two people, and it can never be the same twice in history (*ibid.*: 390f, 403). According to this reflection of Benjamin, history is something entirely subjective and subjugated to reconstruction and constant alteration according to the conditions of the present (*ibid.*: 391). Therefore, Benjamin advocates that there is not one past, not one history, not one memory, just like there is no one universal language in the world.

If Benjamin’s reflections are right, however, how is it possible for a large group of people – a nation or a culture, for instance – to share a common identity based on a universally agreed on past which brings them together as one? Interpersonal exchange of individual experiences and personal history-versions are insufficient, according to what

Benedict Anderson concluded in 1983 in his attempt of defining the origins of nationalism. For Anderson, the key characteristic of nations is that they foster a feeling of unity and belonging despite the fact that the members of these communities never actually meet in person, as certain groups are way too large for everybody to be personally acquainted with one another. For this reason, Anderson introduces the term ‘imagined communities’ in order to describe these social groups: Even though the members do not know one another personally, they still share a sense of identity which binds them all together, ultimately to the extent of sacrificing their lives for their nation (Anderson, 1983). This almost unshakable sense of belonging has to be grounded in something strong; something like a dominant narrative of a shared past which enables the members of these ‘imagined communities’ to act, feel and remember as one. So, how can the idea of the subjectivity, flexibility and ‘multiplicity of histories’ Benjamin puts forward be brought together with the obvious need of a common ground that allows large communities to identify as one unit, as one collective?

The concept we need to take into consideration here is ‘collective’ or ‘cultural memory’. Bringing the two previously considered aspects together, Cultural Memory Studies try to shed light on the issue of how cultures and social groups collectively remember while taking into account both the role of history as well as the role of the individual memories of the members of the group, which eventually all contribute to what can be called the ‘memory of the collective’. This concept lies at the very core of this dissertation.

Nevertheless, as the ambivalence of the two positions presented above indicates, a collective sense of remembering is nothing naturally given, as an ‘imagined community’ of people cannot actually possess a biologically shared cognitive ability of remembering (more on that later). What those communities do have are individuals with this very cognitive ability through which they can contribute to the figurative ‘memory’ of the group. But in order for the individuals of the group to be able to participate in a shared act of memory, a medium of transmission of the content which ought to be (collectively) remembered is necessary. Cultural memory relies on media. While individual memory can be exchanged through direct communication, collective memory contents can only be passed on through a source of transmission which many members of the community have access to in order to widely share and compare experiences and thus nourish a common feeling of belonging, identity and memory. In the course of this work, one medium of collective memory will be explored in depth, namely the medium of literature.

Literature can be considered a medium of memory for the exact purpose stated above. Through literature, a large group of people gets the chance to participate and share an experience they would perhaps otherwise not be able to identify with. Therefore, literature has the power of bringing the members of a community together in a way that they usually could not, may it be because of geographical distance, a generational gap or any other reason. Literature endures over time, it is a way of capturing and sharing thoughts, feelings, and experiences – all of which finally lead to the creation of memory. In the case of this dissertation, literature will be explored as exactly that: a place in which individual and collective memory can be nourished, altered and shared, eventually leading to a shared sense of remembrance and identity among people who do not all share the same personal experience, but yet share the memory of what happened to others. This work in particular will explore the Cold War-period as an example of how literature can achieve precisely that: a notion of shared memory, even when there is no common ground of experience.

As a medium of cultural memory, literature is a way of passing on real-life knowledge and personal experiences to people who have not actually had a first-hand experience themselves. Yet, when it comes to fictional literature, the case becomes a little more difficult: The question at stake here is whether fictional literature is able to convey historical (or factual) knowledge and hence contribute to the collective memory of a culture at a specific moment in time and space. According to Theo de Boer, literature does indeed possess this ability. In his attempt of identifying the key aspects of cultural analysis, de Boer pinpoints functions and meanings of cultural analysis on different levels of reality; one of which is the level of fictional reality. According to his reflections, literature is a way of examining reality, as through fictional literature “we can institute an investigation of ethical situations that would not be possible in reality” (de Boer, 1999: 281). For de Boer, fiction is not the opposite of reality, but it is instead an intensified desire to explore reality by comparing what has really happened to the possibilities of what could have happened (*ibid.*: 282). Through this intensification, fictional literature provides a concentrated meaning, but yet its bond to reality remains intact. It is merely the distance to reality that is increased and through which fictional literature allows for a more thorough analysis of reality (*ibid.*: 282f). As the authors of fiction cannot side with one perspective only, a polyphony of voices and perspectives is present in fiction which eventually reveals a “greater reality than daily experience” (*ibid.*: 283). Concluding his reflections, de Boer writes:

The experience transformed by imagination is purified experience, suspended experience [...] that brings about the most concentrated view of reality. By intensifying reality, then, we mean a reality whose meaningful content has been enhanced at the expense of factuality, but not at the expense of truth. (*ibid.*)

Taking into account de Boer's reflections, fictional literature plays a crucial role in the representation of reality as well as in the representation of the past. The goal of this research project is to explore this very representation of the past, namely the representation of the former GDR, in a contemporary piece of German literature, trying to determine to what extent the selected novel contributes to the collective remembrance of this specific moment in history.

The object:

The object chosen for this purpose is Thomas Brussig's novel *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee*, which was first published in 1999. The author himself was born in 1964 and grew up in East-Berlin, which also serves as the setting for the novel to be discussed throughout this work. Most of Brussig's novels deal with the events and memories of the German division, the most famous of which remains his second work called *Helden wie wir* (Eng.: *Heroes like us*, 1995). In *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee*, Brussig incorporates the memories of growing up in East-Berlin into a fictional plot within a real-life setting. 'Sonnenallee' is the name of a street in Berlin in which the story takes place and which has been divided by the wall into a longer part (west) and a shorter part (east), a circumstance from which the title of the novel derives. The protagonists of the novel, a group of teenage friends, do not know anything other than their lives in the East, but as they grow up side by side with the wall, the omnipresent temptations of the West soon turn out to become a constant reminder of what they are lacking and of what they desire more than anything else in the world – getting to know the taste of freedom and life outside the cage which the wall has become to their young and enthusiastic spirits.

This dissertation will take into account three central research questions: Firstly, how is life in the GDR represented in Thomas Brussig's novel *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee*? Secondly, what are the narrative, linguistic and stylistic tools, motifs and themes through which this very representation is achieved? And finally, how does the novel and its representation of the GDR contribute to the cultural/collective memory of this specific moment in time and space? Summing up, this paper will explore to what extent the novel at stake provides a space of collective remembrance, how individual and collective

memory are interlinked, and what role literature plays in capturing, conveying and altering memory.

The fact that this work focusses on the Cold War-period as a historical framework for the analysis is no coincidence. The fall of the Berlin Wall is about to come to its 30th anniversary this year. I myself believe that this historical anniversary offers an excellent opportunity to recapture the events of the past and to reevaluate the changes that were brought upon society through this major historical event thirty years ago – may they be cultural, social, or political. For the field of Culture Studies in particular, I consider these dynamics to be of crucial relevance, as today the former division of the country appears to be not fully overcome yet. Even though Germany has been reunited for almost three decades, the Iron Curtain seems to have left a scar which has led to cultural as well as social and political differences which are not easily bridged within the German society. Up until today, East-Germany seems to be particularly vulnerable to social riots, and the political landscape differs significantly from the one in the West. Most of these disturbances appear to be originating from right-wing movements which tend to emerge in the East of the country, a dynamic which might be interlinked with the fact that social inequality – for example in terms of wages and employment rate – still constitutes a major issue in the eastern part of Germany. Some examples which make these circumstances more concrete are the reoccurring PEGIDA-protest in Dresden, the riots in Chemnitz in 2018 as well as the outcomes of the German national elections in 2017, in which the rather recent right-wing party AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) scored remarkably higher results in the eastern states of Germany than it has in the West. These dynamics were furthermore conformed in the regional elections in September 2019, when the AfD was elected second-strongest political force in Sachsen and Brandenburg, two states in the eastern part of the country.

This discrepancy in cultural and social practices between East- and West-Germany almost thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall makes the issue of the collective remembrance of the German division and its representation all the more interesting to the field of Culture Studies. As Walter Benjamin has put forward, the past is continuously reconstructed depending on the circumstances of the present, while the present is filled with the ‘echo’ of the voices from the past (Benjamin, 1940: 390, 395). Therefore, no contemporary cultural practice can be analyzed without at the same time taking into account

the relationship between the present and the past which continuously condition, shape and alter one another.

The researcher:

Finally, I find myself having a personal concern regarding the topic of this dissertation. Born and raised in West-Germany, I grew up learning about the division of the country from an early age; but however, I am also part of the first generation of Germans who cannot rely on personal experience when it comes to the memory of East and West. Born almost a decade after the end of the Cold War, I, just like all members of this ‘post-memory’ generation¹, have to rely on external sources in order to be able to participate in the act of remembering this historical period we have not personally experienced – and so will every future generation of Germans. Therefore, I find it a crucial task for our ‘post-memory’ generation to be aware of the ways and the media through which memory is passed on from one generation to the next, as well as of the circumstances that condition the way we remember certain periods of time that we have never actually experienced ourselves.

My decision to work on the medium of literature, and on Brussig’s *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* in particular, can be easily explained: When I was in high school, this novel was part of my compulsory German curriculum, and it has drastically shaped the way in which I ‘re-member’ the GDR, despite having no first-hand memory of it myself. It has therefore struck me as an indispensable task to take a closer look at this very novel, to analyze the kind of representation that Brussig constructs regarding life in the GDR, and to consequently be able to draw conclusions about to what extent the novel contributes to conveying contents of cultural memory to the generations that follow.

The text:

This dissertation is divided into two major parts. In Part I, the conceptual framework – which will later be crucial for the analysis of the novel – will be established. The focus here lies on the concept of ‘cultural memory’, its origins and current state of the art as well as its connection to literature and the several important sub-concepts surrounding it. Furthermore, this first part takes into consideration the specific methodological framework necessary for the analysis of the literary object. Part II contains the results of the close-reading and the

¹ A term coined by Marianne Hirsch (1997).

interpretative analysis of the novel. The outcomes of the analysis will be presented and the novel's value and means regarding its contribution to the collective remembrance of East-Germany will be conclusively summarized.

Theoretical & methodological considerations:

This paper relies greatly on theoretical approaches developed within the context of German academia. Two of the central researches this dissertation draws from, Astrid Erll and Aleida Assmann, both work within the German research tradition, meaning that many of their publications were originally written in German. As the present dissertation is written in English, I have attempted to include most sources in their translated version whenever possible, but however, due to reasons of accessibility and authenticity, other sources were incorporated in their original German version. For I am no Translation Studies scholar, I did not attempt to translate the quotations, but a rough explanatory translation into English is always provided in the text before or after the quotations, so that the paper can be read without knowledge of the German language. However, the cultural object this work is concerned with has not been translated into English yet, which is why the original German edition will be used.

The theoretical and methodological framework is very important for this research project, resulting in the fact that the first part of this work is very elaborated. Following the reasoning of Mieke Bal, I find a thorough theoretical consideration indispensable when working with a concept as broad and diverse as cultural memory, for only a productive dialogue between the different theoretical conceptualizations of memory allows for an in-depth analysis of the cultural object at stake (Bal, 2002). In order to be able to analyze an object – in this case, a work of literature – according to its value for memory culture, it is of crucial importance to first determine what exactly cultural memory is, where the concept originates from and how it has developed over time into the diverse and plural field of Cultural Memory Studies. Only after considering the concept of memory in all its facets will a conclusive and valid analysis of the cultural object at stake be possible.

For the research project at hand is a MA dissertation and thus submitted to limitations in terms of time and space, some theoretical approaches that were too voluminous or impossible to access are being quoted according to secondary sources in the following. However, this dissertation relies on original sources whenever possible, and all secondary sources are listed in the bibliography for the purpose of verification.

Part I

Memory is deceptive because it is coloured by

Today's events.

Albert Einstein

2. Conceptual Framework: State of the Art

2.1. What is Cultural Memory?

2.1.1. Difficulties, Definitions and Critique

Defining 'cultural memory' is a difficult task. Since the 1920s, scientific research in the field of Memory Studies has significantly increased, which has eventually led to a plurality of concepts and terms whose similarities and differences are by no means obvious, as Astrid Erll explains in her introductory work *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen* (2017). Following this observation, Erll makes an attempt to define collective memory, and even though her considerations are rather broad, they suit the conceptual approach of this research project well and shall therefore further be explored and adapted throughout this definitional chapter. First, however, some of the central difficulties in defining cultural memory shall briefly be examined.

The 'memory boom' (Erll, 2017: 4) of the past decades has not only led to an immense amount of research attempts and results in the field of Cultural Memory Studies, but it has also led to the fact that almost all disciplines of the Humanities and the Social Sciences have come to take interest in issues of memory. This interdisciplinary research activity has intensified the need of defining cultural memory, as every discipline not only formulates its own definitions of the concept, but also applies their own methods and theoretical approaches to the issue according to their own research traditions. As a result of these complicated dynamics, some researchers are convinced that cultural memory research today is a "nonparadigmatic, transdisciplinary, centerless enterprise" (Olick/Robbins, 1998: 106), while others merely believe that those heterogeneous concepts depending on discipline-specific methods form one of the biggest challenges of contemporary memory research (Erll, 2017: 4).

Another factor which aggravates the definition of cultural memory is the growing internationalization of the discourse, and in particular the language-based definitional problems that emerge from it. Early memory concepts derived from the French research tradition, including for example Maurice Halbwachs' 'Mémoire collective' and Pierre

Nora's 'Lieux de mémoire', two concepts which will be further explored at a later point of this work. Only later did the memory issue gain increasing popularity in German and English-speaking academic contexts, which has led to a large variety of memory terms and concepts based on the linguistic characteristics of each of those research traditions. As this dissertation will greatly rely on concepts developed by German researchers, some of these terminological differences between the German and the English tradition need to be clarified at this point.

The German language distinguishes between the terms *Erinnerung* and *Gedächtnis*, a distinction which is not per se possible in English, as both of these terms technically correspond to the word *memory*. Astrid Erll attempts to explain the difference between the two as follows: "Über die Disziplinen hinweg besteht weitgehend Einigkeit, dass Erinnern als ein Prozess, Erinnerungen als dessen Ergebnis und Gedächtnis als eine Fähigkeit oder eine veränderliche Struktur zu konzipieren ist" (*ibid.*: 6). According to this distinction, Erll defines *Erinnern* as the process of remembering, *Erinnerung* as the outcome of this process and hence the actual object associated with *a memory*, and *Gedächtnis* as the capability of remembering and hence the condition of the memory act. Erll stresses in this context that *Gedächtnis* itself cannot be observed, as it is merely a cognitive ability which can only be examined through the analysis of concrete memory acts within specific sociocultural contexts. By observing these concrete acts of remembering, research can hence draw conclusions about how *Gedächtnis* functions and which role it plays within the cultural practices of remembering (*ibid.*).

The conclusion Erll draws from these considerations is that 'Kollektives Gedächtnis' is the focus of scientific curiosity in Culture Studies, while concrete cultures, traditions and acts of remembering are its objects of investigation: "Kollektives Gedächtnis ist der Fokus kulturwissenschaftlicher Neugier, Erinnerungskulturen sind ihr Untersuchungsgegenstand" (*ibid.*).

Now that the central difficulties regarding the terminology of cultural memory have been examined, a first definition can carefully be attempted. At this point I would like to briefly get ahead of myself by mentioning something we shall uncover shortly in the course of this work: Defining cultural memory is only useful to some limited extent. At this point of the work, however, I consider it necessary in order to provide a more concrete idea of what exactly we speak of when using the 'cultural memory' term. Astrid Erll's definitional

attempt strikes me as suitable for this purpose, as she takes into consideration the importance of the different disciplinary takes on cultural memory. According to her understanding, memory has to be understood as a discursive construct which constitutes itself differently depending on the contexts in which it is used (*ibid.*: 5). As this dissertation will draw from both Culture Studies' and Literary Studies' research traditions, finding a definition which includes both contexts is of essence at this point. Erll understands collective or cultural memory as following:

Das 'kollektive Gedächtnis' ist ein Oberbegriff für all jene Vorgänge biologischer, psychischer, medialer und sozialer Art, denen Bedeutung bei der wechselseitigen Beeinflussung von Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft in kulturellen Kontexten zukommt. (*ibid.*)

In essence, the collective memory term describes all biological, psychological, medial and social processes which play into the reciprocal interference between past, present and future within specific cultural contexts.

This definition is useful for several reasons: Firstly, it stresses the importance of the correlations between single phenomena in memory cultures (*ibid.*). In terms of this work, the correlations between the social and the media-based memory processes will be particularly relevant, as well as their effects on and their meaning for past, present and future cultural contexts. Secondly, this definition displays the important interlink existing between the memory of the individual and the memory of the collective, as the former is always part of a larger context, namely the context of collective or cultural remembrance. For the conceptual framework of this dissertation, the following observation is crucial:

Wer individuelle Erinnerung, die Geschichtsschreibung oder den fiktionalen Text aus dem kollektiven Gedächtnis herausrechnen möchte [...] wird die Verbindungslinien nicht erkennen können, die zwischen solchen Phänomenen verlaufen. 'Kollektives Gedächtnis' ist nicht die Alternative zu – oder 'das Andere' der – 'Geschichte', es ist auch nicht der Gegenpol zur individuellen Lebenserinnerung, sondern es stellt den Gesamtkontext dar, innerhalb dessen solche verschiedenartigen kulturellen Phänomene entstehen. (*ibid.*: 5f)

Aspects such as individual memory, historiography and fictional literature cannot, Erll argues, simply be excluded from the concept of collective memory, as only together do they reveal the phenomenon of memory in its wholeness. Collective memory is therefore never the opposite of history or individual memory, but it is the general context in which those individual phenomena come into being.

This association between individual and collective memory as well as history will be one of the central concerns in this research project, as it suggests that collective memory is a construct of a plurality of individual memories, which opens up a discourse regarding the subjectivity of collective memory and – to some extent – the subjectivity of history itself. Following the previously introduced reflections of Walter Benjamin, history can only be sufficiently analyzed when taking into consideration the possibility of a ‘multiplicity of histories’; a dynamic which appears to be strongly dependent on the interaction between memory acts of the individual and the collective (Benjamin, 1940). How this ‘multiplicity of histories’ manifests itself concretely and what role literature plays in this very process shall be explored throughout this research project.

In this context of subjectivity, Astrid Erll stresses the constructive character of memory, a criterion which most of the otherwise heterogeneous conceptions and definitions of the memory term seem to have in common. In addition to her definitional attempt, she underlines the subjective, selective and reconstructive character of memory, which appears to be somehow contradictory to the objective claim of traditional historiography. She states that:

Erinnerungen sind keine objektiven Abbilder vergangener Wahrnehmungen, geschweige denn einer vergangenen Realität. Es sind subjektive, hochgradig selektive und von der Abrufsituation abhängige Rekonstruktionen. Erinnern ist eine sich in der Gegenwart vollziehende Operation des Zusammenstellens (re-member) verfügbarer Daten. Vergangenheitsversionen ändern sich bei jedem Abruf, gemäß den veränderten Gegenwarten. (Erll, 2017: 6)

By bringing forward this aspect, Erll’s understanding of memory appears to be very much in line with Benjamin’s claim of the irretrievability and constructiveness of the past, as he states that “the true image of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again” (Benjamin, 1940: 390).

These predications raise the question of how history and memory shape and constitute one another, as one often appears to persistently defend its objectiveness, while the other is clearly subject to a variety of circumstances which continuously alter the perception and the content of the remembered. The observations by Benjamin and Erll make it clear that memory can never be an exact representation of the past, but it can however indicate how an individual or a collective feel about past events depending on present or

future contexts. The focus of cultural memory research is therefore directed at the present of the memory act rather than on the remembered past per se:

Individuelle und kollektive Erinnerung sind damit zwar nie ein Spiegel der Vergangenheit, wohl aber ein aussagekräftiges Indiz für die Bedürfnisse und Belange des Erinnernden in der Gegenwart. Die erinnerungskulturwissenschaftliche Forschung richtet ihr Interesse folglich nicht in erster Linie auf die jeweils erinnerten Vergangenheiten, sondern auf die Gegenwarten des Erinnerns. (Erll, 2017.: 6f)

The fact that memory itself is a reconstructive and subjective process which continuously changes depending on time and contexts indicates that the memory concept is closely connected to another term which shall briefly be introduced at this point, namely the concept of ‘forgetting’. Amongst other researchers, Astrid Erll stresses that *Gedächtnis*, *Erinnerung* and *Vergessen* are strongly interlinked on an individual level as well as on a collective one (*ibid.*: 6). Adapting the argument of Friedrich Nietzsche, who has advocated the importance of forgetting in his 1871 work *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*, Erll agrees with his position that forgetting is a fundamental condition for individual as well as for collective memory, as a ‘total recall’ – the remembering of everything – can be understood as an act of total forgetting instead. Forgetting is hence not only a condition of remembering, but also a necessity for the economy of memory (*ibid.*:7). Nietzsche’s arguments shall once again return at a later point, as well as forgetting as a crucial aspect within every memory discourse.

In this section, the main difficulties of pinpointing cultural memory have been examined and a preliminary definition has been established. It was stated that the broad character of this definition is particularly useful, as it underlines the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, the interlink between individual and collective memory as well as the correlation between different phenomena of memory cultures. However, the broadness of the memory term and the challenges that go along with its definition have also experienced critique from more skeptical researches. Those critics question whether all the different disciplines working on Memory Studies are actually considering one and the same object when they speak about memory. They raise the concern that the disciplines might actually be considering very different phenomena which are simply made into one general category due to the broad and heterogeneous nature of the memory term (*ibid.*:4f). For those critics, the fact that the concept of cultural memory is often being defined in an all-inclusive, broad

and undetermined manner bears the danger of overstretching the original term, which could lead to a drastic homogenization of actually very diverse objects of study (*ibid.*: 5).

However, bearing in mind the difficulties and risks that go along with the broad definition of the memory term, this research project will focus on more optimistic positions regarding new and diverse research possibilities in the field of Cultural Memory Studies due to the inclusive nature of the concept of memory. For instance, Aleida Assmann, one of the leading German researchers in the fields of culture and memory, elects memory as a potential guiding principle for contemporary research in Culture Studies. She sees the correlations between culture and memory – even though surrounded by blurry boundaries – as a chance and a potential new strategy of understanding problem-relations which have been previously considered unrelated and can now be examined under a new light and thus under a new inclusive, transdisciplinary and progressive research-paradigm (Assmann, 2002: 40; also Erll, 2017: 96).

Based on the now established overview of what ‘cultural memory’ means, the following sections will be concerned with pinning down more specific characteristics of the concept. Different usages of the memory term will be taken into consideration, as well as original theories, specific modes of remembering and the interlink between memory and literature as one of the key media cultural memory depends on.

2.1.2. Why study Memory in Culture Studies?

Before further specifying the concept of ‘cultural memory’, let us briefly examine why issues of memory are being studied in the academic context of Culture Studies, and why memory today is a particularly important cultural issue.

In an essay entitled “Kultur als Lebenswelt und Monument” (1991), Aleida Assmann divides culture into two areas. According to the author, one side of culture is dealing with contemporary everyday experiences, hence with the ‘life-world’ of people living in a specific moment in time and space. This aspect of culture, so Assmann believes, finds its purpose in connecting people of the same generation, it lacks objectivity and is based on social actions and interactions as well as communication within this social group. Assmann calls this side of culture *Lebenswelt* (Eng.: life-world²) (Assmann, 1991: 11f).

² My translation.

The other side of culture, however, has a very different agenda at its center. This second aspect of culture, which Assmann refers to as *Monument*, does not link people of the same generation, but people of different generations together. Communication with the ancestors is at the core of this cultural practice. Its language differs significantly from the everyday language of people's life-world, as monuments intend to convey a specific message to their observer, while the documents of people's life-world can be understood as quiet traces that do not communicate with the same intentionality and perseverance as monuments do (*ibid.*: 11, 13).

With the turn of the century, historiography has undergone a paradigm-shift: Historians were now concerned with the everyday practices of past generations. They were no longer merely focussing on the intentional messages from the past conveyed by monuments, but they were increasingly interested in the reconstruction of life-worlds, particular meaning-structures and individual experiences which are instead found as traces in documents and other unintentional media of past generations. Aleida Assmann considers this shift from 'history' to 'histories' as crucial for contemporary historiography: "In der Rückkehr von der Geschichte zu den Geschichten besteht der wohl wichtigste historiographische Paradigmenwechsel unseres Jahrhunderts" (*ibid.*: 12f).

This paradigm-shift is one indicator for the reasons why the study of memory has gained increasing significance throughout the past decades. Unlike monuments, the life-worlds of past generations are not always well-documented. Neither are they objective, in fact, they can only be observed through a careful reconstruction of individual clues that eventually show an image, a representation of what past generations have felt, seen and experienced.

For the study of culture, the shift away from well-documented cultural traditions, festivities and monuments toward an investigation of individual, private cultural practices demands new forms of access to this specific past. New sources need to be taken into account; hidden sources, almost forgotten and less easy to reconstruct (*ibid.*: 13). Documents, letters, archives, diaries, art and literature are all potential access points in following the traces of long lost life-worlds – and furthermore serve as media of memory. This angle of Culture Studies is one of the central concerns of Raymond Williams, who already suggested the importance of literature in the reconstruction of past life-worlds in his 1961 work *The Long Revolution*. Coining the term of the 'structure of feeling', Williams

assumes that literature can be a powerful tool to trace people's thoughts, emotions and personal experiences at any specific moment in history (Williams, 2013).

With the 'experienced life' becoming more and more important for the study of cultural practices, traces of memory which could interlink individual experiences to the 'lived reality' of a generation became one of the key concerns of Culture Studies. According to Astrid Erll, the formation of the modern understanding of culture and the emergence of collective memory theory are strongly related, and memory is therefore considered a condition, a part and/or a product of cultural processes in almost all contemporary approaches regarding cultural memory (Erll, 2017: 7f).

This development is one of the reasons why studying memory is a highly important pursuit in the field of Culture Studies, and yet, it is not the only one. Another crucial aspect is the fact that memory today has an impact on almost every area of cultural practice: Literature and art cover issues of remembering and forgetting, politics and public discuss the importance of remembrance (for instance, in the course of anniversary celebrations) and the monuments and historical sights we visit for entertainment are constant reminders of the role that memory plays in our everyday lives. Memory has therefore become a 'cumulative cultural phenomenon' (*ibid.*: 1) which brings together not only different disciplines and national academic traditions, but also the large variety of independent practices which all ought to be considered cultural. The concept of memory is hence building a bridge between the objects of investigation in Culture Studies and therefore facilitates the dialogue when analyzing different objects under the premise of culture (*ibid.*: 1f).

In addition to the factors introduced above, there are a number of reasons why the study of memory has gained increasing relevance in contemporary Culture Studies. Two characteristics of our time are particularly influential at this juncture: First of all, the media landscape has evolved drastically over the past years. The almost infinite capacity of data-storage adds new tension to the question of what is being – or more importantly: what should be – remembered and what forgotten (Echterhoff/Saar, 2002: 13f). Social Media furthermore reshape the way the past is being represented and hence introduce new forms of social remembrance. These changing dynamics raise the question of the role that media play in the suggestion of the authenticity of representations and to what extent they shape the image of the past (Erll, 2017: 3).

The second and last contemporary characteristic to be mentioned here is one which has clearly boosted Cultural Memory Studies in recent years – probably more than any other factor. At this very moment in time, society is undergoing a crucial historical transformation process: The generation which has witnessed the wars of the past century is fading, and with them the oral transmission of personal experiences and memory. Historical research and media-supported cultural memory contents are replacing these first-hand witness reports, but they require thorough academic research as well as new access points and methodologies (ibid.; also Echterhoff/Saar, 2002: 13).

In addition to this transformation process, the end of the Cold War has dissolved the binary memory culture of East and West, which has – as briefly mentioned in the introduction of this work – led to the emergence of a plurality of national memories, histories and practices (Erll, 2017: 3).

Concluding these reflections, we can note a variety of reasons due to which the study of memory plays a crucial part in the field of Culture Studies – today probably more than ever. However, Gerald Echterhoff and Martin Saar mention that the potential of the collective memory concept has not yet reached its climax, neither methodologically nor in terms of its empirical reach, which indicates that collective memory theory still needs to be more deeply explored in academia (Echterhoff/Saar, 2002: 14).

This dissertation aims to do exactly that within the framework of Culture Studies. In order to be able to do so, the following two sections will draw attention to some specific characteristics of the nature of the memory concept which are of crucial importance when conducting research in the field of Memory Studies.

2.1.3. Memory as a Metaphor

The fact that the memory term is difficult to pin down has previously been established. The next issue which has to be taken into consideration in order to achieve a better understanding of the concept are its different usages, as we are not always dealing with memory in the literal sense and therefore have to make a distinction between the usage of the term memory as a seizable object and its usage as a metaphor, ‘a linguistic imagery-model bearing heuristic value’ (Erll, 2017: 94). Distinguishing these two usages is fundamental in order to avoid confusion when working with the concept of memory, on an individual or a collective level.

The importance of the distinction derives from the critique that individual-psychological terms cannot simply be transferred onto a collective level. Applying the knowledge about individual memory acts and processes onto broad sociocultural, collective phenomena leads to the illusion that the consciousness of the individual can be mirrored onto the consciousness of the collective, which is misleading, as the collective as an entity does not possess a consciousness of its own: “Es gibt außerhalb des je individuellen Bewusstseins kein Kollektivbewusstsein, dem Erinnerung, Gedächtnis, Unbewusstes, Vergessen oder Verdrängung zugeschrieben werden können” (*ibid.*).

Concepts like ‘collective memory’, ‘cultural memory’ or ‘social forgetting’ are hence metaphors, images that should help us picture a cognitive space which can neither be grasped nor physically defined. Ever since the earliest philosophers, the concept of memory relied on imagery and metaphors in order to describe its functions and characteristics, thinkers like Plato and Aristotle introduced early metaphors like ‘writing on a board of wax’ in order to illustrate memory and its capacity of preserving and recalling information (*ibid.*).

Underlining the importance of the metaphorical value of memory, Aleida Assmann has dedicated a chapter of her influential work *Erinnerungsräume* to the variety of metaphors that has been used throughout the past centuries in order to make the memory term seizable (Assmann, 2010a: 149-178). She comes to the conclusion that the basic metaphor of writing, or of the trace that imprints onto some material data carrier, has proven to be the most enduring imagery of memory, even though today that material carrier of data has largely been replaced by the image of the electronic data-storage device (*ibid.*: 178).

Returning to the collective level, Astrid Erll points out that the concept of collective memory is only sometimes used in a metaphorical sense, but it is however always used in relation to *tropes*, which are expressions of transferred meaning (Erll, 2017: 94). Following the observations of Jan Assmann, she suggests a distinction between two usages of the collective memory term.

The first usage is a literal one, in which the term ‘collective memory’ corresponds to the memory of an individual which is shaped by a specific sociocultural context in which it is located. Memory in this sense can be understood as a cultural phenomenon, the attribute ‘collective’ corresponds to the collective contexts which influence the memory of the individual (*ibid.*). The American sociologist Jeffrey Olick calls this first usage of the memory term *collected memory*. Collected memory describes the socially and culturally

defined individual memory, which relies on culture-specific schemes, collectively shared norms and second-hand experience in order to build up its own horizon of experience. This individual memory collects and adapts elements from a larger sociocultural surrounding and is hence a highly relevant concept in socio-psychological and neuroscientific research (*ibid.*: 95; also Olick, 1999).

The second usage of the term ‘collective memory’ is a metaphorical one which comes into play when speaking of abstract memory imageries, for instance the ‘memory of culture’, the ‘memory of society’ or the ‘memory of art and literature’. Those expressions are mere linguistic images which refer to culture as a memory phenomenon without the literal capacity of memory. Culture, art and literature cannot remember on their own, they rely on media and institutions like archives, monuments or documents (Erll, 2017: 94f). Olick identifies this second usage of the term as *collective memory*. Collective memory includes symbols, social institutions, media and cultural practices relying on the past which are all metaphorically referred to as memory. When considering research in the fields of Culture Studies, Literary Studies, History or Sociology, it is mostly this metaphorical usage of ‘collective memory’ that forms the basis of scientific interest (*ibid.*: 95; also Olick, 1999)

Despite the fact that these two usages of the collective memory term need to be distinguished analytically, they only truly work through their interaction with one another. The collective and the individual level are constantly working together, they complement each other instead of excluding one another. Individual memory is always shaped by a cultural context, just as culture is determined by individuals and their memories. Even though the memory of culture is supported by media and institutions, individual experiences are required in order to update the content of this media and hence the content of cultural memory:

Es gibt kein vor-kulturelles individuelles Gedächtnis. Es gibt aber auch keine vom Individuum abgelöste, allein in Medien und Institutionen verkörperte Kultur. So wie soziokulturelle Schemata das individuelle Gedächtnis prägen, muss auch das mediale und institutionell repräsentierte ‘Gedächtnis’ der Kultur in Individuen als ‘Ausblickspunkten’ aktualisiert werden. (Erll, 2017: 95)

These observations underline the fact that literal/individual and metaphorical/collective memory have to be considered side by side. When examining the value of literature as a medium of collective memory at a later point of this work, the

individual memory influencing the collective and vice-versa shall hence be one of the key criteria of analysis.

The metaphorical use of the memory term has to be considered with caution, however. As mentioned in section 2.1.1., critics have pointed out the confusion that derives from the broad concept of memory, claiming that one term is not sufficient to describe the large variety of phenomena which falls under the umbrella-category of ‘memory’. This potential blurring of the nuances between single phenomena is only reinforced if the metaphorical usage of the memory term is not handled with caution. While the concept of collective memory can be understood as a productive metaphor due to its capacity of revealing previously unknown structural similarities and functional relations between single phenomena, other metaphors of memory should be regarded from a more critical angle. Using the term ‘memory’ in order to describe cultural objects like monuments, literature or archives is misleading, as those objects function as media of collective memory, not as memory per se. These media can encode information and enable processes of remembering or forgetting, but they cannot do so themselves (*ibid.*: 96f).

Even more misleading is the use of the memory term if individual-psychological concepts are metaphorically transferred onto the collective level. Even though some phenomena of individual memory can indeed be observed on a societal level, one cannot simply suggest similar effects on both levels. Kansteiner has formulated an example for this when he wrote: “Nations *can* repress with psychological impunity: their collective memories can be changed without a ‘return of the repressed’” (Kansteiner, 2002: 186). These dynamics of national collective memory phenomena shall be revisited at a later point.

Summing up, this latest observation indicates that the concept of collective memory and its sub-concepts cannot simply be transferred between the collective and the individual level of analysis without alteration. Even though the two levels strongly interact with one another, an analytical distinction between the two is necessary, and the metaphorical or literal value of the memory term has to be constantly reevaluated depending on the contexts in which the term is being used (Erl, 2017: 97).

2.1.4. Memory as a Travelling Concept

Regarding the different usages of the cultural memory term, let us once again return to the issues of interdisciplinarity and internationalization in the field of Cultural Memory Studies. Due to the increasingly globalized academic discourse, “the idea of locating the study of culture exclusively in the context of national and disciplinary constellations is surely losing plausibility in a world which is itself increasingly characterised by cultural exchange, [...] transnationalisation and interdependence” (Neumann/Nünning, 2012: 1).

In the light of these interdisciplinary modern dynamics, Dutch scholar Mieke Bal has proposed a theoretical approach through which she aims to diffuse the confusion and oversimplification which can occur through interdisciplinarity in “an age characterized by the loss of boundaries” (Bal, 2002: 3). Bal believes that concepts, not methods are the key to interdisciplinary successful cultural analysis, and she hence proposes her approach of ‘travelling concepts’ as a potential new methodological take (*ibid.*: 5).

Bal bases her theory on the assumption that scholars nowadays are often too set in their disciplinary boundaries to foster a productive interdisciplinary discourse. A term is immediately associated with one specific meaning, namely the meaning this term bears in the specific field a researcher is from. What is however often overlooked is the fact that terms can be more than simple words or jargon: They can stand for a larger concept and can hence possess several layers of meaning. As not everybody in the academic landscape is always aware of this, these terms – as for instance ‘memory’ – can lead to a great deal of confusion and misunderstandings within the interdisciplinary discourse (*ibid.*: 5f). As Culture Studies as a field aims to bring together many disciplines, these dynamics appear particularly problematic. The same issue applies to the interdisciplinary field of Memory Studies.

Bal attempts to facilitate the discourse by suggesting concepts as a ‘common language’ which can provide a certain amount of intersubjectivity between the disciplines. Those ‘miniature theories’ need to be flexible, but at the same time clear, explicit and well-defined in order to enable productive discourse on a common ground (*ibid.*: 22). However, Bal stresses that those concepts can never be fixed or unambiguous, as it is precisely their changeability which makes them useful as a new interdisciplinary methodology (*ibid.*: 23, 25). What might sound contradictory at first is soon clarified by Bal, as she expresses that it is precisely the difference within concepts that gives them their particular value:

Concepts, I found over the years, are the sites of debate, awareness of difference, and tentative exchange. Agreeing doesn't mean agreeing on content, but agreeing on the basic rules of the game: if you use a concept at all, you use it in a particular way so that you can meaningfully disagree on content. (*ibid.*: 13)

Concepts are hence characterized by the fact that they can differ in content, but can however foster a productive interdisciplinary discourse through precisely this flexibility: “[...] For me, the primary concern is not ‘correct’ but ‘meaningful’ use” (*ibid.*: 16f). In this context, Bal values analytical insight over precision and advocates a “certain voluntary conceptual messiness” (*ibid.*: 17).

In the context of this research project, Mieke Bal's idea (which follows a similar tradition as Edward Said's take on ‘travelling theories’ (Neumann/Nünning, 2012: 4f)), proves as particularly useful for one reason: By considering cultural memory as a concept according to Bal's understanding, the definitional difficulties which have been encountered earlier in this work can be regarded as diffused. Following this line of thought, one general theory of what cultural memory is proves to be unnecessary, as all the disciplinary definitions can be considered correct as long as they interact with one another in a productive manner without negating, overlooking or denying each other:

Working with travelling concepts involves multiple and different forms of analysis that allow us to focus on the production of difference and differentiation. The goal is not to arrive at a single paradigm or master narrative but to find ways of holding these different dimensions in productive conversation with one another. (*ibid.*: 12)

As briefly previewed in section 2.1.1., we now see why trying to define cultural memory is only useful to some limited extent: Definitions might indeed help us to better grasp and understand a concept, but at the same time they limit its potential due to the disciplinary boundaries they represent. However, interdisciplinary approaches such as Bal's traveling concepts or Erll's previously introduced understanding of what cultural memory is allow us to explore the potential of the concept beyond the limitations of one discipline. Trying to define cultural memory and applying Bal's theoretical approach at the same time is hence not contradictory, as long as we bear in mind that concepts such as cultural memory can never be sufficiently described through one definition alone, but that they require a dialogue between all existing definitions in order to explore a concept in all its potential meanings and (inter-)disciplinary facets.

The remaining issue that needs to be taken into consideration now is how those concepts proposed by Bal actually travel, and how this metaphor of ‘travelling’ can be productive for this work.

According to Bal, concepts can travel in four manners: between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods and between geographically dispersed academic communities, hence across national borders (Bal, 2002: 24). One decade after Bal’s work had been published, German scholars Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning picked up on Bal’s approach and edited a new volume on travelling concepts in which they propose one more possible way in which concepts can travel: In addition to Bal’s original dimensions, they suggest concepts “travelling synchronically between functionally defined subsystems” (Neumann/Nünning, 2012: 11). Concretely, they see the possibility of concepts travelling for instance “between academia and society, its cultural practices, norms and power relations” (*ibid.*). Within all these different contexts, meaning, reach and operational value of these concepts at stake can differ drastically (Bal, 2002: 24).

Travelling, however, does not only mean that a concept is being transferred from one context to another, but it also entails that concepts change through their journeys. As all concepts emerge from individual disciplines as well as from specific historical periods, their meanings can change significantly over time or during the transfer from their original academic tradition to another. Issues of translation prove to be particularly challenging here, as was previously discussed when clarifying the linguistic differentiations of the memory term which exist in the German research tradition. However, even more importantly, one has to take into consideration that, due to their travelling activities and their diverse original contexts, all travelling concepts “come with ideological freight and often unconscious biases” (Neumann/Nünning, 2012: 2). Historical differences, variations in the definitions of a concept and original academic contexts are all part of a concept’s ‘baggage’, the framework that constitutes the ways concepts are understood, applied and re-defined within the interdisciplinary academic exchange.

When working with travelling concepts according to Bal’s definition, a self-reflexive awareness is necessary to “draw attention to the epistemological, cultural and political implications of the theories and concepts we endorse” (*ibid.*: 3). In other words, when working with a travelling concept, one has to take into consideration its original academic and historical context, its original meaning as well as the new or old meanings the concept

has gained or lost throughout its journey. New layers of meaning can add new dimensions and insight to a concept, old or obsolete layers of meaning can lead to concepts merely functioning as metaphors without any analytical potential (*ibid.*: 16).

The travelling process of a concept has to be retraced in a self-reflexive manner in order for a researcher to understand where a concept comes from and what kind of ideological ‘baggage’ comes along with it. Only if self-reflexivity is deployed, a concept can be grasped in all its facets, and only then the confrontational, controversial potential of travelling concepts can lead to a productive interdisciplinary dialogue which can eventually reveal “the often hidden and naturalised presuppositions, discursive practices and structural features of research traditions” (*ibid.*: 4).

In the practical terms of this work, in order to fulfill the requirements of self-reflexivity when working with such a concept, the origins of the memory concept will have to be explored thoroughly. This step is necessary in order to understand the original academic and historical context of memory research, as well as the transformation processes the memory concept has undergone hereafter. By retracing the steps of a concept’s journey, it “involuntarily reveals the historical and local traces of the contexts in which it has emerged. [...] Just as cultures themselves, the study of cultures can therefore be understood in terms of the productive tension between *routes* and *roots* [...]. Precisely because concepts carry the traces of their various journeys, profound knowledge of their history is crucial to the study of culture” (*ibid.*: 5).

In the following part of this work, the origins of cultural memory as a concept shall be explored. Through retracing the journey of the cultural memory concept from its early origins to modern approaches, light will be shed on the historical and ideological ‘baggage’ of the concept as well as on its most relevant sub-aspects and additional features which have developed through the concept’s interdisciplinary and international movement over the past decades. Through this thorough consideration of the concept’s key components, the framework will be set for a later practical application of the cultural memory concept(s) during the analysis of the object of this research project.

2.2. Origins and Foundations of the Field of Memory Studies

2.2.1. Original Theories on Cultural Memory

2.2.1.1. Maurice Halbwachs' "Mémoire collective"

Conducting research in the field of cultural memory nowadays appears to be impossible without taking into consideration one of the earliest approaches of memory theory, namely the work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. Regarded as the pioneer of social memory research, Halbwachs introduced the collective memory term in 1925 (Assmann, 2006: 187). Nowadays, almost all approaches of contemporary cultural memory theory draw to some extent from Halbwachs' work, or, as Jan Assmann puts it: "Wo immer von den sozialen, kollektiven, kommunikativen und kulturellen Aspekten des Gedächtnisses die Rede ist, wird sein Name genannt" (Assmann J., 2002: 10).

Halbwachs published several books dealing with what he calls 'collective memory', two of which have turned out to become particularly relevant. His first work on the topic, entitled *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Eng.: The social conditions of memory), was published in 1925, his second and most famous work, *La mémoire collective* (Eng.: Collective memory), was to a great extent a response to the criticism of his first book and was published in 1950, only five years after the death of its author, even though it was written only shortly after *Cadres sociaux*.

According to Astrid Erll, the origin of Memory Studies as the field known today can be traced back to two particular approaches which emerged almost simultaneously in the 1920s: One is the approach of Aby Warburg, who analyzed the role of images in memory, and the other is Maurice Halbwachs' take on collective memory (Erll, 2017: 11). Even though both are considered as the foundation of modern cultural memory theory, the two concepts follow very different approaches, which Jan Assmann described as following: "Um die beiden Ansätze auf eine bündige Form zu bringen, könnte man sagen, dass Warburg die Kultur als Gedächtnisphänomen und Halbwachs das Gedächtnis als Kulturphänomen untersuchte" (Assmann J., 2002: 8). In essence, it can be noted that the fundamental difference between the two approaches is that Warburg understood culture as a phenomenon of memory, while Halbwachs understood memory as a phenomenon of culture. In the context of this work, Halbwachs' considerations are of greater relevance, which is why Warburg's theory shall not be discussed further, and it was only mentioned for the sake of completeness.

Halbwachs' theses result from a time in which the issue of memory already played an important role in academia. Intellectuals like Emil Durkheim, Henri Bergson, Marcel Proust and Sigmund Freud had all developed very different approaches to the topic, all of which Halbwachs generally rejected. Unlike Bergson, who understood memory as something entirely individual (Echterhoff/Saar, 2002: 16), or Freud, who advocated for the biological inheritance of memory contents, Halbwachs opens up a new dimension of the issue by defining memory as a social and cultural process instead of a biological condition. By introducing this new social dimension into the discourse on memory, Halbwachs considerably extended the debate and increased the interdisciplinary relevance of the memory issue (Assmann J., 2002: 7f).

What made Halbwachs' memory theory so revolutionary was the fact that he claimed that every memory act, no matter how personal, is in its core a collective phenomenon. The two claims he made can be summarized as following: First of all, Halbwachs suggested that the memory of the individual is always 'framed' by a specific sociocultural context and is hence shaped by a collective social force rather than by the individual him- or herself. This framework is constituted by the people surrounding us and the interaction we conduct with them. Through social interaction, knowledge, facts and experiences are exchanged, which later serve as collective reference points through which the individual is able to locate his/her own experiences as well as past events within a frame of a collective symbolic order. These mental schemes direct our perception and remembrance and indicate that every individual memory is conditioned by the collective social context and the social groups it emerges from (Erl, 2017: 12f; see also Jeffrey Olick's 'collected memory', section 2.1.3)

The second claim Halbwachs makes is that individual memory is not only conditioned by the collective, but that groups, communities and societies themselves possess a form of memory and hence remember just like individuals do. He suggests that memory has hence a very social nature and can be considered as the communicative and emotional bond which holds social groups together (Echterhoff/Saar, 2002: 14f; Assmann, 2006: 187).

In the second half of his first book, Halbwachs focusses on different forms of collective remembrance within social groups, for example within families, religious communities, professions or social classes. From his sociological perspective, society as a whole is divided into groups. These develop a flexible, but at the same time stable identity which is constituted by the collective memories its members share and which they only

possess *as* members of the group. This line of thought was criticized after the publication of Halbwachs' first book, for example by his colleague Marc Bloch, who noted that terms of individual memory cannot simply be transferred onto a social level (Echterhoff/Saar, 2002: 16f). We shall return to this issue later.

Halbwachs was, however, aware of the fact that collective memory does not manifest itself as some kind of over-individual 'group mind', but argued that collective memory is constituted through the individuals of the group itself. Without individual memories, there could be no collective memory, and vice versa (*ibid.*: 21).

While his first work is primarily concerned with the individual memory being grounded in the collective, Halbwachs' second contribution focusses on the complex processes of interaction between the individual and the collective level, an issue which is still highly relevant in Memory Studies today. He eventually comes to the conclusion that the identity and the social memory of a group continuously condition one another (*ibid.*: 23).

Furthermore, Halbwachs was already aware of the fact that memory is never an exact replication of the past, but merely a reconstructed representation which is always vulnerable to involuntary alteration and bias, as it is for instance the case with childhood memories (*ibid.*: 15, 18).

One form of collective memory which is particularly relevant in Halbwachs' work is the intergenerational memory in families. With the members drawing from a common pool of experiences, this form of collective memory constitutes itself through social interaction and communication, i.e. through common practices and the dissemination of experiences. A vivid memory exchange between witnesses and their descendants is at the core of this collective family remembrance. According to Halbwachs, we can only speak of generational memory up to the point to which the oldest family member can still rely on first-hand experiences (Erl, 2017: 14).

The opposite of this vivid exchange of memories is what Halbwachs understands as historiography. He states that history starts where collective memory dissolves. For Halbwachs, history and memory cannot be united, as one is universal and impartial, while the other is limited to a specific time and space, its contents are partial and of a hierarchical order (*ibid.*). He understands memory and history as opposites, as Jan Assmann formulated:

Wenn Vergangenheit nicht länger im Gedächtnis lebender Individuen gegenwärtig, sondern in Texten und anderen symbolischen Formen objektiviert war, nannte Halbwachs das 'Tradition', worin er nicht eine Form, sondern das Gegenteil des Gedächtnisses sah. (Assmann J., 2002: 9)

Halbwachs' perspective regarding this only changes in his work *Topographie légendaire* (1941), in which he extends his memory term and includes monuments and symbols of all kinds in his considerations on collective memory. At this point in his work, he moves away from generational memory, which is usually limited to an individual, autobiographic memory exchange, and instead widens the field by proposing a model of collective memory that reaches back several thousand years and hence depends on media and objects of remembrance instead of social communication alone. Halbwachs proposes monuments and archeological sites as objects of this kind and focusses on collectively constructed knowledge and its conveyance through traditions and social practices. By widening his angle of examination, cultural aspects become more relevant, and Halbwachs' work now provides access points for later researches to continue in his line of thought, the most important of which were Pierre Nora and later Aleida and Jan Assmann (*ibid.*; Erll, 2017: 12, 14f).

The fact that Halbwachs' theories are characterized through a particularly broad applicability, as they are neither bound to one academic discipline, nor to a specific object alone, might be considered the reason why his considerations were adapted so diversely in the past decades. The openness and flexibility of Halbwachs' memory term contributed greatly to the travelling that his approach has undertaken ever since it was first proposed in 1925. Nowadays, however, Halbwachs' concepts have been (partly) altered by years of travelling through different disciplines. Collective memory today is being applied to larger entities, not only the intimate groups of personal acquaintance which Halbwachs originally suggested. What has not changed, however, is the assumption that those collectives, no matter how big they might be, do not actually *have* a collective memory, but they *make/create* one in reliance on symbolic media like texts, images, monuments, anniversary celebrations, etc. (Assmann, 2006: 188).

In relation to Halbwachs' work, Aleida Assmann stresses that his most remarkable contribution derives from the assumption that memory is nothing biologically determined, but something socially acquired. Participating in collective memory acts is not conditioned by an individual's origin, but is a process of learning and participating in social practices.

Through this collective access to a common past, members of a group are now able to establish a sense of common identity ('Wir-Identität', *ibid.*).

2.2.1.2. Pierre Nora's "Lieux de Mémoire"

After Halbwachs' death in the concentration camp of Buchenwald in March 1945, his conception of collective memory as well as the academic concern with issues of memory were put to rest altogether. It was not until the 1980s, almost four decades after Halbwachs' death, that his ideas found new popularity. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, memory as a field of study gained new relevance in almost every academic field, and again, it was in the French research tradition that the next influential take on collective memory was born.

Under the title *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984-1992), French historian Pierre Nora published a seven-volume work, analyzing issues of collective memory and national identity in contemporary France. Similar to Halbwachs' work *Topographie légendaire*, Nora's focus lies on larger communities of collective memory, in this specific case the memory of the French nation.

Even though he moves away from Halbwachs' take of analyzing the transfer of memory through personal communication in small, intimate social groups, Nora agrees with Halbwachs on the fact that history has to be understood as the opposite of memory. However, unlike Halbwachs, Nora believes that nowadays there is no such thing as a collective memory anymore, which leads him to the analysis of what he calls the 'sites of memory'. Those sites, according to Nora's definition, are symbols which obtain the power to summon the forgotten memory images of a nation; in Nora's case, the memory images of France. For him, those memory sites are reminders of the past and at the same time indicators of the absence of any vivid memory (Erll, 2017: 20f).

With his study on contemporary historiography, Nora aims to show that memory sites form the symbolic foundation of the collective memory of France. His reflections derive from a seminar which was led by the historian himself in the 1970s, and during which a total of 130 essays were created, treating all kinds of cultural topics concerning the French society, covering topics such as 'Coffee', 'Vichy' or 'the King'. The goal of his study was to analyze the origins and the development of the symbols which nowadays shape French identity, with particular focus on the political and cultural constructions deriving from the era of the 3rd French Republic (Carrier, 2002: 141).

Those memory sites Nora's work is based on can, but do not necessarily have to be physical locations. His definition of memory sites reaches from geographical sites, buildings and monuments to anniversary celebrations, public figures, texts and symbolic practices such as traditions and rituals. The key aspect is the collective emotional value those sites possess, and the hence resulting social stability they provide. According to Nora, contemporary society finds itself in a state of transgression, in which the connection to the vivid memory, which also constitutes collective identity, is weakened. As a result, memory sites have to act as a sort of artificial replacement where there is no natural sense of collective remembrance anymore (Erll, 2017: 20; Carrier, 2002: 143).

For Nora, memory sites represent several aspects of a shared past, but they do so without dictating one compulsory, universal image of the past due to their plurality. Nora's definition of collective memory is thus a very open one: He claims that individuals make their own selection from the memory sites offered to them, which leads to the fact that the memory of a shared past is constituted by the sum of individual memories and can look tremendously different for the single individuals of a community (Carrier, 2002: 143). "Ihre Pluralisierung lässt keine Hierarchisierung, keine Anordnung zu einer kohärenten Erzählung oder einem Sinngefüge zu" (Erll, 2017: 20f), according to Astrid Erll. Peter Carrier tries to explain this open understanding of collective memory promoted in *Lieux de mémoire* through the diversity and breaks in France's history throughout time:

Der vielfältigen, konfliktreichen französischen Geschichte gemäß bringt dieses Werk ein pluralistisches Verständnis vom kollektiven Gedächtnis zur Geltung; kein streng kollektives Gedächtnis, sondern eine Sammlung von Erinnerungsträgern, die in verschiedenen Konstellationen das Gedächtnis französischer Individuen bilden. Zugleich lässt diese Zusammenstellung jedoch auf eine einheitliche Geschichte unter dem allumfassenden (obwohl schwer fassbaren) Begriff des Französischen schließen. (Carrier, 2002: 141)

Regarding the question of which characteristics differentiate a memory site from a regular cultural object, Nora's distinction is not quite as liberal at first. Overall, Nora's memory sites have to fulfill three specific criteria, which Astrid Erll summarizes as follows:

The first criterion of memory sites is the *material dimension*. It includes physical objects like artworks or books, but also past events can fall into this dimension, as they are constituted by a limited, hence material timeframe. The second criterion is the *functional dimension*, which indicates that memory sites need to fulfill a specific purpose in society. Books, for instance, are always created for a purpose, even before they become sites of

memory. Finally, the third criterion might be considered the most challenging one: The *symbolic dimension* indicates that besides their function, memory sites furthermore need to possess a symbolic value. This symbolic value can derive from several circumstances. One possibility is the simple symbolic elevation of an object, for example a cultural practice which turns into a ritual. Another way of achieving symbolic value is for objects to lose their original meaning and have it replaced by another, a symbolic one. As Nora understands memory sites as surrogates for collective memory that has been lost, this change of meaning occurs with the transition from vivid memory to historical memory. To name two examples, the memory sites ‘French Revolution’ or ‘Berlin Wall’ to us nowadays carry an entirely different meaning than they did centuries or decades ago, which gives them symbolic value and hence qualifies them as a memory site. The latter of the two will be discussed in depth later on (Erll, 2017: 21; Carrier, 2002: 144).

Due to the fact that collective memory is determined by the single memories and the individual selection of memory sites by the members of a community, the meaning and relevance of a memory site can change over time. Nora stresses that this dynamic can have crucial impact on the public opinion and on historiography itself, which leads to him claiming the high impact of memory on the present. Nora calls this shift of meaning ‘historical present’, which he understands as an independent branch of historiography and which puts his theses into close relation which Halbwachs’ claim of the past always being an object of reconstruction (*ibid.*: 146f).

For Nora, memory is a necessary condition to understand that past. However, this understanding can only derive from a certain level of self-reflexivity. The historical consciousness of the past leads hence to the social consciousness of the present, which Nora believes to be even more relevant than the former one, as it reflects the constant change memory undergoes over time (*ibid.*: 147f).

One of the central reasons why memory sites shift in meaning is the desire of generations to distinguish themselves from the previous ones and hence establish their generational consciousness rather in the present than in the past. These generational dynamics lead to the present becoming more relevant than the past and thus the social consciousness of a community overweighting the historical one. This shift indicates that in Nora’s model of memory sites, the responsibility of preserving history lies rather with society than with historians. Due to this fact, the means of collective memory change as they

move away from the objective sources of historicism and towards symbolic public sites of memory, which include everything that supports memory on a collective level (*ibid.*: 148ff).

Despite the fact that Nora's studies have become highly influential and form without doubt one of the foundations of modern memory research, two points of critique shall be mentioned briefly. Unlike Halbwachs, who was still working within the framework of 19th century historicism, Nora's distinction between memory and history proves to be rather problematic, as issues such as perspectivity and constructivity of historiography were already being discussed in the 1970s. The claim that memory and history are opposites – which might have seemed reasonable in Halbwachs' reflection, considering the context of his work – appear rather outdated by the end of the 20th century, which has led to some critique towards Nora's claims (Erll, 2017: 22).

However, the second and more relevant point of critique which has been put forward is the fact that, even though Nora underlines the multiplicity of memory sites, he does not take into consideration marginalized memory cultures and their impact on national memory. An example here could be the memory sites of societal subgroups, such as, for instance, memory contents brought to France during and after the country's colonial era. The exclusion of these memory sites can be explained in two ways: For once, the idea of *one* national memory gained increasing relevance in the 1970s. National ministries of culture were found in several European countries, and these national dynamics were only further reinforced in the 1990s, when the cultural and historical foundations of the new German state as well as other national memory cultures emerging from the collapse of the Soviet Union dominated the public memory discourse (Carrier, 2002: 142).

In addition to the importance of national memory during this period, Nora has a theoretical reason for excluding marginalized memory cultures or the memory sites of sub-communities from his reflections: Nora claims that memory sites can be combined and recombined individually without them ever excluding one another, leading to the fact that every single combination of memory sites is possible for any individual as well as for the collective. Had he taken into consideration places that only speak to part of the nation, for instance only one specific societal group, this premise of unlimited compatibility would not stand. Nora hence limits his considerations to memory sites that address all members of a community at the same time, leaving aside memory sites of minorities and social sub-communities (*ibid.*: 145).

Even though the exclusion of marginalized, non-dominant memory sites from Nora's conception of collective memory can be explained, Astrid Erll reinforces the critique of those scholars claiming that, in a time which is shaped by cultural exchange and globalization, this exclusion seems implausible (Erll, 2017: 22). According to this critique, a national collective memory can no longer be explained by taking into consideration only national memory phenomena, which is why contemporary memory research takes into account the dynamics and movement of memory sites by considering them 'complex inter-, multi-, and transcultural constellations' (*ibid.*: 23).

2.2.1.3. Differences and Similarities in Halbwachs and Nora

The conceptions of collective memory put forward by Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora are both considered to be the roots of modern cultural memory research. What remains now is to evaluate how much those two approaches have in common and to what degree do they differ from one another. Peter Carrier has attempted to compare the two conceptions in an essay entitled "Pierre Noras *Les Lieux de mémoire* als Diagnose und Symptom der zeitgenössischen Erinnerungskultur" (2002), and as both of them will play an important role in the further theoretical reflections of this work, his results shall briefly be summarized.

"Die Ideen Maurice Halbwachs' fallen in *Les Lieux de mémoire* vor allem wegen ihrer Abwesenheit auf" (Carrier, 2002: 156), Carrier notes in the beginning of his comparative analysis. Nora does not refer much to Halbwachs in his work, conveying the impression that the two approaches are not greatly related. Even though both scholars use similar analytical concepts, they have chosen access points which indicate different meanings as well as different sense-structures:

Der Unterschied zwischen Noras Kristallisationspunkten und Halbwachs' Anhaltspunkten liegt darin, dass in *Les Lieux de mémoire* die Träger des kollektiven Gedächtnisses Ereignisse und Orte der nationalen Geschichte Frankreichs sind, die im Laufe der Zeit symbolischen Wert gewonnen haben [...]. Halbwachs dagegen beschreibt alltägliche Anhaltspunkte wie z.B. ein Mittagessen, eine Wohnung, ein Stadtviertel oder Naturerlebnisse, die der gedanklichen Rekonstruktion vergangener Erlebnisse im Zwiegespräch oder im Selbstgespräch zugrunde liegen. (*ibid.*: 157)

Furthermore, both authors understand the term 'collective' differently, which indicates the travelling potential of the collective memory concept in the sense of Mieke Bal. Nora does not base his conception of memory sites on social groups in the sense that

Halbwachs does, thus the term ‘collective’ stands for a national symbolic approach for the former, while the latter understands it in terms of the dynamics within small social groups. Hence, Nora is not so much interested in the communicative processes of collective memory, but rather in defining a collective historical consciousness in the context of the late 20th century (*ibid.*: 158f).

For Halbwachs, the dynamics of the historical, the social and the individual all come together, it is their relations which interest him. He focusses on extant communication, interests and experiences which exist between the individual and the collective, and takes into account the potential problems deriving from this relationship, for instance the gap which might exist between individual experience and the memory of the collective. Overall, Halbwachs focusses on the question of how transgenerational memory transfer works, while Nora is concerned with historical and generational fractions (*ibid.*: 159f).

In conclusion, it can be noted that Halbwachs in his original conception of collective memory advocates a vivid interpersonal transfer of autobiographical memory which both shapes and is shaped by the collective. Nora, who refined the collective memory concept decades later, claims that a natural collective memory no longer exists and that by the end of the 20th century, memory can only be conveyed symbolically. For him, memory is no longer historical but social, no longer political but instead cultural (*ibid.*: 160).

‘Personal experience’ versus ‘national remembrance’ might be a shorthand-distinction which could be drawn between the two pioneers of memory theory. The following chapter will now take into consideration contemporary conceptions of cultural memory. Even though the two original approaches on collective memory presented here seem so radically different, both of them reappear (not seldom combined) in contemporary memory theory, which makes them indispensable in a work on modern Cultural Memory Studies.

2.3. The Conception of Cultural Memory by Aleida and Jan Assmann

2.3.1. Functions, Modes and Dimensions of Memory

2.3.1.1. Communicative vs. Cultural Memory

Moving away from the French research tradition and into the context of German academia, the most widely discussed and most detailed concept of collective memory in the field of Culture Studies has been brought forward by Jan and Aleida Assmann. The two scholars coined the term ‘cultural memory’ in the late 1980s and developed a new systematic and differentiated theory that brings together issues of collective memory and identity construction as well as political legitimation. Their new conception of cultural memory proved to be applicable to most academic disciplines, which made it particularly attractive for interdisciplinary memory research and which has hence greatly contributed to its popularity (Erll, 2017: 24). Jan and Aleida Assmann’s conception draws from both Halbwachs and Nora, which becomes evident when considering the theoretical differentiations they introduce in order to make the memory term more seizable. Their most important distinctions in terms of modes and functions of memory shall be discussed in the following pages.

Jan Assmann introduces two different forms of collective memory in his important study *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization* (1992; Eng. 2011). Even though his work is centrally dedicated to ancient societies rather than to contemporary ones, his distinctions nonetheless remain crucial. Assmann distinguishes between what he calls the ‘communicative memory’ and the ‘cultural memory’ of a community. He writes: “Collective memory functions in two ways: through the mode of ‘foundational memory’ that relates to origins, and that of ‘biographical memory’ that concerns personal experiences and their framework – that is, the recent past” (Assmann, 2011: 37)

The communicative memory is concerned with the recent past, hence the period of time which lies about eighty to one hundred years behind. In this frame of memory, members of the community actively remember certain past events and communicatively share their experiences with their contemporaries. Generational memory falls into the frame of communicative memory as it is “formed, vouched for, and communicated solely by way of personal experience” (*ibid.*: 36). Once the generational limit of approximately eighty years is reached, those communicatively shared memories disappear, they make space for new ones as the people who once embodied them pass away (*ibid.*: 34ff).

The second form of collective memory is what Jan Assmann calls cultural memory. This form of memory is concerned with the times of origin rather than with recent events, it relies on sign systems instead of social interactions. It supports memory and identity and thus fulfills an institutionalized, mnemotechnical function within a community. Cultural memory manifests itself in the form of rituals, dances, myths, artworks and writing, and – unlike communicative memory – it can be understood as an artificial construction rather than a natural form of remembrance due to the intended implementation of its fixed forms (*ibid.*: 37).

However, even though cultural memory focusses on fixed points in the past, it is not an exact replica of the past itself. It is rather a plurality of “symbolic figures to which memory attaches itself” (*ibid.*) – a line of reasoning not too far removed from Nora’s conception of memory sites. Due to this plurality and flexibility of cultural memory, Assmann equalizes myth and history by stating that the remembered history does not necessarily have to be factual. He instead suggests that “one might even say that cultural memory transforms factual into remembered history, thus turning it into myth. [...] This does not make it unreal – on the contrary, this is what makes it real, in the sense that it becomes a lasting, normative, and formative power” (*ibid.*: 38). Assmann hence confirms both the reconstructiveness and subjectivity of the memory of the past, which have already been put forward by Halbwachs and Nora. He furthermore verifies the fact that this collectively shared knowledge of the origin is a way of keeping the “foundational past alive in the present, and [that] this connection to the past provides a basis for the identity of the remembering group” (*ibid.*).

Jan Assmann understands these two forms of collective memory as two idealized types of memory, “two extremes of a sliding scale” (*ibid.*: 41), which in reality are not that clearly distinguishable due to the continuous evolution of society which cannot always be grasped in the form of clear generational cuts. However, a problem which Assmann’s two forms of memory bear is that, in their attempt to remember the recent and the ancient, they appear to be “two ends without a middle” (*ibid.*: 35): Once communicative memory fades and cultural memory takes its place, a phenomenon which Assmann describes as both strange and typical (*ibid.*: 34) sets in: The term ‘floating gap’ was coined by the ethnologist Jan Vansina and describes the period of time in which communicative memory ends, but cultural memory has not yet begun. Between the remembered recent history and the

remembered foundational history of the group there is a gap of no remembrance which moves along as history moves forward and which isn't covered by either form of collective memory (*ibid.*; also Erll, 2017: 25).

The most crucial characteristics that Assmann ascribes to cultural memory are its re-constructiveness and its fixed forms through which a group constructs its common identity. Even though Assmann and Nora both suggest symbolic figures of remembrance,

	Communicative Memory	Cultural Memory
Content	Historical experiences in the framework of individual biographies	Mythical history of origins, events in an absolute past
Forms	Informal, without much form, natural growth, arising from interaction, everyday	Organized, extremely formal, ceremonial communication, festival
Media	Living, organic memories, experiences, hearsay	Fixed objectifications, traditional symbolic classification and staging through words, pictures, dance, and so forth
Time structure	80-100 years, with a progressive present spanning three-four generations	Absolute past of a mythical, primeval age
Carriers	Nonspecific, contemporary witnesses within a memory community	Specialized tradition bearers

Picture 1: Characteristics of Communicative and Cultural Memory (Assmann, 2011: 41)

Assmann defines the cultural memory as compulsorily uniform for the members of the group, a perspective in which he moves away from Nora's open conception of individual versions of collective memory. Finally, Jan Assmann stresses reflexivity as one of the crucial characteristics of cultural memory, as it reflects the self-image of the group as well as itself in a self-reflexive manner (*ibid.*:25f).

Assmann's distinction between communicative and cultural memory is useful for this research project, as it helps us understand that recent generational memory works through different means than cultural memory does. According to Assmann's definition, the Cold War-period, which is the period of time we are dealing with here, still falls into the domain of communicative memory due to its recentness. However, as this research project is concerned with a work of literature and hence with the written word which Jan Assmann ascribes to the domain of cultural memory, communicative and cultural memory have to be considered in combination. Nonetheless, one has to bear in mind that Jan Assmann's research focusses on ancient cultures and their memories rather than on contemporary ones, which has a crucial impact on the way he defines cultural memory. Aleida Assmann, who has been focusing on more recent chapters of the past, applies the cultural memory term not only to memories of origin, but also to the collective remembrance of the identity-

constituting recent history of a community. Due to the historical period at stake, this work will hence follow Aleida Assmann's approach and widen the cultural memory concept according to her terms.

2.3.1.2. Memory as *Ars* and *Vis*

As Jan Assmann, Aleida Assmann too grounds her memory theories in reflections about early civilizations and ancient cultures. Unlike her husband, though, she moves away from this focus in her later works and instead comes to examine contemporary memory dynamics and developments, especially in the context of German memory culture after the Second World War. However, before taking into account those recent contributions of hers, two further distinctions regarding the collective memory term which Assmann puts forward in her earlier works shall briefly be introduced.

Aleida Assmann's *Erinnerungsräume* (2010a) is nowadays considered one of the groundbreaking works of contemporary cultural memory theory, mainly due to the fact that the author drastically specifies the cultural memory term by introducing several new and distinctive functions and modes which all contribute to the applicability and tangibility of the cultural memory concept. The first crucial distinction Assmann introduces is what she calls the two different functions of memory deriving from Literary Studies, namely the function of *Ars* and the function of *Vis* (Assmann, 2010a: 27-32).

According to Assmann's definition, the *Ars*-function of memory is based on the ancient technique of memorizing – also known as mnemonics – which reaches back to the Roman Empire. In those times, events were memorized (spatially) and later remembered in the form of images and visual memorization. In general, the *Ars*-function of memory can be understood as a process of saving and recording an event, an experience or a content of any kind. It is a mechanical process of storing and retrieving in which the input never differs from the output. In literary memory research, this antique technique of mnemonics has served as a guideline since the 1960s and was later complemented with modern approaches such as intertextuality, psychoanalysis and deconstruction theory. The reason why the *Ars*-function used to be so relevant in literary memory research is easily explained: In the case of a book, a letter or any written document, the entire amount of transmitted information remains intact over time. No matter how ancient or recent a book is, its content does not

change between its creation and its retrieving, time has hence no structural influence on this technique of remembrance (*ibid.*: 27f).

Opposed to the Ars-function of memory is the Vis-function, which differs from the former due to the dimension of time which becomes particularly relevant to it. Unlike the storage process of *memorization*, the process of *remembering* is submitted to the active involvement of time, which leads to the fact that the remembered content and the retrieved content can differ significantly from one another. In essence, mnemonics are characterized through the identical input and output they produce, while memory in its Vis-function is constituted by the difference between the two. Due to this dynamic, Aleida Assmann understands the storage process (Ars, ‘Gedächtnis’) and the remembering process (Vis, ‘Erinnerung’) as opposites and suggests a terminological and theoretical distinction between the two (*ibid.*: 29).

Unlike memorization, the process of remembering is an involuntary one, and its contents are generally reconstructive. The manner in which a remembered content is retrieved depends greatly on the circumstances of the present, which can lead to significant alterations between the original and the recalled memory. Memory is hence continuously exposed to a transformation process, and Assmann suggests to consider the Vis-function of memory as a force or energy rather than as a closed-off container for remembered contents:

Diese Energie kann die Möglichkeit des Rückrufs erschweren wie im Fall des Vergessens oder blockieren wie im Fall des Verdrängens, sie kann aber auch von einer Einsicht, vom Willen oder einer neuen Bedürfnislage gelenkt sein und zu einer Neubestimmung der Erinnerungen veranlassen. (*ibid.*)

Summarizing these observations, it can hence be noted that the storage process of Ars is working against time and against the dynamics of forgetting that go along with the temporal dimension, while the memory process of Vis is incorporated into time, which is actively shaping its contents (*ibid.*: 29f).

Unlike the storage process, whose goal it is not to lose or forget any information, the memory process greatly depends on forgetting, remembering and forgetting need to be understood as allies precisely because memory and forgetting always co-constitute and condition one another. This forgetfulness is what fundamentally differentiates the human capacity of memory from a mechanical/technological capacity of storage. This interaction between remembering and forgetting can be understood as an anthropological force which

constitutes the very nature of humanity (*ibid.*: 30). We shall return to these dynamics once again later on.

By putting forward the position that memory has to be considered a productive force rather than a merely reproductive entity (*ibid.*: 31), Assmann confirms what previous scholars such as Halbwachs and Benjamin have suggested regarding the reconstruction of the past and the flexibility and instability of memory contents. This research project will in the following greatly rely on Assmann’s conception of memory in its Vis-function, as the structural impact of time will be of particular relevance in the upcoming literary analysis.

2.3.1.3. *Funktionsgedächtnis vs. Speichergedächtnis*

Another important conceptual distinction brought forward by Aleida Assmann is concerned with the relationship between memory and history – an issue which is of crucial relevance in contemporary Memory Studies as well as to the work at hand.

While early memory-theorists like Halbwachs, Nora and Nietzsche understand memory and history as opposites, Assmann’s goal is to find a more productive way of putting the two in relation with one another. Original memory theories distinguish between a constructivist, identity-ensuring memory on the one hand, which has to justify its claim for existence against a neutral and objective historiography on the other hand. Aleida Assmann summarizes this opposition with the terms ‘embodied vs. disembodied’, or ‘inhabited vs. uninhabited’:

Memory as such (‘inhabited memory’) belongs to living entities with specific perspectives, while history (‘uninhabited memory’) belongs to everyone and no one at the same time, it is objective and hence not identity-ensuring (*ibid.*: 133).

Inhabited Memory	Uninhabited Memory
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bound to an agent; a group, an institution or an individual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not bound to a specific agent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds a bridge between past, present and future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distinguishes radically between past, present and future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acts selectively, remembers some things and forgets others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interested in everything; everything is equally important
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conveys values from which identity-profiles and norms of action derive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigates truth and suspends values and norms

Picture 2: *Inhabited vs. Uninhabited Memory (Assmann, 2010a: 133)*

In contemporary academia, the distinction between memory and history is not as strict anymore, and some scholars have gone to the extent of equalizing the two concepts, as they believe that the recording of history always happens within the framework of memory and is hence conditioned by meaning construction, identity and partiality. Assmann is critical of both positions, she understands memory and history neither as opposites nor as the same,

so she instead proposes to understand the two concepts as two different modes of memory. In contrast to Nietzsche's conception, those two modes should not be understood as forced alternatives, but as terms that do not necessarily exclude or replace one another and which can therefore be productively related and applied in a new analytical way (*ibid.*: 133f).

Assmann suggests that the relationship between inhabited and uninhabited memory is to be understood as two complementary modes of memory. She calls the inhabited memory *Funktionsgedächtnis* (function-memory) and the uninhabited memory *Speichergedächtnis* (storage-memory). The core characteristics of the function-memory are group-acquisition, future-orientation, selectivity and values, while the storage-memory of the historical sciences is to be understood as a second-degree memory that absorbs everything which has lost its vital relation to the present and can hence be considered as 'the memory of memories' (*ibid.*: 134). The storage-memory hence fulfils the purpose of keeping what is not momentarily needed by the function-memory, but could be needed again at some point in the future: "Unter dem weiten Dach der historischen Wissenschaften können solche unbewohnten Relikte und besitzerlos gewordenen Bestände aufbewahrt, aber auch so wieder aufbereitet werden, daß sie neue Anschlußmöglichkeiten zum Funktionsgedächtnis bieten" (*ibid.*). Objects and memory contents which have lost their value can thus be preserved within the domain of the historical sciences, always bearing the possibility of gaining new meaning and someday reenter the sphere of the active function-memory.

What distinguishes the content of the function-memory from the one of the storage-memory is the fact that the former only takes into account fractions of the potential memory contents available. It is highly selective and only absorbs elements which are associated with meaning. Experiences which do not contribute to the constitution of identity or to the coherence of a life-story become neutral in meaning and fall out of the reach of the function-memory and into the domain of storage-memory. As Assmann points out, Maurice Halbwachs was the first to acknowledge this difference between meaningful and meaningless elements of memory, and he claimed that only elements of meaning were able to enter the sphere of collective memory. Meaning construction hence stabilizes memory, and at the same time memory is responsible for the construction of meaning. All elements contained in the function-memory are characterized through meaning, even if this meaning is only reconstructed retrospectively (*ibid.*: 135f). For the memory content conveyed in the novel, this observation will be crucial.

The storage-memory, on the other hand, contains all elements that do not fit into the meaning configuration of a biographical life-story, but are not fully forgotten either. This mode of memory is hence an unconscious one and should be perceived not as the opposite, but rather as the background of the function-memory. By introducing the distinction between background and foreground, the binary opposition between inhabited and uninhabited memory is resolved and a new perspective model replaces the former dualistic one (*ibid.*: 136).

This new relationship between function-memory and storage-memory indicates that the active, conscious and inhabited function-memory can change, that its elements can be reassembled and that new elements which have been slumbering in the domain of the amorphous storage-memory can find their way back into the inhabited, embodied sphere of memory. Assmann explains this constant exchange of information between the two memory modes as following:

Die Tiefenstruktur des Gedächtnisses mit ihrem Binnenverkehr zwischen aktualisierten und nichtaktualisierten Elementen ist die Bedingung der Möglichkeit von Veränderung und Erneuerung in der Struktur des Bewußtseins, das ohne den Hintergrund jener amorphen Reserve erstarren würde. (*ibid.*)

The purpose of the storage-memory is hence to keep what is left out of the vivid function-memory, but at the same time to ensure the renewal and the evolution of the function-memory through the constant exchange of elements. It contains additional knowledge which can correct, renew or stabilize the function-memory without creating meaning on its own. These characteristics of the modes of memory apply to individual memory as well as to cultural memory (*ibid.*).

While the distinction between cultural function- and storage-memory would be impossible in oral cultures, literate cultures have found a way of storing knowledge extending the one crucial to the sustaining of the identity of a group. Memory and identity are hence less closely connected in literate cultures, as part of the total information can be externally stored and thus the two modes of memory emerge. Cultural function-memory is – just like individual function-memory – bound to a living subject that understands itself as its carrier. Nations and states can be understood as such subjects, as they constitute themselves through a function-memory by reconstructing specific past versions on which they base their common sense of identity. The cultural storage-memory is not bound to a subject, it does not actively constitute identity and functions as a kind of archive for

additional information which forms the background in front of which the identity-ensuring contents of the function-memory are shaping the cultural sense of memory of the collective (*ibid.*: 137). Summarizing the functions of the two memory-modes on a cultural level, Aleida Assmann writes:

Auf kollektiver Ebene enthält das Speichergedächtnis das unbrauchbar, obsolet und fremd Gewordene, das neutrale, das identitäts-abstrakte Sachwissen, aber auch das Repertoire verpaßter Möglichkeiten, alternativer Optionen und ungenutzter Chancen. Beim Funktionsgedächtnis dagegen handelt es sich um ein angeeignetes Gedächtnis, das aus einem Prozeß der Auswahl, der Verknüpfung, der Sinnkonstruktion – oder, mit Halbwachs zu sprechen: der Rahmenbedingungen – hervorgeht. (*ibid.*)

Aleida Assmann's new approach of putting history and memory into relation with one another is a crucial advancement in Cultural Memory Studies and plays a particularly important part in this work: According to Assmann's reflections, historical events do have an impact on cultural memory, but they however run in the background, as they are part of the unconscious storage-memory of a collective or an individual. Identity-constituting experiences, on the other hand, shape the conscious function-memory and hence determine the collective memory and the identity-ensuring past-versions of a group. In terms of the literary analysis of this work, this distinction will be fundamental: The way a person or a group remembers the GDR today does not necessarily mean that this past version fully agrees with the historical facts, but it does not mean either that this very past version is automatically wrong, as the vivid function-memory is always constituted of the elements that ensure a sense of identity rather than by the elements that confirm recorded history *per se*.

2.3.1.4. From Individual to Collective Memory

In specifying different aspects and functions of memory, Aleida Assmann also comes across the question of how exactly individual and collective memory interact, depend and condition one another. She tackles this very issue at the beginning of her book *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit* (2014b). Assmann introduces more detailed dimensions of memory which eventually open the field for a discourse about new memory formations, which – according to Assmann's suggestion – are more suitable to describe the complexity of memory as well as the interaction between the individual and the collective sphere. Furthermore, Assmann's

memory dimensions bring more clarity regarding the difference between the ‘collective’ and the ‘cultural’ memory term (Assmann, 2014b: 21-36).

Assmann begins her reflections by stating that every individual is part of a variety of communities which she refers to as ‘we-groups’ (‘Wir-Gruppen’, *ibid.*: 21). Those we-groups reach from families over friends to nations and cultures. However, the different groups an individual is part of are neither equally binding nor equally enduring. Family memory, for instance, is usually shared between three generations during whose lifetime experiences and narratives are shared through communication and interaction. Cultures, nations and religions, on the other hand, are more enduring and exist over a considerably longer period of time – their time-horizon is not bound to the lifetime of an individual or a generation, which leads to the fact that the members of these we-groups absorb temporal dimensions which extend the horizon of their personal experience drastically. Individual memory is hence never limited to personal experience alone, but it is always influenced by collective aspects of memory. Assmann refers to these time-horizons as ‘memory-horizons’ and states that all different we-groups create unique forms of memory which can interfere with and overlay one another. Due to that fact, she proposes to further divide individual and collective memory into four memory formations which differ spatially and temporally as well as in group-size and stability. The formations the author proposes are (i) individual memory, (ii) social memory, (iii) memory of the political collective/nation, and (iv) cultural memory (*ibid.*: 21ff).

Regarding the individual sphere of memory, Assmann confirms what has been established at an earlier point of this work, which is why this aspect shall only be briefly touched upon. The author defines individual memory as ‘the dynamic medium of subjective experience-processing’ (*ibid.*: 25) and underlines the fact that biographical memory is the foundation of all experiences, relationships and individual identity construction. However, only very small parts of these biographical memories are active, but the majority slumbers deep within the subconscious and can only be awakened through an external impulse (*ibid.*: 24).

What all episodic memories have in common is for once their perspective character, which leads to the fact that they can neither be exchanged nor appropriated. Furthermore, those individual memories are always cross-linked, they never exist by themselves but are always embedded into a larger context of other memories which confirm and stabilize one

another. In addition to that, individual memories are generally fragmented, as they appear as unformed, cut-out momentums. Only through narration are those momentums brought into a structure and are hence stabilized. Finally, individual memories are ephemeral, they change over time and depend greatly on the conditions of the present. Not only can their contents change, but also their biographical relevance as well as the criteria of assessment can be altered over time. In other words, what was once important to us can become less important as we move forward in time, and usually it is the frequently repeated and narratively embedded memories that endure the longest. However, individual memory is bound to the lifespan of an individual: as the carrier passes, his/her memories dissolve (*ibid.*: 24f).

The fact that individual memory is largely shaped by social surroundings has already been stated by Halbwachs, which is why Assmann regards it as a form of communicative memory, as it depends on physical proximity, shared lifeworlds and continuous interaction (*ibid.*: 25).

The second formation of memory which the author proposes, namely the formation of social memory, is closely related, but however not identical to individual memory. Assmann assumes that historical key experiences which are shared by members of a generation have a crucial impact on how the individual memories of these members are framed. Based on the work of Karl Mannheim, who suggested that people make their most influential and personality-determining experiences at the ages between twelve and twenty-five, Assmann proposes that individual memory always happens within the framework of a larger horizon of generational memory, which leads to the fact that members of the same historical generation usually share specific values, norms and cultural strategies of interpretation (*ibid.*: 26).

According to this generational take on memory, Assmann assumes that the memory of a society can be sectioned according to generational clusters, containing all the individual memories which shape societal memory as a whole and which are in themselves framed by generational values forged by a common background of experience. Whereas members of the same generation usually share the same experiential framework when assessing their individual memories, members of different generations often experience tensions and conflicts, as they rely on different generational frameworks when making sense of shared or individual experiences. Assmann states that every generation develops its own access to the past and does not simply adapt the perspectives chosen as a reference by the previous

generations. As a result, the generational ‘guidelines’ which help individuals assess experiences are dynamic; they change whenever a generational shift in society occurs, which happens approximately every thirty years. Whenever such a shift takes place, the memory-profile of a society changes drastically, which leads to a constant renewal of societal memory due to ever-shifting dominant generations and their shared value-systems framing experiential interpretation and memory-formation (*ibid.*: 27).

Just like individual memory, social memory is bound to the lifespan of individuals, or more concretely, to the lifespan of the generations which communicatively share this specific social memory. Even though external media such as literature, images or diaries can support this generational memory, Assmann states that it can endure three to four generations at most, which is when vivid interaction comes to an end and the shared past can no longer be kept alive in an interactive, interpersonal discourse. Due to this specific dynamic, Assmann compares the social memory to a shadow that continuously follows the present and always covers the same amount of time passed from any point in history (*ibid.*: 28).

Assmann’s differentiation between individual and social memory supports the claim Halbwachs has made many years before: Individual memory is indeed socially framed, which leads to the facts that individual memory always contains collective components. When we speak of ‘collective memory’, we hence do not necessarily speak of ‘cultural memory’, even though cultural memory is always a collective phenomenon. However, it now becomes clear why ‘collective’ and ‘cultural memory’ should not simply be used as synonyms: while the latter is always part of the former, the same doesn’t necessarily apply vice versa. In order to take the step from individual/social memory to cultural memory, a far more complex process has to be taken into account.

The transition from individual/neuronal memory to social memory is very fluent. The memories and narratives of others are being incorporated into one’s personal horizon of experience and memory, and to some extent the lines between the experienced and the appropriated become blurry: “Die Grenzen zwischen dem selbst Erlebten und dem nur Gehörten und identifikatorisch Nachempfundenen sind dabei nicht immer leicht zu ziehen” (*ibid.*: 33f). However, the key concern in the transition from individual to social memory is the extension and confirmation of one’s own experiences through the adaptation of new perspectives and the memories of others (*ibid.*).

The transition from social to cultural memory, on the other hand, is neither fluent nor easy, which Assmann ascribes to the fact that lived experience is no longer the foundation of this third memory formation. As the participation horizon of cultural memory demands drastic expansion, symbolic media are the only way to support its contents. Experience is hence becoming 'disembodied' and can now be appropriated even by the ones who have not made certain first-hand experiences themselves. Through this process of disconnecting vivid experience and re-connecting disembodied experience to memory instead, cultural memory is no longer bound to the lifespan of a mortal person, but it can live on infinitely through materialized and institutionalized symbols. These disembodied experiences, however, have to be continuously re-connected to living memories and appropriated by living individuals. Through this very process of appropriation and the hence resulting identification with collective cultural memory contents, individuals acquire their cultural identity (complementing their personal as well as their social one) (*ibid.*: 34).

Compared to individual and social memory, cultural memory thus differs significantly in terms of its participation horizon as well as its temporal horizon. Whereas social memory is based on personal interaction and communicatively transmitted exchange of individual memories, collective cultural memory is based on experiences which are no longer connected to living entities, but are supported by material data storage devices. This fundamental difference ensures that cultural memory can endure generational renewal without being bound to the lifespan of its carriers, as the cultural symbols transmitting its contents are not biologically limited. Cultural memory is thus a long-term memory which can be considered as temporally unlimited, as its media (such as images, rituals, monuments and literature) generally endure over time. These symbolic forms of transmission distinguish cultural memory from generational memory or family memory, as their purpose is to stabilize collectively shared memory for future generations to come. Through ritualistic repetition or consumption of the symbolically transmitted content, later generations are presented with the opportunity to participate in the collective act of remembrance without relying on personal or embodied experience in order to do so (*ibid.*: 34f).

Foundation:	biologically transmitted		symbolically transmitted	
Processing:	neuronal	communicative	collective	individual
Memory-Formation:	Individual memory	Social memory	Political memory	Cultural memory

Picture 3: Overview of Assmann's memory-formations (Assmann, 2014b: 36)

Eventually, Assmann comes to the conclusion that the three core dimensions of memory (organic, social and cultural) help us distinguish better between different memory formations and hence help clarify the term ‘collective memory’ in a new way. The author reminds us, however, that individual memory cannot simply be mirrored onto a collective level, but that we have to bear in mind that institutions, nations, cultures and all forms of collectives *make* their own memory through signs and symbols instead of naturally *having* it. Nevertheless, even on a collective level, the memory term does not necessarily have to be metaphorical, as long as the connection to the past enables the active construction of identity in some way (*ibid.*: 35).

However, Assmann’s dimensions of memory also indicate that the term ‘collective memory’ is too vague to clearly distinguish between different forms of memory according to their collective character alone. As previously mentioned, also individual and social memory incorporate collective elements due to the social contexts in which they are created. Cultural memory too possesses a collective character, as it enables a sense of community which reaches beyond generations and historical periods. According to Assmann’s definition, ‘collective’ in a closer sense only applies to what she defines as ‘political’ or ‘national memory’, as it is the memory-formation which fosters the strongest sense of ‘we-identity’ (‘Wir-Identität’, *ibid.*: 36) and loyalty (*ibid.*: 35f). What exactly Assmann’s take on the dimension of political memory entails will be discussed in depth in the following chapter.

2.3.2. History and Cultural Memory – Questions of *Zeitgeschichte*

2.3.2.1. German Memory Culture today: Problems and Solutions

While Aleida Assmann's early works are mainly concerned with the concept of cultural memory itself and the sub-concepts surrounding it, her focus of research later shifts toward more concrete dynamics of memory culture. In her recent works, Assmann analyzes contemporary cultural memory phenomena, and pays special attention to the German memory culture after the Second World War. These recent contributions to the field of Memory Studies are of particular relevance for this work, as Assmann now moves away from the general cultural memory term and towards more applicable approaches of cultural memory theory. The fact that Assmann focusses on German memory culture is hereby especially helpful, and even though her scientific interest is largely concerned with the memory of the Holocaust, her approaches will be highly relevant and useful during the analysis of this work.

The following chapters of this work will provide an overview of the most important ideas Assmann puts forward regarding the contemporary phenomena which shape German memory culture, starting with the following question: What are the most pressing issues regarding memory culture in Germany today, and to what extent can these issues be resolved?

Two of Assmann's works are particularly relevant in this context. In both *Geschichte im Gedächtnis* (2014a) as well as in *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit* (2014b), the author identifies several problems regarding German memory culture today, two of which I would like to elaborate on. At this point, we have to revisit the memory formation of 'political/national memory', which Assmann has identified as the one truly collective form of memory (Assmann, 2014b: 36; see section 2.3.1.4.).

The 19th century is known today as the time when nationalism was forged and historicism dominated the field of historical sciences. Friedrich Nietzsche was one of the greatest critics of this historicism, as he feared that the flood of knowledge triggered by this new phenomenon would rob people of their ability to distinguish between what should be remembered and what should be forgotten, leaving them without orientation in life. He was one of the first scholars to acknowledge the importance of forgetting as a constructive part of memory instead of a destructive force, and many researchers – including Assmann – build

upon his arguments when dealing with issues of forgetting as well as with issues of national memory (*ibid.*: 36f; also Assmann, 2010a: 65)

Nietzsche's position regarding the relationship between history and national memory during the era of historicism was very critical. However, Assmann argues that history in an identity constructing way forms the foundation of political/national memory: "Wo Geschichte im Dienst der Identitätsbildung steht, wo sie von den Bürgern angeeignet und von den Politikern beschworen wird, kann man von einem 'politischen' oder 'nationalen Gedächtnis' sprechen" (Assmann, 2014b: 37). Unlike social memory, which is characterized through its polyphony and the constant generational renewal which it is subject to, national memory is far more enduring as well as uniform in its construction, as it is anchored within political institutions and hence acts as a top-down force onto society as a whole (*ibid.*).

Many theoreticians have tried to grasp this very force which holds societies and nations together. However, Assmann borrows one key argument from French theorist Ernest Renan³, who has attempted to pinpoint this force in 1882 and has thereby found an intriguing way of explaining the importance of collective memory for the unity of a nation. Unlike many early theoreticians, Renan believed that it is not their inalterable, unique features like origin, race, language and religion that bring nations together as one, but that there is an emotional, spiritual aspect to every nation which demands constant renewal and does not depend on any external factors to determine one's sense of belonging. He hence introduced the metaphor of a nation's 'soul' as an imagery for this intellectual principle, which was later reformulated and extended through concepts like 'imagined communities', 'collective identity' and 'collective memory' (*ibid.*: 37f).

By adding the idea of a nation's spiritual soul to the already existing idea of a nation's physical body, Renan no longer understands nation as only a community of will, but also as a community of experience. The 'soul' of the nation is its memory, the commonly shared historical experience on which a collective identity can be built. Due to the fact that national memory has to endure over time, these common experiences have to be transferred onto media, accessible for later generations to come without sharing the first-hand experience themselves. Through mental images, narratives and eventually the emergence of myths, those identity-ensuring experiences are detached from their context of origin and are instead

³ Renan (1882) will be quoted after Assmann in the following.

preserved outside of any temporal sphere, so that they can endure and secure a nation's collective identity without any temporal limitations (*ibid.*: 39f).

This very question of how the past has been experienced and how it is being remembered is becoming increasingly important today. Not only historical accuracy, but also issues of appropriation, imaginative interpretation and identity-construction through narration are gaining importance in contemporary research (*ibid.*: 41). Memory and factual 'truth' are hence not always consistent, as the former is always characterized through a specific perspective, a standpoint from which it is seen. Assmann speaks of an 'affective appropriation' (*ibid.*: 40) of history through myths, and elaborates:

Mythos in diesem Sinne ist eine fundierte Geschichte, die nicht durch Historisierung vergeht, sondern mit einer andauernden Bedeutung ausgestattet wird, die die Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart einer Gesellschaft präsent hält und ihr eine Orientierungskraft für die Zukunft abgewinnt. (*ibid.*)

The issue regarding the relationship between memory and truth will be revisited at a later point. For now, let us resume why Renan's insight is of relevance for this work. He assumes that a nation's future orientation is grounded on the construction of a shared past, especially based on shared painful experiences rather than positive ones. These common memories add meaning to the presence and create a kind of imaginative self-image and a sense of shared identity which holds the nation together as one (*ibid.*: 42f).

Bearing this idea in mind, we have arrived at the first problem of German memory culture today: The common ground of experience, which Renan has identified as the 'glue' which keeps a nation together, has been interrupted for nearly three decades during the division of Germany. During this period of separation, people lacked shared experiences, and instead, the East and the West brought forward a significantly different memory fundus which somehow had to be made accessible to everyone after the country's reunion. The fact that there is no shared experience and thus no memory of a shared past during the years of division might be one way to explain why Germany today is still facing difficulties in bringing the former East and West together as one unified nation. Instead of drawing from a common pool of experience, people from either the West or the East rely on the experiences they have made, but those experiences are not shared by the whole of the country today. Like two different experiential frameworks, some people participate in the shared remembrance of the East, and others in the shared remembrance of the West. As long as this experiential gap is not bridged, it is difficult to say if all social and political discrepancies

between the two will ever be overcome and if the people will be able to identify as being part of one nation despite the fact that they lack a certain amount of common experiences.

Aleida Assmann wrote: “Wir sind, mit anderen Worten, zu ganz wesentlichen Teilen das, was wir erinnern und vergessen” (*ibid.*: 61). If we truly are what we remember, it seems little surprising that after only thirty years of reunion, Germany has not yet overcome the gap which has existed in its national memory for almost as long. In her work *Geschichte im Gedächtnis* (2014a), Assmann takes this argument even one step further. In the tradition of Karl Heinz Bohrer, she tries to answer the question whether the German state can truly be one unified nation today, despite its long troublesome history (Assmann, 2014a: 27).

In the course of this attempt, Assmann identifies several problems of German memory culture, the most important of which is the fact that German history has never been one of union, but that it has always been a fragmented history. Due to the many different forms of government as well as the diverse local and regional traditions, no unitary cultural style has ever emerged or taken root throughout the country. Instead, German history has always been characterized through its fragmentation rather than through unity, and whenever unity and the growth of the nation have become a political goal, war and bloodshed were the consequences. Due to this observation, Assmann concludes that German history cannot be understood as one universal master-narrative, but that it rather has to be explored as a collection of single episodes which hold strong memorial value. With this observation, Assmann supports Nora’s claim that ‘sites of memory’ are the best way of accessing the complex and diverse memory episodes which only together shape the history of the German nation (*ibid.*: 28ff).

It now becomes clear that it is not only the division during the Cold War period which has fragmented German national memory, but that there has never been one unified national memory in Germany to begin with. The lack of a common ground of experience thus reaches far back to the origin of the country, and even though some historical experiences are collectively shared, many other identity-ensuring memories are only accessible to subgroups of society and thus have to be understood as single memory sites which can never be brought into one universal formation.

In addition to this general fragmentation of German history and the hence resulting fragmentation of its political memory, Assmann is concerned with a second problem German memory culture is facing today. Once again, she builds upon an argument of Bohrer, who

has stated that Germany's national history has been erased by the shadow that the Holocaust has cast over the past of the country. Whenever one speaks of the German past today, the NS-regime is the first thing that comes to mind, it dominates the historical and political discourse in Germany and has hence become a negative point of reference for the country's national identity (*ibid.*:18).

The traumatic experience of the Holocaust has changed the German self-image drastically. The past is no longer something to be proud of, something that could bring the country together, but it is rather something to be ashamed of. In this context, Assmann quotes the author W.G. Sebald, who once said: "Die Legitimierung einer Nation ist ihr Selbstbewusstsein, das, woran man zurückdenkt, wovon man sich herschreibt. Das fehlt uns vollkommen, unsere Geschichte ist eine Geschichte der Schande" (*ibid.*: 23). This 'history of shame' that Sebald is referring to poses a great challenge to Germany's national memory: Besides the fact that German memory culture is already fragmented in its very nature, the historical experiences made by the country as a whole are so traumatic that the people would rather forget them than use them as a reference-point for a shared national identity. The key question which Assmann poses is whether it is possible for the German nation to establish a national identity despite this fraction between moral and history, and whether the German people can somehow arrive at a common national identity despite the fractured experiences of the past (*ibid.*).

In the context of the German division after the Second World War, the lack of shared experience *during* the time of separation is not the only factor which challenges the emergence of a shared national identity today. It is also the way in which the traumatic NS-experiences were being dealt with which differs significantly between West-Germany and the former GDR. Unlike West-Germany, which had to face the traumatic realization of guilt after the end of the war, the Soviet regime established an artificial mentality of victimization in the East of Germany, leaving its people unable to cope with their guilt and feeding them the idea that the West alone was to blame for what had happened. As a result of that, the post war-period was characterized by the rupture between history and nation and a hence resulting rejection of all national symbols in the West, while the GDR did not face any immediate problems regarding national identity or continuity (*ibid.*: 182).

In this context, Assmann explains that ‘nation’ and ‘history’ can be understood as two elements that nourish, condition and define one another. In the case of Germany, however, this relationship has been extinguished by the horrors of the Second World War. Due to this historical trauma, the German people had to undertake great changes in their traditions and ways of living in the post war-years in order to be able to make a fresh start, in the West even more so than in the East. They had to find a way to free themselves from the past in order to be able to build a future. It was only with the fall of the Berlin Wall that the general rejection of the past, of history and identity came to a sudden end (*ibid.*: 182; 186f).

Once Germany was reunited, the desire for national symbols and a common national identity reemerged for the first time after the Holocaust. The fact that the German people were still not proud of their nation was now perceived as a problem, and counter-strategies for this continuing identity crisis had to be found. One strategy was the attempt of bringing back the educational and pedagogical function of history in the form of public display of those periods which were now often forgotten in the shadow of the Holocaust, but which were nonetheless part of the country’s cultural heritage once (*ibid.*: 187-190).

However, even though German memory culture today has come a long way since 1945, real ‘closure’ in the sense of overcoming the traumatic past and finding a common ground on which one national identity can be fostered has not yet been achieved (*ibid.*: 190f). After outlining the core problems German memory culture faces today, Assmann provides us with some suggestions of what she believes are the crucial factors in order for the country to overcome the fracture in its national memory. The arguments she makes are highly relevant both in the field of Cultural Memory Studies as well as in justifying the importance of the research project at hand.

Assmann is aware of the fact that the relationship between nation and history will never fully be repaired in Germany, but, despite that, she underlines the importance of promoting a reflexive relationship between the two to the young generations by focusing on the traces of the past in the present without either leaving out nor only focussing on the events of the 20th century, but on history as a whole instead. Furthermore, Assmann reminds us that Germany has become a country of immigration, leading up to the fact that the ‘Germans’ themselves today are a heterogeneous group, which has to be taken into account when trying to redefine national identity through history. In accordance with Walter

Benjamin, Assmann suggests that such national identity can only be based on the acknowledgement that there is not one, but many histories that shape the national history of the country. Germany's national history is hence indeed long, but in a diverse way rather than in a universal one. It has been shaped by many histories at once, regional, national or European ones, and thus can only be reconstructed in this very context of multiplicity. When dealing with German national history, we thus have to consider the productive tension between identification and appropriation on the one hand, and distance on the other hand (*ibid.*: 193f).

The importance of Assmann's observations for this work can be summarized as follows: Individual stories (according to Benjamin's notion of the 'multiplicity of histories') are what shapes collective memory as well as collective identity. Only by taking into account these diverse histories coming together will people be able to understand each other's past and thus be able to appropriate all the experiences which are essential for the creation of a commonly shared sense of identity. During the literary analysis of this work, this idea will be at the center of attention. Our goal will be to find out how one individual story – in this case in the form of a literary example – can contribute to society's collective/cultural memory by communicating one small part of history, now made accessible even to those who do not share the collective experience of this very moment in time and space. The question will be whether literature has the power to overcome this experiential memory gap which – according to Renan – is the basis of all collective identity and hence the basis of a unified society.

2.3.2.2. Cultural Trauma and the Importance of Forgetting

Ever since the end of the Second World War, the relationship between what should be remembered and what should be forgotten has been particularly tense in Germany. On the one hand, as previously discussed, many of the experiences were too painful and too mortifying for the people to remember. On the other hand, however, the Holocaust and its aftermaths have brought forward the notion of memory as a responsibility and an 'ethical duty', which indicates that the traumatic past cannot simply be forgotten, not even if the people wanted to in order to move on (Assmann, 2018: 11).

This duality indicates that the dynamics between remembering and forgetting are very complex, and, as we are dealing with the post war-era of German cultural memory, it is of essence to consider the interlink existing between the two concepts. In the course of exploring contemporary phenomena of memory culture, Aleida Assmann has written extensively on both the dynamics of forgetting as well as on strategies of dealing with a traumatic past. The present chapter will provide a summary of her most important research outcomes in the context of this work.

In 2016, Assmann dedicated a whole book entitled *Formen des Vergessens* (2018) to the relationship between cultural memory and forgetting. She builds her argument upon the premise that forgetting in itself is not necessarily a bad thing, as it fulfills important psychological, social and political functions within society. Linguistically, the concept is however misleading, as ‘forgetting’ is usually understood as the opposite of ‘remembering’, which is why the concept of forgetting has been neglected in the field of Memory Studies for a long time. It was only recently that ‘forgetting’ as an object of study has regained importance within the academic discourse, which has led to the fact that nowadays, ‘remembering’ and ‘forgetting’ are no longer perceived as ideal-typical opposites, but instead, the interlink between the two concepts has become a key point of interest in the field of Memory Studies (Assmann, 2018: 11ff).

Unlike the study of memory, research on the field of forgetting faces one crucial methodological problem: As forgetting happens outside our consciousness, it is very difficult to observe, as one can hardly observe something that is no longer there. Aleida Assmann put this issue as follows: “Wie kann man diese negative Energie in Evidenz umsetzen und das, was sich dem Bewusstsein und der Aufmerksamkeit entzieht, beobachten und beschreiben?“ (*ibid.*: 26).

According to Assmann, there are ways of observing the traces, strategies and processes of forgetting, but only as long as something is not yet entirely forgotten. As long as memory still plays an active part, forgetting can be observed either at the exact point at which something drifts away or at which it returns from the sphere of the forgotten back into the domain of memory. These transitions between remembering and forgetting are historically important and can be experienced as either happy or painful, as they determine and re-adjust our relationship to the past, to our knowledge and to the people surrounding us (*ibid.*: 26f).

As the previous paragraph indicates, forgetting does not necessarily mean that something is lost to us forever. Forgotten knowledge can indeed return; in fact, Assmann explains that remembering and forgetting together condition the ever-changing rhythm in which our consciousness is organized: Not everything can be remembered at all times, sometimes elements drift in the background and are being rediscovered at a later point. Remembering and forgetting are hence not necessarily opposites, but they build upon the complex interaction between what Assmann has determined as the function- and the storage-mode of memory, the conscious foreground and the unconscious background. The line of transition between the two is usually blurry and therefore difficult to identify (*ibid.*: 16f, 19; see also section 2.3.1.3.).

Due to the fact that the interaction between remembering and forgetting shapes memory both on an individual as well as on a collective level, we can note that a functional memory generally moves between the two extremes of a ‘total recall’ and a ‘total amnesia’, none of which are desirable on their own on either level. Assmann writes:

Das Gedächtnis, in dem sich Erinnern und Vergessen auf vielfältige Weisen miteinander verschränken, arbeitet zwischen den Extremen ‘alles speichern’ und ‘alles löschen’. Dafür eröffnet es unterschiedliche Räume für das, worauf später noch einmal zurückgegriffen werden kann. (*ibid.*: 17f)

Contents that can be retrieved again even though they have been forgotten are hence not equally accessible, and while a certain amount of information can return to the sphere of remembering, other contents can indeed get lost forever (*ibid.*).

The acts of remembering and forgetting can both occur either actively or passively. However, according to Assmann, information that has been forgotten passively is far more likely to return than actively forgotten memory contents, which are usually irretrievable: “Was mit Gewalt zerstört oder mit Absicht entsorgt worden ist, kann nicht mehr zurückgeholt werden” (*ibid.*: 20). In terms of cultural objects, Assmann reminds us that just like every memory content, they are flexible and thus move within this field of tension between remembering and forgetting. Even forgotten objects can return and become part of cultural memory again, which makes cultural memory in itself a dynamic, ever-changing object of research (*ibid.*: 19f).

Techniques of forgetting:

Concluding the previous reflection, we have seen that the concept of ‘forgetting’ entails much more than a simple ‘loss of memory contents’. Forgetting is diverse, it can occur actively or passively. In addition to that, the term itself appears to be too broad to indicate all the different strategies and practices through which the very act of ‘forgetting something’ can be achieved. Consequently, Assmann suggests a number of techniques of forgetting which help us distinguish between different forms of forgetting and hence provide a useful way of further specifying the concept (*ibid.*: 21-26). As those techniques will be helpful during the analysis of this work, they shall briefly be introduced.

Assmann proposes that forgetting can be achieved through several strategies whose outcome does not necessarily have to be permanent in the same way. According to her, the most radical form of forgetting is the erasing (*Löschen*) of a trace, which permanently breaks the connection between the present and the past (*ibid.*: 21). Less permanent than erasing is the technique of covering up (*Zudecken*), in which case a memory is not truly lost, but it is removed from communication. Even though the content of this memory is still remembered by all, the memory itself has lost its emotional charge which used to cause conflict between the parties involved (*ibid.*: 21f). Very similar to the technique of covering up is the one of remaining silent (*Schweigen*). Painful events of the past are not forgotten, but are banned from communication so that the members of a group find new ways of living together peacefully. The mutual silence can be understood as a form of social agreement, but, if this silence is caused by experiences of severe trauma, it can go beyond such social agreements and instead enable the unconscious preservation of the silenced memory contents (*ibid.*: 22f).

The strategy of concealing (*Verbergen*) entails what Sigmund Freud has identified as the suppression of memory. It describes the desire to get rid of emotions such as guilt or shame, but concealing these emotions does not usually dissolve them. Instead, this technique can stabilize unpleasant experiences psychologically (*ibid.*: 22). On the individual level, the suppression of memory is often ineffective, for suppressed memories tend to return. On a collective level, however, concealing and thus suppressing certain memories can be an effective way of overcoming the past, for the same dynamics do not always apply on the individual and the collective level, as we have previously discussed and as Kansteiner has suggested in his example of collective suppression introduced earlier (Kansteiner, 2002; see section 2.1.3.).

Moving on, overwriting (*Überschreiben*) is a technique which mainly applies to cultural objects or places which lose their original purpose or meaning overtime and are transformed into something else. Such a transformation changes the symbolic value of an object or place, and the memory of it is thus being altered, but not necessarily erased (Assmann, 2018: 23f).

Two closely connected techniques of forgetting are neutralizing (*Neutralisieren*) on the one, and denying (*Leugnen*) on the other hand. According to Assmann's definition, an event, person or place is neutralized once it loses its relevance within society and moves from the center of cultural memory into the periphery (*ibid.*: 25). This dynamic of forgetting can be induced by a shift of generations which usually brings upon a shift in cultural memory (see also section 2.3.1.4.). Denying, however, is the opposed strategy. Events or people are kept in the center of attention, but usually under a negative premise. Denying a memory or an experience demands a big effort, as people who are in denial constantly have to try to convince opponents of their position and hence never get the chance to truly forget (*ibid.*).

The last two techniques of forgetting which Assmann puts forward are ignoring (*Ignorieren*) and losing (*Verlieren*). Events, objects or people that are ignored are excluded from attention, but on a personal level, this withdrawal of attention can be easily revoked. However, when it comes to cultural ignorance, bigger structural changes are necessary in order to bring such ignored objects or events back into the center of attention, for example a fundamental shift in the generally recognized values or norms of a collective (*ibid.*: 24).

Finally, the process of losing describes the involuntary forgetting which usually occurs on an individual level. Individuals perceive it as a loss once memories which used to be important to their lives fade away, and they thus often try to counteract this dynamic of forgetting, for example by collecting souvenirs or photographs (*ibid.*: 26).

During the literary analysis of this work, we will revisit these techniques of forgetting, especially once we discuss the specific memory phenomena that come into play when dealing with the era of the German division.

Forms of forgetting:

After formulating these universal techniques of forgetting, Assmann applies her findings more concretely and puts forward seven forms of collective forgetting⁴. We shall now take a look at those general dynamics of forgetting and afterwards narrow our focus towards the specific mechanisms which come into play when considering the special case of overcoming traumatic events, as this will be of particular importance for the analysis of the object of this research project.

1. Automatic forgetting 2. Storage-forgetting 3. Selective forgetting	Forgetting as a filter	Neutral
4. Destructive/repressive forgetting 5. Defensive forgetting	Forgetting as a weapon	Negative
6. Constructive forgetting 7. Therapeutic forgetting	Forgetting as a possibility to build a future	Positive

Picture 4: Forms of Forgetting by Assmann (Assmann, 2018: 68)

Aleida Assmann distinguishes between neutral, negative, and positive forms of forgetting. In its neutral functions, forgetting fulfills the role of a mental filter and serves as a means for the reduction of the

complexity of life. In its negative functions, forgetting is used as a weapon. It can stabilize social repression and abusive power relations and provide protection for an aggressor. Positive forms of forgetting, on the other hand, provide ways of coping with a traumatic past and facilitate the process of moving on into a better future (*ibid.*: 67).

Beginning with the neutral functions of forgetting, the first form that Assmann suggests is what she calls *automatic forgetting*. This category can be understood as the natural mode through which societies and cultures constantly renew themselves materially, biologically or technically. The author emphasizes the fact that not remembering, but forgetting is the natural state of society, as it is characterized by the constant exchange of objects, ideas and individuals. Remembering demands a great deal of effort, while forgetting happens constantly and unnoticed, which is the reason why remembering should be understood as an exception instead of a rule. Assmann writes:

Nicht das Erinnern, sondern das Vergessen ist also der Normalzustand in Kultur und Gesellschaft. Vergessen geschieht lautlos, unspektakulär und überall, Erinnern ist demgegenüber die unwahrscheinliche Ausnahme, die auf bestimmten Voraussetzungen beruht. (*ibid.*: 30)

⁴ Assmann bases her approach on the works of Daniel Schacter (2001) and Paul Connerton (2008), who have both developed categories in order to structure dynamics of memory and forgetting (Assmann, 2018: 28f).

While the individual often experiences this loss of memory as painful, on the macro-level of society these dynamics of forgetting are hardly noticeable. The two factors that come into play here are ‘social forgetting’, which describes the constant exchange of experiences brought upon by generational renewal, and ‘material elimination’, referring to the fact that the material and technical objects surrounding us during our lives are continuously replaced, especially in today’s society of consumption (*ibid*: 31f).

However, even though automatic forgetting shapes cultures and societies, it also has its limits, for example when it comes to overcoming traumatic experiences. Although time can indeed heal many wounds, certain experiences and memories demand ethical decisions regarding the question of what can or cannot be forgotten, for instance when it comes to techniques such as denial or the concealing of past events (*ibid*: 35). In this context, Assmann wrote: “Alles ändert sich, wenn nicht der natürliche Tod, sondern Folter und die massenhafte Ermordung ziviler Opfer zwischen uns und der Vergangenheit stehen” (*ibid*.: 36). Whenever a traumatic past needs to be overcome, other forms and dynamics of forgetting become necessary, as the natural process of healing, renewal and replacement of memories through time is no longer sufficient.

Assmann’s second form of forgetting is what she calls ‘*Verwahrensvergessen*’ (Eng.: ‘storage-forgetting’⁵), a term she borrows from F.G. Jünger and which describes the storage of things and information that are no longer in active use, but that are also not forgotten for good (*ibid*.: 38). Assmann states that the sphere of storage-forgetting is the place in which a very limited amount of objects can prolong their lifetime and hence escape the dynamics of automatic forgetting brought upon them through the natural course of time. Institutions, archives and museums provide such a place for those objects, and, similarly to cultural memory itself, we can once again observe the two modes of function- and storage-memory coming together and determining the very nature of this mode of forgetting (*ibid*: 37).

One distinction we need to take into account here is the one between the *canon* and the *archive*. The canon, in this case, symbolizes the function-memory: The objects that are being stored here are not forgotten, their knowledge is being rediscovered and appropriated by every new generation to come, thus prolonging the life of those very few objects that were able to find acceptance in the exclusive canon of a society. Through this constant

⁵ My translation.

reactivation of the contents, a group is able to create a common sense of memory as well as a collective identity which is anchored in the past and guides the collective in the future. The archive, on the other hand, fulfills the function of the storage-memory. Everything that is absorbed here is no longer part of the active memory culture, but also has not yet fallen victim to the total destruction caused by automatic forgetting (*ibid.*). However, we shall discover at a later point that it is not only the canon making an important contribution to an active memory culture.

Summing up, it can be noted that the form of ‘Verwahrensvergessen’ stores information that has no current primary use for society, while helping the people to position themselves within history. Canon and archive together form the foundation of the knowledge about the past and the present in the future and are thus indispensable for culture and the memory of a collective (*ibid.*: 38). Objects that arrive here are neither lost nor present, they exist in an in-between state, caught between active remembering and complete forgetting. However, it is precisely the exchange between these two spheres, between the canon and the archive, the function- and the storage-memory, that enables the dynamic nature and the continuous renewal of cultural memory itself. Once an object regains relevance, it can return to the sphere of memory, and Assmann considers it an important task of the Human Sciences to revive those objects and sources that have drifted off into the space where they are neither forgotten nor remembered (*ibid.*: 40f).

The last of Assmann’s neutral forms of forgetting is the one of *selective forgetting*. Unlike modern storage devices, the human memory is only able to preserve a very limited amount of information, leading to the fact that forgetting is an important means of reducing information. Forgetting in this context can be understood as a filter through which a person’s sensual perception of the world loses all its irrelevant elements. What remains after this filtering process is that which forms the condition for perspective, relevance, identity and memory itself (*ibid.*: 42f).

Forgetting is thus crucial for the organization of memory. Techniques such as loss or ignorance do not necessarily have to be negative, but in terms of this selective form of forgetting, they rather serve as mechanisms or means of selection (*ibid.*: 43f). However, this raises the question of how exactly such selection happens, or more precisely, according to which criteria things are being forgotten or remembered. Nietzsche, for instance, thought that those criteria were determined by a combination of a cognitive and a moral dimension

according to which a person would decide what information to keep and what to lose, but it was Halbwachs and his idea of the 'social frames' that fundamentally changed the understanding of how memory contents are selected (*ibid.*: 44f, 47).

Halbwachs put forward the idea that the selection criteria of the individual depend on the rules of communication within the social group the individual is part of. These rules determine the social frames of memory and shape and organize the relationship between individuals and society as well as the dynamics of the interaction between remembering and forgetting. Whatever memories do not fit into this collectively established framework are considered socially unacceptable and are thus excluded from individual or collective memory. Memory frames hence determine the meaning as well as the value of memories, or, as Assmann puts it: "Solange es für Geschichten und Erinnerungen keinen Gedächtnisrahmen gibt, verhalten diese ungehört" (*ibid.*: 47). A memory that has been locked out from the sphere of remembrance can only return into society once the social memory frames change and its meaning can thus be reevaluated (*ibid.*: 47f).

Assmann's next two forms of forgetting fall into the category of negative forgetting, the first of which is the one of *repressive or destructive forgetting*. This form of forgetting can be practiced in different manners. We can speak of a destructive form of forgetting when forgetting is used as a punishment, for example in the case of a 'damnatio memoriae'. By eradicating a person's name, he or she is wiped from existence through forgetting, which equals a symbolic death in the eyes of the collective (*ibid.*: 49).

Another form of punishment through forgetting can occur whenever crimes are not being properly processed and the victims of these crimes hence lose their right of history and memory. In this context, forgetting fulfills a repressive function in the sense that history is actively manipulated by those in power. Dictatorships or totalitarian regimes often practice this form of forgetting in their attempt of gaining total control over that past, but, due to the fact that repressive forgetting always requires a large amount of lies and denial, it is extremely difficult to enforce. In order to illustrate this repressive method of forgetting, Assmann mentions the Armenian genocide as an example, as well as the burning of books in May 1933 during the NS-regime in many German cities through which critical authors were symbolically destroyed through the destruction of their names (*ibid.*: 50ff).

However, Assmann underlines the fact that repressive forgetting does not always have to be as violent or as obvious as in the examples stated above. Structural violence can also be a way of implementing repressive forgetting, for instance through censorship or the limited access to cultural resources and education which usually leads to the exclusion and suppression of marginal voices. In such cases, not only the dominant memory frames, but also the relations of power have to change in order to overcome this form of forgetting, as the duration of repressive forgetting is usually bound to the regime that enforces it (*ibid.*: 52f).

Another form of forgetting which Assmann classifies as negative is *defensive forgetting*. This form of forgetting becomes relevant once certain abusive power relations change and the former oppressors thereupon try to cover up their crimes in order to protect themselves from punishment. Defensive forgetting is a common way of trying to cover up a culpable history, as it was the case in 1945, when thousands of NSDAP-membership cards were destroyed, or during the last month of 1989, when tons of documents were being torn to pieces by hand in order to erase the traces of all Stasi-activities in the GDR right before the Berlin Wall came down (*ibid.*: 53f). In this context, Assmann reminds us that remaining silent about past events does not necessarily have to be negative, as it can also have transformative powers. However, such transformative silence has to be distinguished from what Assmann calls ‘accessory silence’ (‘komplizitäres Schweigen’), which is a way for a third party to protect the aggressor and thereby exploit the victim of a crime. Accessory silence, which is often practiced by society, is one of the three forms of silence which enable defensive forgetting to take root, the other two are the ‘defensive silence’ of the aggressors and the ‘symptomatic silence’ of the traumatized victims. Once all of these three forms of silence come together, a crime can efficiently be suppressed over a long period of time (*ibid.*: 55ff).

In most cases, accessory silence is triggered by social taboos, for instance topics like sexual abuse. Only once the value system of a society is adjusted can these socially frowned upon topics can be collectively reevaluated and the silence can be broken. Once this happens, defensive forgetting can be overcome and the offenders can be brought to justice. To name one example, Assmann points out that such a change occurred during the 1980s and 1990s: The value systems in many countries were undergoing a significant change during that period of time, which led to a significant increase regarding the awareness of the suffering

of the victims of the war. This shift enabled a new dialogue and thus a new discourse of memory could arise (*ibid.*).

The last two of Assmann's forms of forgetting left to discuss at this point are the ones which the author classifies as positive, beginning with the form of *constructive forgetting*. In this context, forgetting should not be understood as a form of destruction, but rather as a way of overcoming loss, suffering and disappointment. This positive form of forgetting provides people with the courage and strength to move on, it is the basis of intellectual innovation, of identity renewal and of political fresh start (*ibid.*: 58f).

When Assmann speaks of constructive forgetting, she means a form of 'tabula rasa' which often occurs with the shift of a political regime: Once the power relations of a country change, the desire to undergo the political transfer as quickly as possible triggers a rapid dynamic of forgetting, which in this case can be seen as a crucial way to overcome violent conflict and to achieve political and social integration. Symbols and other reminders of the former regime are thereby instantly removed, as it was the case in West-Germany after 1945 and then later in the East after the fall of the Soviet regime. The goal of this form of forgetting is to create a clean slate and to allow for a fresh start for the group, even though this destruction of memory can be painful for the individual, as it often entails the removal of the memories of a whole generation (*ibid.*: 60f).

The goal of constructive forgetting is thus to erase the past in order to move forward into a new and better future. The example that Assmann introduces here is the one of the European Union, which was founded on precisely this idea of 'forgiving and forgetting'. In 1946, Winston Churchill suggested that the people had to turn their backs on what had happened in the past and instead look forward and build a strong union in order to render possible the peaceful future of Europe. Constructive forgetting was hence understood as a therapeutic way to leave the past behind and focus on the new challenges of the future instead (*ibid.*: 61ff).

The question that remains at this point is whether such a complete and definite 'tabula rasa' can truly be achieved, especially after the experience of trauma. At this point, I would like to briefly return to Walter Benjamin and his *Thesis on the Concept of History*. It appears curious that Churchill has chosen the imagery of 'turning one's back to the horrors of the past' (Churchill, 1946) in order to support his argument of moving forward, for Benjamin has stated the opposite in his allegory of the 'Angelus Novus'. Referring to a painting of

Paul Klee, Benjamin uses the ‘Angelus Novus’ as an imagery, stating that to him, this angel represents the ‘angel of history’, who the author describes as follows:

His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm. (Benjamin, 1940: 392)⁶

If we are to believe Benjamin, overcoming the past in a constructive way is not quite as easy as it appears in Churchill’s speech. According to him, the angel of history is not facing the future, but it is facing the past, trying to hold on to it, return to it, refusing to let go of the destruction and the horror that is building up in front of him. Only against his will does the angel move away from the past and towards the future, which indicates that letting go of the past is not necessarily a voluntary, easy process. The question that arises from these reflections is whether a ‘tabula rasa’, a total amnesia of the past in order to move forward, is truly possible, and, to some extent, desirable. Churchill and Benjamin obviously disagree on the subject-matter. In order to solve this contradiction, we shall now take a look at Assmann’s final form of forgetting, the one which she calls *therapeutic forgetting*.

Like constructive forgetting, therapeutic forgetting has the goal to achieve peace and social integration and to overcome a violent past, but in this case, these goals can only be reached through memory. Instead of total amnesia for the sake of moving forward, therapeutic forgetting entails acceptance and regret of the past events in order to overcome them. This form of forgetting entails two steps: first, a confrontation with the past has to take place through memory. Only after that can ‘forgetting’ occur in terms of diffusing and hence overcoming the past events. Therapeutic forgetting thus creates distance between the present and the past, and only on the basis of such distance, peace and a constructive fresh start can be achieved (Assmann, 2018: 64).

The technique of forgetting which is in motion here is the one of covering up memories, which entails the emotional discharge of past experiences, but not their deleting. Opposed to this form of therapeutic forgetting is the technique of silence, for the therapeutic

⁶ Emphasis according to the original.

effect can only occur through discourse and dialogue (*ibid.*: 65f). Assmann summarizes the key characteristics of therapeutic forgetting as follows:

Die Seite muss gelesen werden, bevor sie umgeblättert werden kann. [...] Eine schmerzhaft Wahrheit muss noch einmal ans Licht geholt und öffentlich gemacht werden, das Opfer muss seine Leiden erzählen dürfen und sie müssen mit Empathie angehört und anerkannt werden, damit sie anschließend in einem gemeinsamen Gedächtnis aufgehoben und als 'vergangen' bestätigt werden können. (*ibid.*: 65)

According to Assmann, confrontation and discourse are the way of overcoming the past. Only if the victims tell their stories and are listened to with empathy can a group collectively decide to overcome traumatic experiences, but at the same time preserve them in their memory without clinging to them in the future.

Four models for dealing with a traumatic past:

Whenever the past experiences that ought to be overcome are shaped by pain and violence, simply forgetting them is not enough – and often not possible. Throughout the following pages, we shall focus on ways of dealing with historical trauma and violent conflict, as we will be facing such a case during the analysis of this work.

Closely related to her forms of forgetting, Aleida Assmann has brought forward four models which specifically pin down strategies through which a traumatic and violent past can be overcome. In exploring those models, we will reencounter many aspects and dynamics of remembering and forgetting that were previously discussed. However, it is crucial to include Assmann's take on cultural trauma, as she constructs her models according to different forms of trauma as well as different abusive power relations, which will be very helpful during the analysis of this project, for it will allow us to better understand what kinds of traumatic cultural experiences there are and what forms of collective remembering or forgetting they demand in order to be overcome.

In the beginning of her essay "From collective violence to a common future: four models for dealing with a traumatic past" (2010b), Assmann states that in today's memory culture, remembering and forgetting are no longer mutually exclusive, and neither are the four models of coming to terms with a traumatic past. In her attempt to develop these models, Assmann's goal is to counteract the fact that history is usually written by the victors while the victims are generally silenced – a state that Walter Benjamin had already discussed in his thesis on history (Assmann, 2010b: 9; Benjamin, 1940: 391f). As a result of these

dynamics, memory and history are often abused to stabilize oppressive power relations. In this context, Assmann's goal is to find new ways through which "a new and mutual [...] memory of the past" (Assmann, 2010b: 9) can be negotiated. The author justifies the need for such an approach as follows:

It is an age-old experience that the memory of violence, injustice, suffering and unsettled accounts is prone to generate new violence, mobilizing aggression between neighbours which tears societies apart. This is why humans throughout history have looked for pragmatic solutions to bring to an end a lethal conflict by controlling and containing the explosive force of memory. (*ibid.*: 9f)

The first model Assmann suggests as a way of overcoming a traumatic past is what she calls 'dialogic forgetting'. This model suggests that memories can be controlled through a self-imposed dialogic silence agreed upon by two parties who used to be in conflict with one another, but eventually want to achieve peace (*ibid.*: 10).

Dialogic forgetting can often be observed after civil wars, for it is one possible way of bringing a divided society back together. It is based on the formula of 'amnesia and amnesty', much like the constructive form of forgetting discussed earlier. This strategy of silence was widely applied after 1945 in order to facilitate the economic and political reconstruction, as well as during the Cold War, when old wounds had to be overcome quickly so that people would be able to stand up to the new common enemy in the East (*ibid.*: 10f).

However, we need to be aware of the fact that dialogic forgetting is only an option for overcoming mutually violent power relations, not one-sided abusive power relations. In cases in which the power relations are unequal, pacts of forgetting are not usually an option, as the aggressors are far more likely to forget their crimes, while the victims tend to remember the injustice they have suffered (*ibid.*: 11).

In conclusion, dialogic forgetting is a way of achieving peace, but it does not actually cure past traumatic experiences. Furthermore, asymmetrical power relations demand a different form of overcoming conflict, as the defenseless victims, unlike the powerful perpetrators, cannot forget as easily – if they ever can in the first place (*ibid.*: 12). Due to that, Assmann introduces her second model for overcoming cultural trauma, which she calls 'remembering in order to never forget'.

The strongest example for such asymmetrical power relations which cannot be overcome through mutual forgetting is the Holocaust. This traumatic event remains singular in terms of violence and cruelty, and has hence brought upon society a crucial shift from a model of forgetting the past towards a model of remembrance. Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, this shift occurred internationally on both a personal as well as a collective level, and was supported by media such as books, films, public debates, monuments and museums, which all contributed to the fact that “the impact of this event spilled over to those who had no share in the historical experience but joined the memory community on the basis of empathy” (*ibid.*: 12). During the 1980s and 1990s, new social norms took root in Germany, and the country was finally ready to join into the already existing transnational memory community of the Holocaust (*ibid.*).

In this context of extreme cultural trauma which the Holocaust had caused, the social consensus arose that forgetting had to be prevented by all means, leading to the fact that remembering gained increasing relevance, firstly as a therapeutic form of coping with the past experiences, and secondly as an ethical obligation in order to honor the victims of this violent crime against humanity. As a result of this understanding, a pact of remembering was forged, whose purpose it was to “transform the asymmetric experiences of violence into symmetric forms of remembering” (*ibid.*: 13). In the case of this second model, the goal is thus to foster a shared memory based on empathy in order to collectively overcome trauma (*ibid.*: 12f).

With the return of the Holocaust memories, many other countries too started to actively confront their own past, and remembering was now largely considered as a new universal claim when dealing with the traumatic experiences of the past. Assmann’s third model, however, differs from the previous one in the sense that the goal of remembering here is no longer the memorialization of the past, but rather the pursuit of reconciliation and healing, which is why Assmann named this model ‘remembering in order to forget’ (*ibid.*: 13f).

The aim of this third model is ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’, which Assmann defines as a way of mastering the past in order to be able to move away from it. Examples which apply to this model are the Christian model of confession as well as the representation of trauma in art and performance. In all those cases, confronting the past in order to overcome

it is the main objective, an idea which in its origin is grounded in the theories of Aristotle and later the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud (*ibid.*: 14ff).

The idea of publicly sharing and narrating traumatic experiences in order to overcome them (*ibid.*: 15) is an interesting indicator for the important role which literature can play in the attempt of mastering the past and thus being able to move forward into the future. However, Assmann emphasizes that remembering in this context is not the goal, but the medium of the memory process, which is yet another important aspect we will have to take into account during the upcoming analysis. Summarizing these dynamics of her third model, Assmann states:

But, however long it may take and however deep it may go, remembering is not the aim of the process but only its medium. The aim is to facilitate recognition, reconciliation and, eventually, ‘forgetting’ in the sense of putting a traumatic past behind in order to be able to imagine a common future. (*ibid.*: 17)

While Assmann’s third model of overcoming a traumatic past is very closely related to her approach to therapeutic forgetting and particularly important in the context of this work, the last model she suggests is no longer concerned with the memory policy within a country, but focusses instead on conflicts between nations. Through ‘dialogic remembering’, two countries that mutually inflicted suffering upon one another are expected to come to terms with their history by “acknowledging their own guilt and empathise with the suffering they have inflicted on others” (*ibid.*).

Achieving dialogic remembering is a difficult task, as national memories tend to be monologic by nature: their purpose is to strengthen the collective identity of the group and at the same time promote a positive self-image, which usually leads to the fact that unpleasant memories or memories that do not contribute to this purpose are excluded from the national collective memory of a country. Assmann mentions the fall of the Iron Curtain as an example, which led to crisis in various national memories, for these had been ‘cleaned up’ at the end of the war. With a growing number of documents turning up in parts of the former Soviet Union, the historical perspective shifted greatly after 1989, and many countries had to reevaluate their own past and thus their national memories – the former GDR being amongst them (*ibid.*: 17f).

Due to the monologic nature of national memory, Assmann points out that this fourth model of overcoming a traumatic past is an ideal rather than a reality at this point in time. She believes that the international discourse as well as the mediation still have to improve, even though she considers the EU to be a promising step towards a model of dialogic remembering. According to Assmann, the transfer from monologic to dialogic memories could create one inclusive memory discourse which would be able to heal the scars of Europe and allow for a better protection of human rights and commonly shared values (*ibid.*: 19). This aspect of the productive discourse between different memories will be one of the key concerns of the analysis of this work.

However, Assmann stresses in this context that the goal of such inclusive memories is not to arrive at one universal master-narrative of Europe, but to create a productive dialogue between the plurality of memories which exists and has always existed throughout European history (*ibid.*), and which eventually leads us back to Benjamin and his previously discussed ideal of the multiplicity of histories which only together make up history in itself.

Summarizing her results, Assmann claims that memories can be a means of either prolonging or overcoming conflicts, depending on how they are framed. Due to the dynamic nature of memories, and cultural memory in particular, the ever-changing social frames as well as the current value systems in place determine what is being remembered and how those memories affect every day cultural practices and interactions (*ibid.*: 20f). When it comes to overcoming trauma, several levels of memory are working together, and it is the interplay between remembering and forgetting that will be of particular importance during the analysis of the cultural object of this work, for Assmann explains:

Remembering trauma evolves between the extremes of keeping the wound open on the one hand and looking for closure on the other. It takes place simultaneously on separate but interrelated levels of individuals, of society and the state. It therefore has a psychological, a moral and a political dimension. (*ibid.*: 21)

2.3.2.3. Memory, History and the Issue of Truth

In the previous chapters, we have touched upon the difficult relationship between memory and history. For a long time, the two were considered as incompatible opposites, as for instance both Halbwachs and Nora have claimed in their approaches on cultural memory. The core difference between memory and early historical science was that the former was (and is) always guided by a particular/subjective perspective and the purpose of identity construction, while the latter claimed to be based on universal knowledge and hence occupied a meta-perspective onto society as a whole. This universal knowledge the historical sciences claimed to be built upon was no longer bound to a specific collective identity of its carriers, leading to the fact that it was no longer spatially and temporary limited, unlike collective memory. Hence, memory and history as two concepts of a very different nature kept growing further apart over the years (Assmann, 2014b: 46).

It was only since the 1980s that history and memory started to be considered side by side, as the historical sciences realized that memory can contribute to the exploration of the past, especially regarding events that cannot be concretely reconstructed through documents or other forms of physical evidence (*ibid.*: 47f). This rather recently discovered reciprocity of history and memory has great impact on the way history is being recorded today, as Assmann explains that the individual experiences which now entered the sphere of the historical sciences drew attention to the polyphony as well as the contradiction which exist between individual memories, leading to the realization that historical events cannot be explained universally, but that the factual knowledge of the historical sciences has to be combined with subjective perceptions, experiences and memories of the people who witnessed those events:

Durch Einlassung individueller Erfahrungen und Erinnerungen wird die Illusion einer kohärenten Geschichtskonstruktion unterlaufen und auf die irreduzible Vielstimmigkeit und Widersprüchlichkeit der Erfahrungen aufmerksam gemacht. Dies ergibt eine multiperspektivische Darstellung des historischen Geschehens, die die wissenschaftliche Erklärung der Zusammenhänge mit der Ebene subjektiver Wahrnehmungen und Erfahrungen zusammenführt. [...] Im Zuge dieser Entwicklung wurden Brücken gebaut über die einst so tiefe Kluft zwischen geisteswissenschaftlicher und gedächtnisorientierter Deutung der Vergangenheit. Subjektive Erfahrung und objektiver Begriff galten nicht mehr als unvereinbar, sondern ergänzten sich. (*ibid.*: 49)

Through these modern developments, historiography has come to appreciate the importance of inconspicuous individual stories, which only in their plurality make up history as a whole – a fact that Walter Benjamin had already put forward in 1940, when he wrote: “It is more difficult to honor the memory of the anonymous than it is to honor the memory of the famous [...]. The historical construction is dedicated to the memory of the anonymous” (Benjamin, 1940: 406).

Benjamin’s idea of the ‘multiplicity of histories’ has hence been accepted in modern historiography. Memory and history today are no longer opposites, but they form a complex dynamic of complementing and correcting one another. Assmann explains that confronting the past – especially a traumatic past – demands all possible functions the two concepts can provide, from memorial and moral functions to critical and corrective functions. Only through this dual interaction real truth can be achieved, as historiography depends on the meaning provided by memory, and memory depends on the verification and correction provided by historical science (Assmann, 2014b: 52).

We have now determined that memory plays a crucial role in today’s historical research, but we have also seen that memory is highly subjective and unstable, thus requiring correction as well as verification, which leads to the question of how ‘true’ memories really are and to what degree they can be trusted. This issue shall be further analyzed at this point.

First of all, let us revisit some of Benjamin’s key concerns regarding the objectivity of the past, as he states that “articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it ‘the way it really was’. It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger” (Benjamin, 1940: 391). What Benjamin means is that our knowledge of the past can never be objective, for it is the circumstances of the present that determine how the past is being reconstructed. He further elaborates that “history is the subject of a construction whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled with now time (*Jetztzeit*)” (*ibid.*: 395). As the circumstances of the present change continuously, Benjamin emphasized the fact that the past can never be retrieved in the same manner twice, for he believes that “the past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again [...]. For it is an irretrievable image of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image” (*ibid.*: 390f).

If we are to agree with Benjamin, memories of the past are unstable and unreliable, but not necessarily untrue, for the past is always constituted of many subjective perspectives and single images. The fact that the past can never be reconstructed objectively does hence not mean that its subjective reconstructions are false, but that they have to be considered in their plurality. After considering Benjamin's perspective, we shall now tackle the question of how 'true' memories are from a more contemporary point of view, and will therefore return to Aleida Assmann and her reflections on modern memory dynamics.

When it comes to the truthfulness of autobiographical memories, Assmann makes a fundamental distinction between two different modes of episodic memory which she calls 'I-memory' (Ich-Gedächtnis) and 'me-memory' (Mich-Gedächtnis). The former is a verbal mode of memory and constitutes the stories individuals tell about themselves. Through this narration, the loose episodic memories are brought into a meaning structure, which helps individuals to construct their identity. The purpose of the I-memory is thus to actively retrieve memories and bring them into a narrative form through which they can become meaningful and hence provide orientation in the future (Assmann, 2014b: 120).

The me-memory, on the other hand, is a passive, unsorted, preconscious mode of memory. Described with the term 'mémoire involontaire' by Marcel Proust, the me-memory can be understood as a number of sensual impulses which can trigger active, autobiographical memories. Such sensual triggers can be a smell, a taste, an object or a place that used to have a specific meaning in the past and whose symbolic meaning can come flooding back to the individual and revive a conscious memory within the mode of I-memory (*ibid.*: 120ff).

Following this model, Assmann explains that our autobiographical memories are divided into two parts, especially those located within the me-memory: one part remains within us, the other is externalized and exists within objects or places. Once those two parts are reunited, they trigger a somatic emotional memory. However, those memories located within the me-memory are not as easily accessible as the conscious memories of the I-memory, they cannot be actively retrieved, but they have to return to us willingly through a specific external stimulus (*ibid.*: 122).

Through activation, such sensual memories can be translated from the preconscious me-memory into the conscious I-memory. Like an invisible net, Assmann says, these memories form a connection between our body and the objects surrounding us in our daily

lives. We hence have to distinguish between the consciously constructed I-memory and the unstructured, preconscious me-memory. While the former is constructed through interaction and the active dialogue between memories, the latter is triggered through the interaction with places or objects (*ibid.*: 123).

However, whenever an unconscious memory is translated into a conscious one, the quality of this memory is permanently altered. Once transitioning into the I-memory, the preconscious memory at stake becomes more and more verbally determined instead of sensual. This translation is a process which first de-codes the sensual nature of this memory and later re-codes it into a verbal or visual one. Unlike memory contents which are preserved in libraries, museums or archives, these vivid memories undergo a constant translation process, which leads to the fact that memories are always fluid, determining the dynamic nature of memory on an autobiographical level (*ibid.*: 123f).

The constant process of translation also entails constant changes and shifts of the memory contents. On the one hand, these dynamics contribute to the enduring liveliness of memories, but on the other hand, they bring upon many dangers, for they emphasize the gap which exists between experience and memory, and Assmann here quotes the German author Christa Wolf, who once wrote: “Wie man es erzählt, so ist es nicht gewesen”⁷ (*ibid.*: 124). Assmann attempts to answer the question regarding the truthfulness of memories bearing in mind the dynamics considered above, and eventually comes to the conclusion that not all memories undergo the same amount of change when transitioning from the preconscious into the conscious domain of memory.

‘Flashbulb memories’, for instance, form a special subgroup of autobiographical memories. They are characterized through their stability and their subjective authenticity, and usually entail vivid details. These flashbulb memories contain unexpected, unique experiences and are mainly constituted by the sudden arrival of important news or drastic historical transformations. We can speak of flashbulb memories whenever something strikes our consciousness unexpectedly and the direction of our lives is thereafter forever altered. As possible triggers for such flashbulb memories, Assmann mentions historical turning points such as the news of Hitler’s suicide, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, or the terror attacks on September 11th 2001 (*ibid.*: 126f).

⁷ ‘As one tells it, it was not what happened’ [my translation].

Memories as overwhelming as flashbulb memories do not usually change throughout time. Verbally transmitted memories, however, are of a very different nature: While the former preserve their sensual character and hence their sensual evidence and their truthfulness over time, the latter are stabilized by repeated verbal narration, through which they slowly lose their sensual character. Assmann summarizes these dynamics as follows:

Während Wissen sprachlich mitteilbar ist, bleiben die körperlich gespeicherten Erfahrungen in ihrer Eindruckskraft und Absolutheit letztlich unvermittelbar und unaustauschbar. Letztere werden als besonders authentisch erfahren, weil sie eine radikal individuelle Wahrnehmung vergangener Realität festhalten und damit zugleich die Unverwechselbarkeit der eigenen Existenz verbürgen. (*ibid.*: 127f)

Departing from this very distinction, Assmann introduces two models of memory, the *trace* and the *path*. A trace occurs through one single impression, whereas a path requires repeated movement in the same direction. Sensual, embodied experiences leave a trace depending on the intensity with which such experience hits us, and they endure in our memory, no matter how often they are recalled. Verbal memory, however, is not preserved within the body, but in social communication. Only memories that we tell can endure within this frame, whatever memories remain untold will be lost over time (*ibid.*: 128f).

However, these verbal memories are characterized through one crucial flaw: The more often something is repeated, the more one begins to remember the words through which the story was previously narrated instead of the experience itself. This verbal memory is stabilized through elaboration and repetition, like a path which was walked over and over again. Those verbally encoded memories, so Assmann explains, should not be considered wrong or untrue, even though they have lost their sensual character and are submitted to constant change through narration. Instead, Assmann points out that these memories merely exist in a different mode, namely the mode of language instead of the body (*ibid.*).

The image of the trace and the path corresponds with two different memory theories, which Assmann briefly elaborates on. ‘Retention’ describes the idea of an experience being permanently engraved into the bodily memory. This sensual experience is often considered to be more reliable and hence more truthful than memories preserved through the medium of language, which can be summarized with the term ‘reconstruction’. This term entails the idea that memories can only be stabilized through constant re-construction of their contents, which leads to an every-changing appropriation of these contents (*ibid.*: 129).

Even though these two ideas of the trace and the path, retention and reconstruction, the sensual and the verbal memory appear to be mutually exclusive, Assmann draws attention to the fact that the actual act of remembering always entails both aspects. She therefore suggests we should understand retention and reconstruction – or adherence and renewal – not as opposites, but as two complementary aspects of remembering (*ibid.*: 130).

When it comes to the question of the authenticity of subjective memories, Assmann suggests the metaphor of photography in order to illustrate the process of remembering. Involuntary, bodily experiences are being engraved without any claim of objectivity, but with a claim to subjective truthfulness. The trigger of this process is a strong affect, which forms the foundation of our emotional memory (*ibid.*: 131)

Modern memory research has been trying to combine this idea of involuntary inscription with the model of the conscious memory path by arguing that every experience and thus every memory act is constituted by a large amount of images, sounds, actions, and words. Hence, remembering demands the interaction of both sensual, unconscious trace-memories as well as conscious, verbal path-memories in order to really create an image of what has happened (*ibid.*: 131f). Following this line of thought, we once again return to Walter Benjamin and his idea of the ‘dialectical image’, which describes exactly that: As briefly touched upon in the introduction of this work, Benjamin promotes the idea that every single moment in history is constituted by many single elements and perspectives, which only together make up one moment in time. With this idea in mind, Benjamin supports his claim that there is no single-narrative of history and that all individual experiences have to be taken into consideration when analyzing the ways in which the past is reconstructed. He writes:

Articulating the past historically means recognizing those elements of the past which come together in the constellation of a single moment. Historical knowledge is possible only within the historical moment. But knowledge within the historical moment is always knowledge of a moment. In drawing itself together in the same moment – in the dialectical image – the past becomes part of humanity’s involuntary memory. (Benjamin, 1940: 403)

The constant translation process which memories undergo is not the only factor that can endanger the sensual evidence of episodic memory. When dealing with the question of how true memories are, Assmann reminds us that it is not always easy to distinguish between the memories we have experienced and the memories we have only appropriated. In such a case, the process of forgetting is initiated not through the suppression of one memory, but

through the interference of another memory that does not necessarily have to be our own (Assmann, 2014b: 132). Such appropriated memories can feel as authentic as experienced memories, but the truth is that they are nothing more than an imaginary picture triggered by cultural information. Assmann refers to those culturally appropriated memories as ‘metaphorical memories’, and to the experiential ones as ‘metonymic memories’; In the case of the former, we only see an imaginary image, in the case of the latter we can place ourselves within the image we see: “Die metaphorische Erinnerung hat man als Vorstellungsbild vor sich, in der metonymischen Erinnerung steckt man selber drin” (*ibid.*: 133). Metaphorical memories are of no personal value and can easily be replaced, while metonymic memories are always tied to other memories which are all interlinked with one another, because they represent the things we have actually experienced (*ibid.*: 132f).

However, even though these two types of memory are of a fundamentally different nature, they cannot be fully separated from one another in human memory. Lively conceptions and lived experiences mingle, which leads to the fact that our subjective memories are always supported and framed by objective knowledge that we acquire from books, images, music or other cultural sources. Due to this correlation between experience and knowledge, we have to be aware of the fact that knowledge can alter and to some extent even blend out experienced memories, challenging the reliability of personal memories overall (*ibid.*: 133).

Summarizing her reflections, Assmann states that differentiation is the key to answering the question of how true our memories are. Modern Neuroscience has confirmed that memory adapts to the changes in its surroundings and is not naturally concerned with exact retention, but instead, every reactivation of a memory trace leads to an unavoidable re-inscription, which necessarily changes the memory of the primary experience (*ibid.*: 134). For the evaluation of the truthfulness of the memory contents conveyed in the novel chosen for this work, this observation is crucial, for it already indicates the instability and reconstructiveness of memory contents we will be facing during the upcoming analysis.

Nevertheless, Assmann emphasizes that memory must not necessarily be understood as unreliable, but that it has to be considered with a critical consciousness, especially regarding the differentiations between different kinds of memories. Both the emotional impact as well as the verbal elaboration have an impact on the way in which memories are stabilized, always bearing in mind that the human memory is no camera, capturing images

for eternity. Instead, Assmann compares the continuous process of de- and re-construction of memories to the practice of retouching, during which certain elements are removed from the original photography. During this process, certain elements can be emphasized, embellished, augmented, enhanced, while bothering or unpleasant elements are being removed in order to create a more harmonious image through this form of internal censorship (*ibid.*).

One exception to this rule of reconstruction are the impactful flashbulb memories, which are usually preserved with large detail over a long period of time, as well as false memories or appropriated memories, which cannot actually be altered by the individual for these memories do not actually belong to him/her (*ibid.*: 134f).

Assmann concludes her findings by drawing attention to the fact that memories are always variable and imprecise. In most cases, there is no external evidence which can prove the truthfulness of memories, but we can generally note that details are usually unreliable. Furthermore, the human memory merely captures cutouts and fragments, which can only be assembled to a coherent picture in retrospect, which can often change the nature of the original memories. Once again, Assmann's observations are in accordance with Benjamin's reflections (*ibid.*: 135; Benjamin, 1940).

Memories, however, cannot simply be seen as false, constructed or fictional, even though they are imprecise. Assmann indicated that the truthfulness of memories is not always the key concern, especially when it comes to autobiographical memories. In this special case, experiences are often re-structured and re-evaluated, as their core function is to support a certain self-image. In addition to that, we have seen that memories are also tied to the social dimension as well as to the objects surrounding us, which gives them additional support and the possibility for correction, improving their reliability and truthfulness (Assmann, 2014b: 135f).

In conclusion, we have to be aware of the fact that memories require constant testing and examination through a self-reflexive discourse. One's own experiences need to be considered between retention and reconstruction, between authenticity and imagination; only through this, such experiences can be anchored in the real world. This constant reality-check and self-insurance of memories is crucial so that memories can serve as the foundation of individual identity (*ibid.*: 136f).

During the literary analysis of this work, we will encounter the question of how truthful memories are on several layers. Before we move on to this analytical part however, we have to cover a few more theoretical concerns, one of which is the question of how exactly an individual experience becomes part of cultural memory. The following pages shall attempt to answer this very question, and at the same time wrap up the conceptual framework provided by Jan and Aleida Assmann.

2.3.2.4. How Experienced Memory becomes Cultural Memory

The question of how individual experience becomes part of cultural memory is of highly contemporary relevance. Aleida Assmann points out that the reason we have to deal with this issue is the fact that the generation of time-witnesses which has survived the Second World War is slowly disappearing, leaving us with the task to find out what happens to experiential memory once the ones who embodied it vanish. The central concern of this chapter is therefore to explore how the transition from a biographical experiential memory towards an external media-based memory comes into being, and what effects this transition and the extension of experiential memory can have on the memory contents which ought to be remembered (*ibid.*: 205f).

For a long time, the dominant idea in academia was that over time, memory is transformed into what will be history one day. However, taking into account this premise, Assmann observes that contemporary memory dynamics do not show any signs of such developments: Especially in Germany, the continuing political actuality of historical issues prevents vivid memory from turning into static history. In addition to that, modern media play a crucial role in the reconstruction, representation and interpretation of the recent past. Through different formats and forms, the media complement and at the same time challenge the task which used to be the monopoly of historians, namely this very reconstruction, representation and interpretation of past events. Due to these dynamics, memory is no longer quietly transformed into history, but instead, we can observe a plurality of memory strategies today (*ibid.*).

So, how exactly is it possible to prolong the horizon of experiential memory, and what changes in memory contents are coming along with this process? Assmann begins her examination by pointing out that individual memory is always embedded into a larger context, as we have previously explored. These contexts differ depending on which

formations of memory we take into account, which brings us back to Assmann's classification discussed in section 2.3.1.4.: Individual memory is always embedded into the social memory of the family or the generation, the collective or political memory of the nation, and the symbolic memory of culture (*ibid.*: 206; see also section 2.3.1.4.).

The transition from individual to social memory is a natural process, deriving from the fact that every individual is born into a community of other individuals with whom they communicate. This social interaction is, according to Halbwachs, the fundamental condition for any kind of memory, resulting in the fact that individual memory is always socially grounded. One part of this social memory is the memory of the family, which entails the exchange of experiences and stories being commonly shared between up to three generations. Within such family memory, the line between the experienced and the appropriated memory can become rather blurry (*ibid.*).

Another form of social memory is the generational memory, which is always directly linked to individual memory. Within this generational memory, individual experiences are cumulated into generational experiences, which later frame the individual experiences of the members of this generational collective once again. The generational standard narrative which emerges from these cumulating experiences is no individual reconstruction, but it is based on a retrospective discourse, which is shaped through both individual experiences as well as texts, images, films and other cultural contents (*ibid.*: 206f).

These generational narratives can then be adapted, for example in art or literature, which makes them accessible to a larger group of people. The cumulated experiences are thus no longer exclusive property of a generation, but they access the sphere of cultural memory, where new generations can appropriate the memory contents, as we shall further explore during the analysis of this work. However, Assmann points out that, even though generational memory can be appropriated by other generations through the right media, the reception of the memory contents will always differ between the generation who can rely on experiential memories, and the generations who appropriate the knowledge through empathy, which allows them to expand their horizon of experience, but those experiences will never be of the same emotional quality for the generations that follow:

Ein Film oder Roman ist als Kunstwerk und damit als seine verallgemeinerte ästhetische Formulierung schon immer Teil des kulturellen Gedächtnisses und kein Exklusivbesitz einer bestimmten Generation. Als Kunstwerk öffnet der Roman oder der Film die geschlossene Erfahrungsgemeinschaft der Generation und macht sie einem breiten Publikum mit einem jeweils ganz anderen Erfahrungshintergrund zugänglich. Die

Rezeptionsweise der betroffenen Generation wird sich aber von der der nicht Betroffenen deutlich unterscheiden; geht es hier um Wiedererkennen und um das Auslösen von Erinnerungen, so geht es dort um Erkennen und Empathie, folglich um zwei kognitive und emotive Operationen, mit denen wir den Horizont unserer Erfahrungen grundsätzlich erweitern können. (*ibid.*: 207)

Assmann's observation that literature as an aesthetic translation of generational memory can be a way of granting access to experiential memory to subsequent generations and hence provide a means of transition from individual to cultural memory is a crucial aspect of the present dissertation. Before looking further into this dynamic, let us take a brief look at how individual memory can become part of national collective memory.

Assmann assumes that national memory is acquired through the individual's participation in rituals. Whenever individuals participate in rituals, they get the chance to participate in the interpretation, communication and appropriation of past events and thus obtains a sense of collective national identity. These rituals, which can for instance be anniversary or memorial ceremonies, provide individuals with the opportunity to imaginatively relive and hence retrace the history of their ancestors. Through this process of individual participation, events of the past can be affectively revived in the present and can hence reinforce the bond between the individual and the collective memory he or she now participates in. Are those participatory rituals missing, no connection between individual and collective memory can be established, as it is for instance the case in Germany, where many official rituals and ceremonies are carried out by politicians and public figures instead of the people, as Assmann explains (*ibid.*: 208f).

Coming back to the transition from individual to cultural memory, Assmann reminds us that individual memory is never limited to the horizon of our own experiences, but always entails a certain amount of interaction with people or symbols which all together shape the way in which individuals perceive the world surrounding them. The transmission of contents through signs and symbols has thus a large impact on our personal fundus of knowledge, and the human memory is thus not only shaped by the experiences we made ourselves, but also by the memories of others. Every individual is connected to a common fundus of knowledge, but not unspecific or general knowledge: The knowledge at stake here has to be constantly appropriated in order for the individual to confront this knowledge and thereby make it part of one's own identity (*ibid.*: 209f).

Assmann states that symbolic expansion as well as psychological identification are the two conditions that need to be fulfilled for an individual experiential memory to become a cultural memory. Memories can be turned into communicative information through representation, which entails symbolic coding, inscription on material data carriers, multiplication and distribution. Once this information is processed by interested people, it arrives in the domain of cultural function-memory. In order for this to occur, the information must be appropriated through psychological identification and cognitive contention, through which it becomes part of the individual's own identity and at the same time becomes cultural memory. If such active appropriation does not take place, the symbolically encoded information falls into the domain of cultural storage-memory and remains inactive (*ibid.*: 210). Through this symbolic expansion, the individual experience is disconnected from its original human carrier; through psychological identification, it is reconnected to a new human carrier. The incarnated, vivid experiential memory thus transitions into a disembodied media memory which is initially no longer linked to vivid memories and hence provides a new and equal foundation for other memories (*ibid.*: 210f).

Assmann explains that the reason why this transition is so important is the fact that one's individual past is not accessible in itself. It requires symbolic representations and material images through which it becomes disembodied and thus communicable for others. Through this process, new groups of people gain access to these images and can appropriate them into their own memory, leading to the fact that the group of participants is no longer limited from this point forward (*ibid.*: 212f).

Concluding her reflections, Assmann once again emphasizes the importance of art in the transition process of memory, an aspect which is of particular relevance for us. The author states that fiction often mirrors biographical aspects, and can be a way of vocalizing memories that have been kept silenced for a long time. Assmann thus understands art not only as a representation of memory, but also as a way of liberating suppressed memories. Due to this fact, individual memory can become part of a social and cultural memory through art, individual and collective memory meet, touch and overlap with one another:

Individuelles und Idiosynkratisches wird in der verallgemeinerten ästhetischen Formulierung in etwas allgemein Zugängliches und Anschließbares verwandelt; im Fiktionalen kann sich Biographisches spiegeln. [...] Kunst ist nicht nur ein Mittel der stellvertretenden Darstellung von Erinnerung, sondern auch [...] ein Anstoß zur Freisetzung blockierter Erinnerung. [...] Private Erinnerung wird mithilfe der Kunst Teil eines sozialen und kulturellen Gedächtnisses, individuelles und kollektives Gedächtnis begegnen, berühren, überlappen sich. (*ibid.*: 216)

2.4. Memory in the Field of Literature

2.4.1. The Media of Memory

The last theoretical aspect I would like to discuss is the way in which memory and literature tie together. In the previous chapters, we have mentioned that memory on a collective level always relies on media, an aspect which shall be more closely examined in the following pages.

As Astrid Erll points out, collective memory would not be possible without media. The coding of an experience into a narrative scheme which can then be passed on is fundamental for the establishment of a shared past version, and the circulation and distribution of such version – in a social as well as in a cultural context – is only possible through media. Erll hence understands media as a connective point between the individual and the collective dimension of memory, as medial representation is the only way through which individual experiences can become relevant elements of collective memory (Erll, 2017: 135).

In this context, Erll emphasizes what we have established before, namely the fact that memory is never an exact representation of the past, but always a reconstruction and a mode of reality-creation, which leads to the question of what role exactly the media of memory play within this reconstructive process. Erll states that the media in themselves are never neutral, which indicates that they often themselves create the past versions they encode: “Medien sind keine neutralen Träger von vorgängigen, gedächtnisrelevanten Informationen. Was sie zu encodieren scheinen – Wirklichkeits- und Vergangenheitsversionen, Werte und Normen, Identitätskonzepte – erzeugen sie vielmals erst” (*ibid.*).

Due to this observation, one has to bear in mind that the medium itself has to be understood as a constructive force, which can have great impact on the memory content it conveys. However, even if the past versions of cultural memory are always medial constructs, this does not necessarily mean that they are false or unreal. This ‘mediality of our reality’ (*ibid.*: 136) only calls our attention to the fact that the medium always leaves a trace on the message it conveys, indicating the fact that collective memory is always media-dependent. Furthermore, Erll takes this argument one step further and concludes that the media of memory create collective memory worlds without which no memory communities could exist (*ibid.*: 136f).

Every memory culture is thus greatly influenced by the media landscape it inhabits. Revolutionary shifts in media culture usually bring upon great shifts in memory culture, the most important of which have occurred with the transition from oral cultures to written cultures, which now allows for the implementation of a storage-memory, the invention of printing and eventually the emergence of the internet (*ibid.*: 140f).

The media of memory fulfill three different functions. First, they can store contents of the collective memory and thus keep them available over a long period of time. However, these storage media can lose their memorial function once they cannot be collectively decoded anymore. This could occur, for instance, once their symbolism or their writing can no longer be read by the members of the collective. Second, the media of memory can fulfill the function of circulation. In that case, their purpose is to spread collective memory contents through cultural communication. Circulation media can overcome great spatial and temporal distances, and their goal is to connect large memory communities within which interpersonal communication is no longer sufficient in order to create common past versions (as it is the case for Anderson's 'imagined communities'). In many cases, the popular mass media fulfill this function of circulating cultural memory contents. Finally, the last function are the medial cues of collective memory. Such cues can be images, texts, or all other forms of content transmission which trigger a specific memory. On a collective level, this function has been explored by Pierre Nora in his study on memory sites (see section 2.2.1.2.). On an individual level, however, these cues are not homogeneous and can thus trigger all kinds of memories depending on personal experience and knowledge, leading to the fact that the memory contents conveyed through these medial cues can vary greatly from person to person (*ibid.*: 147ff).

Media, however, do not only shape the memory of the collective, but they also have great impact on the memory of the individual. Following Maurice Halbwachs' approach on social frames (see section 2.2.1.1.), Erll suggests that media storing memory contents are the individual's way of accessing collective data, knowledge and the symbolically constructed world of the group. Through the medial frames shaping the content, individuals are provided with certain guidelines for the appropriation and interpretation of their own experiences as well as the experiences of others. The individual perception of memory, as well as the way in which certain memories are recalled, are thus highly depending on the medial representation through which the individual memories are framed. In most cases, individuals

only become aware of this medial framing once memory contents begin to conflict, which indicates the immense memory constituting power media has in our everyday lives (*ibid.*: 150f).

We have thus determined that the interlink between memory and media is indeed complex, both on an individual and a collective level. The media of memory are diverse, for collective memory contents can be represented through all display formats. Those go from paintings, monuments, objects, and symbols to places, images, manuscripts, diaries, articles, films, novels and websites. Once one specific memory content is displayed over long periods of time and in different media, it becomes a powerful and enduring memory place and hence an important element of collective memory. This process can be compared to Assmann's idea of the memory path (see section 2.3.2.4.), which takes shape only once a memory is often articulated and thus narratively stabilized; 'Iconization through remediation' is what Erll speaks of in this context (*ibid.*:161f).

What can be concluded is that all media – especially popular mass media – have a crucial impact on the reconstruction of memory, which gives them tremendous power and control over the experiences and the knowledge of the people, as Michel Foucault has already pointed out in 1974, and as modern media- and memory research has confirmed (*ibid.*: 156; Foucault, 1975: 25).

2.4.2. Literature as a Medium of Memory

2.4.2.1. How Literature constructs Collective Memory & Identity

In the context of this work, we shall now analyze literature as a medium of cultural memory and take a closer look at how literature – especially fictional literature – contributes to the establishment and the construction of a collective memory. Let us begin by taking into account some of the general characteristics of literature as a medium of memory which Astrid Erll has identified, before later focusing on the specifics of fictional literature.

Erll sees the connection between literature and memory in the fact that both construct versions of the reality and the past. As a specific form of world construction or 'world making', as Nelson Goodman has coined it, literature has to be understood as an independent symbolic form of memory culture, fulfilling specific functions, such as for instance, providing its readers with ideas of past life worlds, conveying certain historical images,

revealing competing memory versions and reflecting upon processes and problems of collective remembering (Erll, 2017: 167; Goodman, 1978)

Erll identifies three characteristics in which the interrelation between literature and cultural memory becomes particularly clear. The first element which the two share is the process of *aggregation*. In both literature and memory culture, complex events of the past are represented through particular narratives, icons or topoi, in which the meaning of the past is condensed. Literature in particular relies on a particular set of practices through which this aggregation is achieved, for example intertextuality and imagery. Like all processes of memory culture, the literary aggregation of meaning is also often interpreted differently according to reception habits and contexts. In order to fully grasp the aggregated meaning, one has to be familiar with the practices and ways of interpretation of a given memory culture, otherwise the symbolic memory sites or linguistic imageries represented in the literary work cannot be interpreted according to their true meaning (Erll, 2017: 168).

The second characteristic which literature and cultural memory share is the element of *narration*. As previously discussed, the collective remembrance of experiences relies on the same narrative structures and representations that constitute literary texts. Both memory and literary narrations are based on processes of selection and combination of specific elements, a process which will be further discussed in the following pages. For now, it can be noted that memory and literature both construct meaning by focusing on selected aspects of the past and arrange them in a narrative way through which these elements are forged into a meaningful story. As mentioned earlier, narration also plays a crucial part in autobiographical memory, which, just like the cultural function-memory, acquires its meaning only through the retrospective selection and interpretation of memory contents depending on the conditions of the present. Erll thus claims that collective memory is always a world of narratives in which the past has already been brought into a meaningful structure retrospectively. (*ibid.*: 168f).

The last common element between memory and literature put forward by Erll is the way of encoding certain chains of events in the form of *genres*. As conventionalized ways of structuring experiences, genres serve as models of development in both literary works as well as in the construction and interpretation of the autobiographical memory of the individual. Such narrative patterns are useful for individuals in order to understand their life, but they are also crucial in the reconstruction and interpretation of the past, for instance in

the context of historiography. Plot structure and motifs can have a crucial impact on the way in which the past is being remembered, and literature serves as a relevant means of creating and spreading such patterns of interpretation. Collective experiences which are difficult to interpret can be accessed more easily through familiar patterns, and new genres can be created as a reaction to contemporary challenges in memory culture. The most important examples which Erll mentions in this context are the epos, the historical novel, the romance or the *Bildungsroman*, all of which provide their readers with genre-specific patterns of interpreting experiences, on a collective as well as individual level (*ibid.*: 169f).

Now, Erll also calls our attention to the fact that literature is a unique medium of memory, not only because its processes of meaning construction are very similar to the ones of collective memory, but also because literature possesses particular features which distinguishes it from all other symbolic memory systems. The first of these features is the fictional privilege, which is unique to literature. By bringing together fictional and real elements, literature has the power to fundamentally restructure cultural perceptions. At the same time, due to this blurred line between imagination and reality, fictional literature has a restricted claim to factuality and objectivity, which distinguishes it from non-fictional genres such as memoirs or autobiographies. The concrete advantages of fictional literature in memory culture as well as the means through which fictional literature constructs memory will be discussed in detail below (*ibid.*: 170f).

The last two unique features which distinguish literature from other media of memory are its interdiscursivity and its polyvalence. Interdiscursivity refers to the fact that literary works can unite a variety of positions, perspectives and voices. Mikhail Bakhtin has coined the term 'polyphony' in order to describe this plurality of discourses possible in literature, a phenomenon which thus enables the medium to serve as a representation of the plurality of memory discourses within a memory culture. Polyvalence describes a very similar process: The term refers to the fact that in literature, the condensed memory contents on which memory cultures are based can be represented in a complex manner, leading to the fact that representations of the past conveyed through the medium of literature are usually far more multi-layered and elaborated than the ones provided by other symbolic systems of memory (*ibid.*: 171f; Bakhtin, 1979).

Now that the general characteristics of literature as a medium of memory have been listed, let us take a closer look at how fictional literature impacts cultural memory. Birgit Neumann has provided a detailed overview regarding the role of literature in cultural memory theory in her essay entitled “Literatur als Medium (der Inszenierung) kollektiver Erinnerungen und Identitäten” (2003). Her approach is particularly useful for this research project, as she focusses on fictional literature. Furthermore, she takes into consideration the three core theories of cultural memory presented in this work, and attempts to put forward a new contemporary approach through which the concepts of memory, identity and literature can be put into a productive dialogue with one another.

Neumann begins her reflections by pointing out that shared memory always forms the foundation of a shared identity, which is why collective memory theories are always simultaneously theories of collective identity, tying the two concepts inseparably together. The goal of these theories is to explain how the interpretation, appropriation and meaning-construction of memory contents can contribute to the implementation of a shared sense of memory and identity, and in this context, literature has to be considered a central medium in the representation as well as in the production of memory (Neumann, 2003: 50).

However, even though the importance of literature in the construction of cultural memory has been widely recognized, Neumann criticizes that there are very few integrative theoretical approaches within Culture- or Literary Studies focusing on the dynamic interaction between memory, identity and literature. Often, according to the author, literary analysis only concerns itself with the content, but not with the narrative forms of literarily staged collective memory. She thus justifies her attempt of pointing out possibilities through which the diverse relationship between the three concepts can be theoretically explained, underlining the fact that her intention is to focus on literature in two different ways: First, literature is understood as a symbol-system which can produce imaginative versions of the past, and secondly, literature needs to be understood as a social system which actively shapes society’s struggle of memories (*ibid.*: 50f).

Building up a foundation for her argument, Neumann revisits the three core conceptualizations of cultural memory and evaluates the importance of literature in each of these approaches. Beginning with Maurice Halbwachs’ ‘*mémoire collective*’, Neumann comes to the conclusion that literature is not considered a relevant medium of memory in this context, which derives from the fact that for Halbwachs, collective memory is

constituted only through the communication between living individuals. However, Halbwachs acknowledges the literary text as a potential social frame, even though he does not elaborate on literature as an objectified cultural representation of the past (*ibid.*: 54).

The role of literature changes drastically in Pierre Nora's approach on the 'lieux de mémoire'. For Nora, collective memory is a pluralistic, open concept, leading to the fact that there is not one compulsory past version all individuals have to acknowledge, but instead, they can choose from a pool of memory sites available to them (see section 2.2.1.2.). In terms of Cultural Literary Studies, Nora's approach opens up the possibility of understanding literary works as symbolic memory sites, which would indicate their active contribution to memory culture. As Neumann claims, works of literature under Nora's premise not only grant insight into the reality constructions and collective value systems of the past, but they can also contribute to the creation of a certain perspective of the past through which the collective identity of a nation can be supported (*ibid.*: 56f).

The critique Neumann formulates regarding the understanding of literature in Nora points to the fact that his theory on memory sites only pays attention to those literary pieces which are considered part of the national canon. In Neumann's opinion, however, the value of literature for memory culture goes far beyond the standardized canon, as she believes that popular literature especially fulfills diverse cultural memory functions today. She argues:

Der Beitrag, den Literatur zur Erinnerungskultur leisten kann, reduziert sich allerdings weder auf einen Bildungskanon, noch erschöpft er sich in der Perpetuierung und Festigung des nationalen Selbstverständnisses. Literarische Texte – und dazu zählt gerade heute auch Populärliteratur – können vielmehr ein breites Spektrum von erinnerungskulturellen Funktionen übernehmen. Diese reichen von der Affirmation bestehender nationaler Selbstbilder und kollektiver Werte über deren kritische Reflexion bis hin zur Inszenierung subversiver Gegenerinnerungen und alternativer Identitätsmodelle. (*ibid.*: 57)

The last conceptual approach Neumann analyzes is Jan and Aleida Assmann's. In their distinction between communicative and cultural memory, literature (or 'texts', as they call it) does play a crucial role, but it comes with an important distinction which will be further discussed in the following chapter of this work. For now, let us briefly explore why Neumann believes that also this approach is insufficient to fully grasp the potential of the relationship between memory, identity and literature.

Neumann's core point of critique is that Jan and Aleida Assmann map out a concept in which they assume *one* collective memory which is equally shared by all members of society. Even though Aleida Assmann moves away from this singular conception in her works on contemporary memory cultures (as previously mentioned), Neumann claims that their original take on cultural memory indicates that cultures define themselves through one memory and one corresponding collective identity, which, in her opinion, does not do justice to the increasing societal differentiations and the diversity of collective memories and identities in modern societies. She argues that such homogenization of collective memory brings forward a closed identity model which does not reflect contemporary multicultural dynamics, which is why Neumann suggests to move away from this conception and instead focus on the diversity of modern collective sub-identities influencing and conditioning one another. This assumption lays ground to Neumann's approach of a pluralistic interplay between memory and literature (*ibid.*: 60f).

The author's goal is to enlarge the cultural memory concept in a way that reflects the plurality of past versions and identity constructions of modern societies, thus allowing for a reflection on competing cultural memories. In this context, Michel Foucault's term 'contre-mémoire' has to be mentioned: such counter-memories attempt to introduce alternative past versions which are usually ignored by the homogenizing dominant collective memory which most members of a society share. One important means through which such alternative versions of the past can be introduced into the public discourse is fictional literature (Foucault, 1977: 160; Neumann, 2003: 61, 65f).

In order to explain how fictional texts can contribute to the creation of collective memory and identity, Neumann relies on the research of Paul Ricoeur. She uses his model of *mimesis* to illustrate that literature not only reflects preexisting cultural contents and forms of collective memory, but that it also creates imaginative or alternative past versions and identity models due to its specific literary design elements which lay ground to literature's unique way of world- and memory making (*ibid.* 66).

Ricoeur's model of *mimesis* divides the literary process of reality creation into three steps. The goal of the model is to illustrate the relationship between literature and cultural reality as a process of productive transformation, in which the poietically created worlds and the cultural system of meaning-creation influence one another mutually. Neumann writes:

⁸ Ricoeur's model of *mimesis* (1988) will be quoted after Neumann in the following.

Ricoeurs Mimesis-Konzept modelliert das Verhältnis zwischen Literatur und kultureller Wirklichkeit als eines der produktiven Transformation, bei der die poetisch erzeugten Welten und die kulturellen Sinnsysteme sich wechselseitig beeinflussen. Literarische Texte sind kein rein selbstbezüglicher oder überzeitlicher Ausdruck der Wirklichkeitsdeutung, sondern historisch und kulturell geprägte Phänomene und als solche variabel. (*ibid.*: 67)

The first step of mimesis, which Ricoeur calls Mimesis I, deals with the cultural *prefiguration* of literature. Even though literature does create alternative worlds, Ricoeur claims that all literary works are bound to the cultural context of their creation, for they rely on the terms and concepts provided by the extra-literary reality surrounding them. Due to this prefiguration, it is not unusual for literary works to incorporate different elements of society's total memory fund, for example historical events, people or places. This incorporation is a highly selective process, however, as the total fund of memory elements and forms of a culture or society can be potentially infinite. Literature thus represents the experiences and identity concepts of given memory communities, while others are left out in the process of selection (*ibid.*).

Due to this selectivity, literature can represent experiences and memories that used to be socially marginalized, forgotten or tabooed. Furthermore, coexisting memory contents can be brought together in literature, which can lead to the representation of a heterogeneous, antagonistic plurality of memories in a society. In doing so, literature can illustrate the potentially unreliable nature of memory and reveal new and potentially critical perspectives of a collective past. Such effects can be achieved not only through the explicit literary content, but also through stylistic elements such as, for example, the narrative structure which allows for a coherent meaning construction and is thus already a form of interpretation of the represented content (*ibid.*: 67f).

The second step of mimesis, Mimesis II, refers to the process of the textual *configuration* of the selected elements from Mimesis I into a new, fictional whole. The random extra-literary elements are now brought into a structure and thereby removed from their original context, and are instead being reassembled into a new, fictional entity. Literary configuration is thus not a mirror image of the extra-textual reality but a productive, poetical way of creating a new reality (*ibid.*: 68f).

The potential of fictional memory production thus lies within the ability to connect and structure the socially and materially unrelated elements selected from extra-literary reality and bringing them together into a new model version of memory. Through this

process of configuration, different memory discourses can be put into dialogue with one another, cultural conflicts and competing past versions, but also previously unnoticed similarities between different memory systems can be illustrated and thus brought to the surface. Due to this unique potential of fictional literature, this medium has the power of uniting dominant past representations with forgotten or marginalized counter-memories, and this means that existing memory versions can be altered, extended, reinterpreted or questioned through fictional elements and representations. The process of configuration, as Neumann explains, is therefore an act of poietic exploration of alternative worlds of memory through which a collective experiential reality can be re-structured imaginatively (*ibid.*: 69).

Once again, it is also the literary devices which can contribute to the process of configuration. Neumann points out that specific literary forms or structures can help convey certain memory and identity images, which indicates that apart from the content, narrative tools need to be considered when analyzing how memory processes are being textualized. One example for such a literary tool is the temporal structuring of fiction, which will be an important factor in the analysis part of this work: By using a particular temporal structure, fiction can illustrate the important relation which exists between the present conditions and the recall of a memory from the past (*ibid.*: 69f). Neumann states:

Außerdem kann die zeitliche Strukturierung im Medium der Fiktion dazu eingesetzt werden, den präsentischen Charakter von Erinnerungen vor Augen zu führen: Das Oszillieren zwischen dem Jetzt des Erinnerungsabrufes und dem Damals des Erlebens illustriert, daß Erinnerungen mit den Rahmen, innerhalb derer sie aktualisiert werden, verschränkt und somit als gegenwartsgebundene Rekonstruktionen des Vergangenen zu konzipieren sind. [...] Die hieraus resultierende Abhängigkeit des vergangenen Geschehens von gegenwärtigen Perspektivierungen zeigt an, in welchem Maße Erinnerungen immer schon von präsentischen Bedingungen überformt sind. (*ibid.*: 70)

However, the effects of this configuration process only truly unfold during Mimesis III, the *refiguration*, occurring during the process of reception. According to Ricoeur, this third step forms the touching point between the alternative fictional world of the text and the extra-textual real world of the recipient. The reception of the fictional text triggers cognitive processes and the recipient acquires access to new, unknown aspects of the real world by interpreting the alternative world conveyed by the text. By ascribing specific meanings to certain contents and forms during the act of reception, the perception of the extra-textual world can change for the recipient, which is why literature has to be understood as an active force within individual and collective processes of meaning construction (*ibid.*: 71).

By providing alternative memory and identity constructions, literature can thus contribute to the re-evaluation and re-perspectivization of the extra-textual memory culture. Suppressed or forgotten aspects of the collective past can be rediscovered, and thereafter influence the cultural self-image of a group, resulting in the fact that the dominant collective memory can be challenged or extended through literature, as the alternative memories of sub-collectives or minorities can reveal gaps in the dominant memory culture. Neumann explains:

In diesem Prozeß vergegenwärtigt Literatur nicht nur das Vergessene und macht es so erinnerbar; vielmehr stättet sie es auch mit subversiver Gegenmacht zur bestehenden Erinnerungskultur aus. Durch diese imaginativen Grenzüberschreitungen können fiktionale Texte zu kritischen Reflexion sowie zu ständigen Erneuerung kollektiver Erinnerung anregen und den gesellschaftlichen Streit um Erinnerung mitgestalten. (*ibid.*)

We can thus observe the interplay between literature and the extra-textual world on two levels: On the one hand, literature is a medium in which the reality of memory culture can be represented, and on the other hand, literature plays an active part in shaping this extra-literary memory culture (*ibid.*).

Fictional literature thus fulfills a variety of functions within memory culture, from the representation of counter-memories to the critical reflection on past versions and the unification of divided memory worlds. However, Neumann calls our attention to the fact that even though the potential functions and effects of fictional literature may be numerous, only a few of these historical and cultural aspects are realized during the process of reception. As literary texts are consumed by different people and communities, they are usually interpreted differently according to the criteria of relevance dominant in the recipient's context. Due to this fact, Neumann emphasizes that literary works as a medium of collective memory and identity are not equally relevant or valid to all members of a collective at all times, resulting in the fact that competing interpretations struggle for primacy at all times. Whether a community understands a text as affirmative or subversive depends on content and form, as well as on different sociocultural contexts and practices of reception. For Neumann, this fact indicates that the variety of functions which literature can fulfill within memory culture can only be grasped if one assumes a plurality of memory communities and thus a multiplicity of collective memories (*ibid.*: 71f).

2.4.2.2. Literature on a Collective Level: Cultural vs. Collective Texts

Coming back to the general functions of memory media which were discussed in section 2.4.1., the distinction between the storage function and the circulation function can also be found in the medium of literature. In order to explain how these two functions are to be distinguished concretely, we have to return to the distinction between two different types of 'texts' according to the theoretical approach of Jan and Aleida Assmann, which was briefly touched upon in the previous chapter, and to which both Neumann and Erll refer in their works.

Astrid Erll points out that when analyzing literature as a medium of memory, one has to understand the process of reception as a starting point. She attempts to map out the functions of literature on a collective level and on an individual level, understanding literature as a medium of collective memory, on the one hand, and as a medium of collected memory, on the other (Erll, 2017: 178).

In terms of literature as a medium of collective memory, Erll proposes a distinction between *cultural* and *collective* texts, which she bases on Jan and Aleida Assmanns' general distinction between cultural and literary texts. Cultural texts, in this context, fulfill the storage function of literature as a memory medium. Out of all literary texts a society produces, only very few achieve the status of a cultural text, namely only those which are accepted into the literary canon of a society. Once part of the canon, Erll argues, these texts lose their literary characteristics and instead acquire a cultural dimension: instead of providing their readership with individual interpretations, the cultural texts have now a standardized meaning, they convey a universal 'truth' which is compulsory to all recipients, they have become timeless and unchangeable. Through this transfer from the literary into the cultural sphere, a text thus loses and acquires dimensions of meaning at the same time (*ibid.*: 179f).

The counterpart of cultural texts are the collective texts of a society, namely all literary texts which are not (yet) part of the canon. These collective texts, according to Erll, fulfill the function of a literary circulation medium, their meanings are not compulsory or standardized, but instead they spread different past versions and reconstructions of reality and thus produce, circulate and put into perspective contents of the collective memory of a society (*ibid.*: 180f).

The category of collective texts is made up mainly by popular literature, as for instance war novels or historical novels can play a crucial part in conveying collective identities, past images, values and norms. In accordance with Neumann's statement presented earlier, by emphasizing the category of collective texts, Erll underlines the importance of popular literature in comparison to the highly standardized canon. She argues:

Gerade die Trivialliteratur bedient sich symbolischer Ressourcen, die dem kulturellen Gedächtnis zuzuordnen sind. In ihr werden Mythen erzeugt und perpetuiert, kulturspezifische Sinnstiftungsschemata vermittelt. Die Erinnerung an eine fundierte Vergangenheit und kollektive Sinnkonstruktionen normativer und formativer Art sind offensichtlich gesamtgesellschaftlich mehr durch populäre Zirkulationsmedien bestimmt als durch institutionell vermittelte Speichermedien, die im Rahmen der Enkulturation, etwa in der Schule oder bei der religiösen Unterweisung, aktualisiert werden. (*ibid.*: 181)

In order for a collective text to truly impact collective memory, its contents have to be relatable to the real world, so that during the process of reception and interpretation, the reader can overcome the gap between fiction and reality, and the text can thus shape reality and past versions of the collective memory. Only a literary text that fulfills this criterion can be perceived as part of the collective texts category, it has to be connectable to the already existing horizons of meaning, cultural schemes, narrative patterns as well as imaginative past versions within a memory culture (*ibid.*: 181f).

While contemporary works of literature often fall into the domain of collective texts, another closely related concept which Erll introduces in this context is the one of the 'literary afterlife'. She discusses that many contemporary studies in the field of Literary Memory Studies focus on the aftermath and the continued influence a literary piece can have on memory culture, they analyze how literary works are received, discussed, canonized, forgotten, censored and rediscovered over long periods of time (*ibid.*: 182f).

This approach towards memory and literature comes from a sociohistorical perspective, it combines sociodemographic aspects with aspects of memory research and asks, for instance, how different generations, classes or genders react to literary works and their memory constructing force (*ibid.*: 183). In the context of this work, this sociohistorical take on memory and literature is of interest, as we will be analyzing a contemporary work located within the domain of collective texts and its impact on the collective memory of a specific generation.

However, Erll concludes that the categories of cultural and collective texts as well as the concept of the literary afterlife represent different forms of access through which literature can be approached and analyzed as a medium of collective memory. Through them, literature can be examined from different perspectives, which implies that technically one literary text can be analyzed from all three conceptual points of access. The core

	Cultural Texts (A. Assmann)	Collective Texts
Objects of interest	Canonical texts	Genuinely all literary texts (often popular literature)
Form of reception	“conscious appropriation” “binding character”	Often: unconscious effects, reference to narratives and meaning horizons of the collective memory
Status/function within memory culture	Storage medium (and object) of the cultural function-memory	Circulation medium (distribution and negotiation of past versions, identity concepts and history images in memory culture)

Picture 5: Literature as a medium of collective memory: Cultural and Collective texts (Erll, 2017: 185)

difference between the three is that they ask different questions, necessarily leading to different answers: When focusing on the category of cultural texts, literature is being understood as a storage medium of memory, the institutionalization and interpretation of a canon is at the center of research. If the access point of the collective text category is chosen, the contemporary contributions of a literary work to the memory culture of a collective is at the center of interest, the goal of research here is to find out how (popular) literature represents the past and thus shapes the history images of the collective. Regarding the analytical access through the concept of the literary afterlife of a work, the research interest focusses on the social, medial and textual dynamics which contribute to the sustaining influence a work of literature can have on a memory culture (*ibid.*: 184).

Regarding the upcoming analysis, the research questions and approaches associated with both the collective texts-category as well as the cultural text-category will be of interest, for the novel at stake is located in between the two. On the one hand, we are dealing with a collective text due to the novel’s recentness and the way in which it reconstructs memory, experiences and value-systems of the recent past. On the other hand, however, the novel has the potential of becoming a cultural text, as it is read at certain German schools, for instance, thus indicating that the possible interpretations of the memory contents it conveys are becoming more standardized as they are consciously appropriated by large collectives.

2.4.2.3. Literature on an Individual Level: Literary Memory Frames & Individual Identity

According to Erll, literature can be understood as a medium of both the collective and the collected memory. As the former has been discussed above, let us now focus on the latter: the individual level of memory and how it is being impacted by literature.

Erll understands literature as a medium of collected memory to be the opposite side of literature as a medium of storage or circulation. She states that in order for literary representations of the past to have a collective impact, they need to be appropriated within the organic memory of the individual first. These observations very much confirm many of the aspects we have already discussed: Erll once again emphasizes the importance of cultural paradigms serving as models for literary patterns, helping the individual make sense of real life situations and experiences. Due to the fact that literary works serve as guidelines for the construction of autobiographical memory within a social context, Erll defines literary works as ‘medial frames’ in accordance to Halbwachs’ definition (*ibid.*: 185ff).

However, Marion Gymnich presents us with a quite different perspective regarding the interrelation between memory, identity and literature on the individual level in her essay entitled “Individuelle Identität und Erinnerung aus Sicht von Identitätstheorie und Gedächtnisforschung sowie als Gegenstand literarischer Inszenierung” (2003). Instead of focusing on memory alone, she puts the concept of identity at the center of her reflections and tries to establish how processes of identity creation are impacted by memory dynamics and literary representations surrounding them (Gymnich, 2003).

Gymnich begins her reflections by stating that identity and memory, both on a collective and individual level, constantly touch upon and condition one another, leading to the fact that the two concepts are closely related not only in academic research, but that they are also a reappearing conceptual pair within a large number of literary works, leading back to our previous question of how literature, memory and identity are interlinked concretely (*ibid.*: 29).

With the concept of individual identity at the core of her interest and at the same time the starting point of her research, Gymnich maps out the complex psychological and social factors determining individual identity. She highlights the fact that one of the fundamental assumptions of socio-psychological identity theory states that identity is created within a context of social interaction within which it is constantly reevaluated, readjusted and

renegotiated. Due to this characteristic, the process of identity construction is an ongoing one which, by definition, is never completed at any point in time (*ibid.*: 30f).

Furthermore, Gymnich stresses that early identity theory had already come to the conclusion that individual identity is always constituted through two perspectives, an internal and an external one. Closely related to what Louis Althusser has identified as ‘interpellation’, identity theory assumes that individual identity consists of the subjective self-image of a person, on the one hand, and the image that the other, thus the person’s interactive counterpart, has of that self-identifying person, on the other hand. In essence, the core assumption is a relationship of productive tension between the internal and external perspective of this image of a person, only together shaping individual identity. All three factors of identity creation – interpersonal interaction, social dependency and the image of the Other – will be of particular interest during the content analysis of this work (*ibid.*: 31; Althusser, 1970).

The fact that individual identity is constituted through an internal and an external perspective is not the only factor which makes identity construction such a complex phenomenon to grasp. Gymnich asserts that an additional reason for the complexity of the identity concept is grounded in the fact that cognitive, emotional and motivational aspects have to play together in order to forge identity. The cognitive component for Gymnich is the subjective way in which individuals perceive themselves, the emotional component is the sense of self-esteem through which individuals evaluate themselves as a person, and the motivational component describes the individuals’ ability of being in charge of their own actions. This conceptual differentiation between three interacting aspects allows for a precise description of the psychological dynamics involved in the process of identity creation (Gymnich, 2003: 32).

According to Gymnich, there is a third factor contributing to the complexity of the identity concept. Besides the multi-layered psychological dynamics and the discrepancy between internal and external perspective, the author claims that identity is always simultaneously located within a synchronic and a diachronic dimension. The synchronic dimension of identity refers to the separate experiences an individual makes within different contexts of his/her social surroundings, which are then brought into subjective coherence, allowing the individual to interactively communicate and make sense of these experiences (*ibid.*: 33).

The diachronic dimension of individual identity, on the other hand, emphasizes the dependency between a present identity and given self-experiences of the past. Within this biographic dimension, the memories of individuals are the key aspect in the negotiation of their present identity, for such an identity emerges from the rehabilitation of one's past experiences and thus one's own biography. For Gymnich, this observation marks the touching point between memory and identity theory: The creation of a sense of continuity is fundamental for identity creation, and memories are the means through which such retrospective, subjective sense of continuity can emerge. Memories are thus identity-creating, as they are not only the foundation of the identity of a collective, but at same time are the basis of individuality, for individual memories are unique and hence bring forward an individual identity. This dynamic becomes particularly apparent in cases of amnesia: Gymnich explains that individuals lacking personal memories also lack the foundation upon which the experience of continuity and uniqueness can lead to the emergence of a coherent sense of individual identity (*ibid.*: 34f).

The diachronic dimension of identity furthermore includes the confrontation of the future as well as the past. The same dynamics can be observed in memory research: Remembering is not limited to the mere storage of past experiences, but it also entails the reflection upon possible future events based on the memory of the past, leading us into the domain of prospective memory. All the interlinks discussed so far indicate that the processes of memory and identity creation are strongly interrelated. However, Gymnich notes that not all aspects of the memory process are equally relevant to the creation of identity. At this point, I would like to briefly touch upon Gymnich's classification of memory components and see to what extent they can be useful for the present work (*ibid.*: 36).

Gymnich distinguishes between four separate components which together constitute memory: (i) the episodic memory of single events, (ii) the semantic memory of factual knowledge, (iii) the procedural memory which entails motoric abilities, and (iv) the priming system which is responsible for the recognition of certain sensual stimuli. According to Gymnich, not all of these memory components are equally important in the process of identity construction, which is why we shall only focus on the ones the author considers relevant (*ibid.*).

The memory component which is considered to have the largest immediate impact on identity creation is the episodic memory. As discussed before, this memory of past experiences forms the foundation on which a feeling of biographical continuity can be created. Single experiences, which can be classified according to space and time, allow for the creation of a subjective sense of who we are. The episodic memory is therefore the most complex, but at the same time the most fragile of the four memory components at stake. In the case of amnesia, for instance, biographical continuity cannot be established, often leading to a severe crisis in identity creation (*ibid.*: 36f).

In opposition to the individual experiences of the episodic memory, the semantic memory only plays an intermediate role in the creation of identity, according to Gymnich. She defines semantic memory as the component which includes factual knowledge not immediately related to one's own identity, and is thus referring to what Assmann has called the individual storage-memory. Even though this component does not include personal experiences, it nevertheless complements the episodic memory, for we rely on factual knowledge when interpreting individual experiences and memories. Furthermore, Gymnich points out that the semantic memory does have an identity constructing function, for it allows individuals to participate in the knowledge system of their culture and thus forms an important interlink between individual and cultural memory (*ibid.*).

Both the procedural memory and the priming system are not as relevant in the construction of identity as they are in the domain of memory. As previously discussed in section 2.3.2.3., Assmann underlines the importance of external sensual memory cues which can trigger internal memories at any time (see section 2.3.2.3.). Regarding the procedural memory, Gymnich writes that it can have an impact on individual identity in terms of the self-attribution deriving from a specific ability. For instance, the motoric ability of playing the piano can have an impact on the way an individual perceives his/her own identity (*ibid.*: 36). However, it can be noted that the episodic and the semantic memories are the most influential memory components in terms of identity creation.

The most important aspect of Gymnich's research derives from the question of how exactly individuals achieve the subjective feeling of biographical continuity. According to the author, coherence is established through narration. Gymnich claims that this narrative identity is the product of an explicit, interactive self-representation of the individual deriving from his/her self-reflection, whose goal is to bring one's memories and experiences into a

coherent form and hence counteract the diversification of identity and instead manifest one continuous sense of identity (*ibid.*: 38).

Regarding the question of how such identity narratives can be characterized, Gymnich introduces three aspects put forward by Donald E. Polkinghorne⁹, which are of crucial importance in this context. For once, Polkinghorne speaks of the aspect of reconstruction, which is responsible for the coherence of an identity narrative. Secondly, identity narratives are characterized by simplification, narrative flattening and the sharpening of specific details. And finally, identity narratives are formed according to the cultural plot structures available to a person at a specific moment in time and space (*ibid.*: 38f).

If we now consider these three characteristics of identity narratives – reconstruction, narrative flattening, and cultural plots – the similarities to what we have discussed in section 2.4.2.1. become apparent, namely the characteristics found in literature and memory put forward by Astrid Erll. She stated that literature and memory share three key components, aggregation, narration, and genres (see section 2.4.2.1.). Adding the reflections of Gymnich based on the original conception of Polkinghorne to Erll's findings, we can thus conclude that identity also fits into this scheme, and that the three concepts – identity, memory and literature – share the same three key characteristics, for they are all dependent on narration and thus rely on the same general processes of creation. These three concepts discussed in the past chapters are thus inevitably and inseparably connected, for they are based on the same three aspects which link them all together: narration or reconstruction, aggregation or flattening, and genres or cultural plot structures. This interlink between the three key concepts of this dissertation will be crucial for the evaluation of the upcoming literary analysis.

Coming back to Gymnich's reflections, the author confirms Assmann's thesis that biographical memories – and thus the individual identity based on them – are stabilized through the narration process. Adding to Assmann's conception of the path memory (see section 2.3.2.3.), Gymnich advocates that not only the act of articulation, but also the act of remembering a biographical episode in itself contributes to the stability of a memory. She furthermore confirms Assmann's position of such memories often being altered through the repeated act of narration, drawing the conclusion that not only memories, but also individual

⁹ Polkinghorne (1998) will be quoted after Gymnich in the following.

identity as a construct deriving from these memories only has a limited claim to authenticity. When analyzing the object of this work, we thus have to bear in mind that both memory and identity are constructs which can undergo severe alterations through the act of narration as well as through the memory act itself (*ibid.*: 39).

Finally, Gymnich introduces a number of techniques through which issues of identity and memory are integrated and represented in literary texts, some of which will be particularly interesting for the work at hand (*ibid.*: 40-46).

Not only are the topics of memory and identity variably dominant within the literary field, but they are furthermore represented through a diverse spectrum of literary display formats. The first aspect which Gymnich introduces is the field of tension between a remembered character, on the one hand, and a remembering auctorial narrator, on the other hand. Especially in cases in which the temporal distance between the experienced and the narrated memory is large, the connection between memory and the narrative construction of identity becomes particularly apparent. Past events are then often narrated according to a retrospective construction of meaning, an insight that can only be achieved once there is a temporal gap between experience and narration. However, such a gap begs the question of how reliable the concepts of remembering and forgetting are after a certain amount of time. Within the literary narration of a first-person narrator, so Gymnich explains, he or she can make this issue object of his/her own reflections within the narration and thus introduce a self-reflexive aspect regarding the reliability of his/her memories. In the case of the object of this work, the situation is slightly different, for we are dealing with a different style of narration, but Gymnich's observations will be applicable nonetheless, as we will discover shortly (*ibid.*: 40f).

Regarding the characters of a literary work, Gymnich states that every verbal or nonverbal action can potentially be interpreted as a way of processing one's own life-story in the service of one's present identity. In this case, however, Gymnich emphasizes the fact that this aspect of identity construction is difficult to grasp, for it can easily happen that psychological dimensions are being added to a character which are not actually grounded in the text. In essence, when conducting literary analysis, one has to be aware of the fact that not every action or statement of a character has to be relatable to one's own life-story, for such a generalizing approach can lead to the mis- or over-interpretation of a given literary text by applying dimensions of meaning which are not actually there (*ibid.*: 42f).

More easily than through a verbal speech act, memory and identity can be shaped narratively through the representation of a character's consciousness or self-awareness, namely through internal focalization. Even though Gymnich refers to non-fictional texts in this context, some of her reflections can be applied to the literary work at stake. Once a character's memory is represented through figural consciousness, several questions have to be accounted for. First, a subjective bias of the situation represented has to be considered. Furthermore, the character's ability of relating a certain memory to his/her current situation needs to be evaluated. In conclusion, when analyzing the representation of memory through a character's displayed consciousness, one has to be aware whether the character is able to establish a relationship between the present and the past (*ibid.*: 43).

Relevant in this context is a specific type of literary memory which often comes into play in drama, where the representation of a character's consciousness is difficult to articulate outside of a speech act. Through the so called 'observational memory', episodic memories are being told through the remembering character seeing him-/herself as an acting entity, hence as a third person within his/her own memories. Especially when the temporal gap between the experience and the now narrated memory is big, this observational perspective is common: Instead of remembering an event from a first-person perspective, the remembering person is being represented through a third person which carries out his/her actions in the past dimension of the narrative while the true subject of these episodic memories takes the stand of an observing party. In terms of the literary analysis of this work, this way of representing memory and identity through a third party will be of particular interest, even though the technique is usually applied in drama (*ibid.*: 43f).

The last aspect regarding the representation of the connection between memory and identity in literature which Gymnich introduces derives from the conceptualization of time and space within a literary work. Regarding the upcoming literary analysis, this aspect will be of great relevance. Gymnich assumes that once an individual remembers and thus retrospectively confronts his/her past, important moments or stages of life can be recalled through material, spatial cues, which then sensually trigger a specific individual memory, which can thereafter have direct impact on the individual's identity. Gymnich writes:

Wenn ein Individuum sich also erinnert, [...] dann können signifikante Momente oder auch ganze Entwicklungsphasen letztlich nur in Gestalt eines materialen, verräumlichten Korrelats erinnert werden. Die dinghafte Dimension des Erinnerns, d.h. der Zusammenhang zwischen Raum und Erinnern, kommt auch darin zum Tragen, daß dem Individuum aus persönlicher Erfahrung bekannte Räume (oder aber solche, die mit bekannten Räumen ein subjektiv hinreichendes Maß an Ähnlichkeit aufweisen) einen Reiz für den Abruf von individuellen Erinnerungen aus dem episodischen Gedächtnis liefern können, die sich unmittelbar auf die Identität des Individuums auswirken. (*ibid.*: 44f)

Within this reflection, we once again reencounter Assmann's approach of the memory cues, which can trigger an embodied memory through a disembodied stimulus, as we have discussed at an earlier point of this work. Gymnich goes on arguing that the familiar space usually relegates to specific interactions or patterns of interaction which the individual has experienced within this particular physical surrounding, leading to the fact that such spatial cues can awaken even blurry or repressed memories. The relationship between space and memory is thus of particular relevance within memory research, which is supported by the fact that spatial metaphors play a crucial role in memory theory overall (*ibid.*: 45).

In the context of this work, space as a trigger for memory – or as a place to remember – will be of the essence during the literary analysis. The GDR and the Berlin Wall as physical places of memory have a large impact on how the author reconstructs the past and how memory and identity are constructed and conveyed in the novel, hence supporting Nora's claim of the importance of symbolic memory sites for the remembrance of the past.

Eventually, Gymnich comes to the conclusion that the aspects introduced by her only represent a small amount of the possibilities according to which the connection between memory and identity can be analyzed in literature. However, she emphasizes the fact that memory and identity should not only be understood as popular elements of literary content, but that structural aspects are also of particular relevance in the cultural and literary analysis of works of literature, which is why these semantic reflections will return during the second part of this dissertation (*ibid.*: 45f).

3. Methodological Framework: How to analyze Memory in Literature

3.1. What the Object demands

Many of the concepts and perspectives discussed in the previous part of this work are crucial aspects of the methodological take this research project will follow. We have already discussed different aspects under which memory can be considered in literary analysis, as well as the most important conceptualizations of memory which will guide the analysis of the memory issues provided by the novel. What is left to do throughout these methodological chapters is to specifically identify the tools which will be needed to conduct the analysis, as well as to outline the strategies of analysis which will guide the reflections and results presented in the last part of this work.

Before mapping out the specifics stated above, let us consider what empirical method this research project applies, or in other words, which method our object of interest demands. Mieke Bal, whose insights have already been thoroughly discussed in the introductory chapters of this work, has put forward the claim that the world of culture cannot easily be mapped, for it is a diverse field which lacks clear boundaries; a problem which is directly applicable to cultural analysis. According to Bal, the analysis of culture is not limited to a specific set of methods, but instead, the methodological takes always depend on what the object requires. Method and object are thus inseparably interlinked, or to put it into Bal's words: "Together, object and methods can become a new, not firmly delineated, field" (Bal, 2002: 4). Based on this assumption, Bal introduces the idea that concepts, not methods have to be understood as the key to a successful cultural analysis (*ibid.*: 4f).

Following Bal's approach, the object and the concepts surrounding it determine the methods of analysis and thus have to be our starting point. In the case of this work, we are dealing with a literary case study, a work of fiction to be precise. Our scientific interest evolves around the concepts of memory and identity, which are apparent in the novel in different ways: First, memory and identity issues can be discussed in terms of the novel's content, as well as the structural characteristics that constitute the object. Secondly, the reception of the novel by a recipient unfamiliar with the first-hand experience of the events discussed opens up a further aspect of interest, namely the impact the communicated memory issues have on the individual/collective memory of its readership.

3.2. Five Rhetorical Modes of Collective Memory

In order to be able to better analyze literature as a medium of memory, Astrid Erll has developed a narrative-theoretical approach which she calls the ‘five rhetorical modes of collective memory’. Through this differentiation, literary texts can be analyzed according to specific narrative elements through which they contribute a specific value to a memory culture. Several fictional modes of collective memory can be identified through these flexible categories, which are by no means a binding tool of analysis, for Erll emphasizes that the relationship between literary forms and their functions as memory media varies from culture to culture and often changes drastically over the course of time (Erll, 2017: 191).

Within the framework of this context-oriented ‘memory-historical narratology’ (*ibid.*), Erll explains that there are no textual characteristics which are mandatory in order for a text to be recognized as a medium of collective memory by its recipients. The value a literary text possesses as a medium of memory can only be answered by taking into consideration its historical effects within a memory culture. However, there are certain ways of literary expression which show similarities with processes of collective memory. Due to this observation, Erll assumes that particular narrative strategies can trigger the conscious or unconscious appropriation of a literary text as a medium of memory. These strategies are what she calls the ‘rhetoric of the collective memory’, which becomes apparent in five different modes (*ibid.*: 191f).

The first mode Erll identifies is the (i) experiential mode, in which the narrated content appears to be element of the everyday communicative memory. Opposed to this first mode is the (ii) monumental mode, in which the narrated elements appear to be part of a compulsory, cultural meaning-horizon and thus part of the cultural memory. The (iii) historiographic mode makes its narrated contents appear as a part of a terminated past or as an object of scientific historiography. Within the framework of the (iv) antagonistic mode, competing memories are being introduced through literary discourse. Finally, the (v) reflexive mode becomes evident in literary works that allow for a memory-cultural self-observation and reflection (*ibid.*: 192).

As we are now specifying the methodological tools necessary for this work, we shall only focus on the rhetorical modes which are particularly relevant to the analysis of the cultural object at stake, namely the experiential, the monumental and the antagonistic mode.

The experiential and the monumental mode are closely connected, for they represent two different ways of approaching the past literarily. As media of cultural memory, literary works have the power to shape and construct the collective meaning-horizon of a culture, but also the communicative memory can be displayed in literary works, for instance the memories of a generation. Erll explains that literature can serve as an important medium in constructing generational self-images and identities, and therefore plays a crucial role in the creation of collective memory on this side of the floating gap, hence in the sphere of the recent communicative memory according to Jan Assmann's differentiation. As a medium of communicative memory, literature is furthermore a way of representing traumatic historical experiences of the recent past, may they derive from revolutions, wars or other experiences of violence (*ibid.*: 192f; see section 2.3.1.1.).

The central question Erll attempts to answer is which literary forms contribute to the effect of the reader perceiving the narrated content of a specific literary work as an element of the cultural or the communicative memory. She assumes that literary texts always display affinities to both 'basic registers of collective remembrance' (*ibid.*: 193), the cultural and the communicative one, for they are always both experiential and monumental in the context of a cultural-autobiographical memory. On the one hand, literature displays experiences by representing the actions, emotions, thoughts and behaviors of individuals in specific places and times, through which the illusion of a sensual perception of a fictional world is being created. According to Erll, works of literary realism are particularly suitable to display such experientiality, for they usually represent typical contents of the communicative everyday memory, such as specific experiences or details of a particular life-world (*ibid.*).

On the other hand, works of literature always have to be understood as monumental, for their goal is to endure over time. They thus imply the distant horizon of cultural communication, the horizon of cultural memory in that sense. Literary works therefore have to be seen as cultural artifacts meant to preserve their message over the course of time in order to communicate with and convey their messages to the generations that follow, which explains their monumental character (*ibid.*).

This differentiation between the experiential life-world and the monumental future-orientation of cultural memory leads us back to Assmann's distinction between the two sides of culture discussed in section 2.1.2., for we have now discovered that literary works are always part of both sides of culture, the monumental and the experiential one (see section

2.1.2.). However, Erll specifies her classification of rhetoric modes of the collective memory by pointing out a number of literary display elements according to which a literary work can be assigned rather to the experiential mode and hence the communicative memory of a collective or the monumental mode and thus the cultural memory of a collective (*ibid.*: 194). In the course of the upcoming analysis, we will use these literary elements suggested by Erll in order to ascertain the specific rhetorical mode of collective memory we are facing.

First, Erll points out that *patterns of content selection* can indicate which mode is dominant within a literary work. Characters, objects and events belonging to the extra-textual sphere of the communicative memory often imply an experiential mode, while elements of the extra-textual cultural memory rather suggest a monumental mode. Furthermore, *paratextual elements* can indicate the dominant mode of the rhetoric of the collective memory within a literary work. Quotes from scripture or other famous literary pieces (e.g. from a literary canon) can trigger a whole cultural tradition through semantics, while for example references or dedications to members of a communicative memory-community ground a work of literature in extra-textual context of the life-world (*ibid.*).

Closely related to the paratextual display elements is the one of *intertextuality*, which is typical for the monumental mode of the collective memory. A literary work which references classical or canonical texts often intends to establish a monumental authority by placing itself within the contexts of such cultural artifacts. *Interdiscursivity*, on the other hand, is often a characteristic of the experiential mode. Through the incorporation of informal speech elements according to Bakhtin's term of 'heteroglossia', which can extend to group-specific terminology or dialect, an experiential rhetoric can be established. On the contrary, by incorporating extremely formal or monumental language elements, the monumental mode of collective memory can be emphasized (*ibid.*: 194f; Bakhtin, 1979).

Intermediality can serve the establishment of an experiential mode whenever media of the communicative memory such as photographs or recordings play a central role in the literary text. Does the text refer to media of cultural memory, for instance monuments or scripture, this kind of intermediality can indicate the transition into a monumental mode (Erll, 2017: 195).

Regarding *plot structure and genres*, Erll points out that they usually correspond with one or the other mode. Genres such as tragedy or epos usually belong into the sphere of cultural memory and thus to the monumental mode, while the romance, the *Bildungsroman*

or the travel novel are rather an expression of the reader's everyday life-world, which makes them elements of the experiential mode of collective memory in literature. However, as stated earlier, these classifications do not always have to apply, for Erll emphasizes the fact that her categories of analysis are flexible (*ibid.*).

In terms of *narrative style*, cultural memory is often conveyed narratively through auctorial narration techniques, for such techniques represent distance between the narrator and the plot, which can be read as a representation of the distance between the content of a literary work and its manifestation within the distant horizon of cultural memory. Personal voices, on the other hand, indicate a communicative memory in which the narrator is connected to the narrated situation and is therefore part of the narrated story. First person-narrations can be an indicator of the experiential mode, for they display typical situations of communication within the framework of a communicative memory. Through these displayed situations, individual experiences and subjective perceptions of reality can be added to the collective memory fund through the element of narration (*ibid.*).

One of the unique contributions literature can make to memory cultures is the display of *interior world views*. Through internal focalization, individual experiences can be displayed in much detail, for instance in terms of emotions, sensual perceptions and detailed explanations of first hand-experiences. Through verbalization and narration, these experiences become part of a communicative memory, and pre-narrative elements which are difficult to convey in cultural practices can be represented. As examples for such aspects Erll mentions traumatic experiences or fragmented perceptions, which are more easily communicated through an experiential, internal literary display (*ibid.*: 196).

Finally, the last literary display element according to which an experiential or a monumental mode can be determined is the *representation of time and space* within a literary work. According to Erll, temporary as well as spatial coordinates are crucial social frames within which life experiences can be situated. Such communicative locations can turn into cultural memory sites once they acquire a cultural relevance in addition to their function of orientation within the context of a communicative life-world. Places such as the 'West front' or the 'Berlin Wall' can thus become heightened or mythical memory sites, which represent the life-worlds of past generations and therefore become situated within the distant horizon of cultural memory (*ibid.*: 197).

Conclusively, Erll stresses that the experiential and the monumental mode do not exclude one another, but they are instead two complementary, interlinked forms through which literature refers to the past. The combination of the two is what characterizes literature's unique function within a memory culture: On the one hand, elements of the cultural memory can be enriched with experiential elements, which creates a touching point between the past and the present, but which also indicates that these elements of the cultural memory become less compulsory. On the other hand, experiences made on the individual or communicative level can be included into the distant horizon of cultural memory, which can facilitate the transfer from a vivid memory into the sphere of a temporary unlimited cultural memory (*ibid.*: 197f).

In the words of Erll: "Das Oszillieren zwischen beiden Modi dient im literarischen Text daher der Überführung alltagsweltlicher Erinnerungen in kulturelles Gedächtnis ebenso wie der Anreicherung von Inhalten des kulturellen Gedächtnisses durch Erfahrungshaftigkeit" (*ibid.*:198). This transition from vivid experience to cultural meaning is one of the most important functions of literature as a medium of memory. Especially in memory cultures which have to construct meaning from experiences which are part of the communicative and the cultural memory at the same time, this literary dynamic is crucial. The author points out that the literary memory of wars, revolutions and catastrophes is often characterized through the attempt of uniting both memory frames, the experiential and the monumental, in order to make sense of the events and to somehow situate them in the communicative as well as in the cultural memory of a community (*ibid.*). Due to this observation, Erll's classification of rhetoric modes will be a crucial methodological tool in analyzing the memory value of the novel at stake.

The last rhetorical mode of collective memory I would like to discuss in detail is the antagonistic mode, for it will be of relevance for the upcoming analysis. Erll points out that literature not only represents the past, but it also plays an active role in the competition between opposed memories. As potential media of memory competition, literary texts can display counter-memories, for example by representing the memories of marginalized groups that challenge the dominant self-images and memories of the collective. Erll supports this claim by stressing that medial representations of the past are always based on the specific memories of certain sub-communities, and are thus only relatable to their identity concepts, values and images of the past. This inevitably leads to the fact that a large amount of other

memories is being excluded from representation. Through the antagonistic mode, this selectivity, perspectivity and site-dependency are reinforced within a medium of memory, or in our case, within a literary work (*ibid.*: 200f).

Through the antagonistic mode, literature thus has the ability to take a stand in a memory culture characterized through competing memories. Due to the narrative construction of specific identities, literary works are an important means for the plurality of identity discourses within a society, which necessarily have to be based on a multiplicity of memory discourses, for identity and memory are inseparably connected as previously discussed. Within the framework of an antagonistic mode, different past versions of societal subgroups as well as different cultures or nations can be confronted, compared and maybe even brought together, for instance through the representation of the memories of certain social classes, genders, generations or religious groups (*ibid.*: 201).

Like the experiential and the monumental mode, the antagonistic mode is also characterized through a number of literary display elements which often indicate the fact that an antagonistic mode of collective memory is dominant in a literary work. Beginning with *patterns of selection*, Erll states that the social groups represented in the literary content often suggest the antagonistic nature of a text. It is therefore important to note whose memories are being represented, which social groups are being mentioned and how their experiences, identities and values are being integrated into the text. Literary works which focus on very narrow collective memories of a rather small sub-community of society are usually showcasing an antagonistic rhetorical mode (*ibid.*).

Particularly important for the analysis of an antagonistic mode is the *literary configuration* of a text. Contrasts and relations of correspondence can be structural means which can be meaningful in the confrontation of competing past versions, for instance the display of a contrasted spatial representation. Social groups with competing memories often associate their memories to a specific notion of space which the antagonistic mode can use in order to emphasize the conflict within a memory culture. The character constellation often indicates which groups are understood to have the relevant or 'true' memories in such a contrasted setting. Due to the importance of the contrast between East and West in the novel, this aspect will be crucial during the analysis of the object at stake (*ibid.*: 202).

The *structure of perspectives* is another way through which competing memories can be represented in a literary work. Through the perspective of the characters as well as the narration perspectives, different memory versions, identity concepts, norms and values can be confronted with one another, evaluated or hierarchized. Even though literary texts dominated by an antagonistic mode usually display a plurality of perspectives, they are often relatively restrictive regarding their structure of perspectives. The non-dominant perspectives are usually being deconstructed throughout the text and eventually brought together with the privileged perspectives, which indicates that the antagonistic mode and a true ‘polyphony of perspectives’ according to Bakhtin’s definition usually exclude one another due to the mode’s limited views and site-dependent representations of the past (*ibid.*; Bakhtin, 1979).

In terms of *narration techniques*, the antagonistic mode prefers to display the voice of a community. ‘We-narratives’ are of particular relevance, for their goal is to articulate a collective identity. This communal voice is a way, especially for marginalized authors, to legitimize their identity, which at the same time can serve as a literary strategy to monopolize or monophonize memory, which can be an important means of articulating counter-memories within a memory culture dominated by competition (Erll, 2017: 202f).

The antagonistic mode is often used to illustrate generational memory and identity, for the memories, values and beliefs of generations often clash (as was discussed in section 2.3.1.4.), justifying the need of displaying such memories in opposition to one another. Through *implicit means*, the antagonistic mode can become a central medium in representing and negotiating memory competition, for instance by putting existing past versions into new plot structures or by focusing only on limited aspects of a collective memory. Through these strategies, literary works dominated by an antagonistic mode actively influence the societal struggle for memory dominance, for they are able to model specific collective memories as well as confirm or reject memory narratives through literary strategies (*ibid.*: 203).

For the upcoming literary analysis, Erll’s rhetorical modes of collective memory will serve as a methodological guideline, focusing especially on the experiential, the monumental and the antagonistic modes. The historiographic as well as the reflexive modes are not major categories of analysis, but they will nevertheless be represented in Appendix A, which will be serving as an additional short-hand tool in the analysis of the novel.

3.3. Application of the Theory

In the following part of this work, the results of the close-reading and the interpretative analysis of the novel will be presented. After a short overview of the plot and the context of creation, the outcomes of the analysis are divided into three parts. First, we will consider the structural characteristics, for we have determined earlier that structure and content have to be considered side by side when conducting literary analysis in the field of Memory Studies. Afterwards, the most important aspects of the novel's content, like character development and plotlines, but also central motifs shaping the novel's representation of the GDR will be at the center. In the last part, content and structural observations will be brought together. The dominant rhetorical modes of collective memory will be determined and the memory concepts introduced in the theoretical part will be revisited, serving as a methodological attempt of defining which memory concepts can be found in the novel and how they contribute to the collective memory value of the literary piece at stake.

Part II

*Glückliche Menschen haben ein schlechtes
Gedächtnis und reiche Erinnerungen.*

Thomas Brussig

4. Literature as a Place to Remember – An Analysis

4.1. About the Novel

4.1.1. Context of Creation

In order to be able to better understand certain aspects of the novel, we need to take into account the context in which the novel was created. As we have learned from Ricoeur's model of mimesis, even fictional literature always draws from the extra-literary context surrounding it, which is why it is of essence to include the most relevant circumstances of the novel's creation as well as its historical background into the evaluation of the novel's capacity of shaping collective memory.

The spatial context and the setting of the novel's plot is the GDR, the former 'German Democratic Republic', established after the end of the Second World War in the East of the country. After Germany was defeated in 1945, the East of Germany fell under the restriction of the Soviet Union, while the rest of the country remained in the hands of the western allies composed of the United States, Great Britain and France. Unlike the western allies, whose goal it was to implement a democratic government in post-war Germany, the Soviet Union decided to extend their authoritarian influence into their newly gained German territory, resulting in the fact that in 1961, the Soviet regime constructed a wall dividing their section of Germany from the territories of the other allies. Coming to be known as the Iron Curtain, the Berlin Wall physically secluded the eastern part of Germany from the liberal West, and, in consequence, ideologically separated the authoritarian-socialist East of Europe from the democratic West. Berlin, as the former center of power during the NS-regime, became a symbol for the harsh reality of the Cold War unlike any other place, for the Berlin Wall ran right through the heart of Germany's capital, serving as a constant reminder of the hardened fronts between East and West.

In Berlin, the division of the country was omnipresent, for the people lived side by side with the wall. From one day to the next, citizens of East-Berlin were no longer able to enter into the West, for the Soviet regime intended to prevent all interactions between the liberal West and their newly established authoritarian territory. While western citizens were still able to enter the GDR – and even observe life there from observation towers along the west-side of the wall –, the people from the East could no longer leave. With the liberal West in front of their doorstep, they lived their lives isolated and in an ideological bubble created by the Soviet regime. The socialist ideology became the only reality they knew, the media connection to the West was limited to a minimum and everyday life became a struggle, for the Soviet authorities restricted personal freedom as well as freedom of information, freedom of speech and the right to justice.

While the West of Germany slowly recovered from the horrors of the Second World War, the citizens in the East once again lived in fear of a repressive authoritarian regime. Most of the goods produced in the West were prohibited in the GDR, as well as cultural products promoting liberal ideologies and western lifestyles such as music or films. Only the people with a personal connection to the West, for instance a family member, were aware of how drastically restricted the living conditions in the GDR truly were – but despite their

awareness, they were incapable of changing or escaping their situation, for the wall was impossible to overcome. It is in this very setting that the plot of the novel is located.

Regarding the relationship between the author and the novel's plot, we can note that, even though we are not dealing with a first-person narration, it can be assumed that the author's personal experiences with the GDR played a great role in the creation of the novel. Brussig was born in 1964 and grew up in East Berlin, meaning that the experiences of his youth largely coincide with the experiences his characters make in the novel. Deriving from the fact that Brussig has first-hand experience of what it was like to live and grow up in the GDR, we can assume that his identity constituting function-memory of these experiences influenced the work at stake, which is why it is relevant to analyze the work under the paradigm of memory, even though the novel is declared a work of fiction. This argument can further be supported by the fact that all of Brussig's works deal with topics evolving around the German division, may it be everyday life in the GDR, the German reunification or its aftermath. This observation allows for the assumption that the author sees his writing as a way of coping with past experiences, therefore supporting the novel's relevance in the field of memory.

Despite the fact that all of Brussig's works are concerned with the GDR, his novels differ significantly from the majority of works which are considered 'GDR-literature'. While most GDR-related literary works – or cultural objects overall – tend to focus on specific aspects of the Soviet regime, for instance issues such as surveillance or espionage, Brussig is more concerned with displaying everyday situations and the effects that the GDR and its aftermath had on people's life-world. For this reason, analyzing Brussig's work regarding its ways of representing the GDR and the resulting impact on the memory of the East-German state is particularly interesting.

Unlike most literary works, which are often later adapted into films, we are confronted with the opposite case in terms of the literary piece at stake. In 1999, Brussig received an award for the film script of the movie *Sonnenallee*, a project he worked on together with the East-German filmmaker Leander Haußmann. After the film script was completed, Brussig felt as if many of his ideas had not found space in the movie, and he decided to write a novel based on the film in order to be able to extend and alter the original plot. While the film mainly focusses on the love story between Micha and Miriam, Brussig added several critical elements in the novel, which is why the book has to be considered an

independent piece of work and not simply an extension of the movie. Furthermore, Brussig changed several names and characters, added new topics and shifted the focus away from the love story towards a more regime-critical direction, aspects such as protest, resistance and revolution became central storylines of the novel. This fundamentally different approach between movie and book also shows in the ending of both: While the movie ends with the opening of the wall and thus the ‘happy ending’ that the people have been waiting for, the novel only suggests a potential change in the future without specifying how the story actually plays out. This shift from a simple teenage love story towards a critical and multilayered piece of literature (Krischel, 2019: 20f) is yet another element which makes Brussig’s novel an interesting object of analysis.

Regarding the context of the novel, it was already established why the author’s memories and personal experiences need to be seen as a reference when analyzing the novel. Even though Brussig writes fiction, his works are grounded in real-life experiences and take place in real-life settings, attesting for their relevance to memory culture. The final factor at stake regarding the context in which the novel is embedded is, however, the temporal factor.

In terms of the plot, Brussig’s experiences coincide with the experiences of the teenagers in his story. However, when taking into account how reliable Brussig’s own memories are and to what extent they shine through in the novel, we have to bear in mind that *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* was only written in 1999, thus many years after Brussig’s youth and, more importantly, during a time in which the Iron Curtain had already fallen. In the theoretical chapters of this work, we have discussed the re-constructiveness, the selectiveness and the subjectivity of memory several times, and all these aspects are of extreme relevance at this point: Due to the reconstructive character of memories, the way in which they are retrieved is inseparably linked to the conditions of the present, which can have great impact on which memories are accessible within the domain of the function-memory overall, and furthermore, in what manner certain events are being remembered and forgotten.

When analyzing Brussig’s work, we thus have to take into account the retrospective factor influencing the way in which memory is accessed. Had Brussig written this piece while the GDR was still intact and/or while he was still a teenager there, the memories which he incorporated in the novel might have been very different. As discussed at an earlier point, biographical memories change over time, which does not make them untrue, but it is a factor

which has to be taken into consideration during analysis. Due to the fact that we are dealing with memory in its Vis-function, time has an undeniable impact on the memory content at stake, which is why we will return to the question of which memory concepts specifically come into play in the novel during and after the assessment of the content analysis.

4.1.2. Plot Overview

Since the plot of the novel has already been briefly outlined in the introduction of this work, the plot summary can be kept rather short at this point. For the upcoming analysis, it is however important to be familiar with the most important aspects of the content, even though many of the key points will be considered more in depth throughout the following chapters.

The plot of the novel is situated in the late 1970s or early 1980s and covers a period of approximately one and a half to two years. The protagonist, Michael ‘Micha’ Kuppisch, is a 16-year old boy, who lives with his family in East Berlin, more concretely, in a street called Sonnenallee which is located in the district Berlin-Baumschulenweg. As the title of the book indicates, Micha lives at the shorter end of the Sonnenallee, for the street has been divided by the Berlin Wall into a longer (west) and a shorter part (east). Due to this fact, the people living at the shorter end of the street, namely the eastern part, all live in close proximity to the wall, so much so that many of the balconies of their small apartments overlook the ‘Death Strip’¹⁰. This aspect serves as a constant reminder of their absence of freedom and puts them in direct confrontation with the unknown, mysterious life beyond the wall.

Even though Micha Kuppisch is the protagonist of the novel, there are a number of other characters relevant to the story, which can be roughly divided into two groups connected through Micha. On the one hand, Micha’s family plays a key role. They represent a typical GDR-family, which will be considered more in depth during the character analysis at a later point. It can however be said that Micha does not have much in common with his family members, who have more or less adapted to the rules and the lifestyle of the GDR.

¹⁰ ‘Death Strip’ = area around the wall that nobody was allowed to enter due to a firing order implemented in order to prevent people from escaping the GDR.

On the other hand, Micha's group of friends forms the second group of characters, which can be considered the most relevant group in terms of plot development. 'Die Clique', as they are referred to, consists of Micha, his best friend Mario, and their three friends Wuschel, Brille and 'der Dicke'. The use of only nicknames indicates that some of Micha's friends may also symbolize typical characters of the GDR (in this case the young GDR-generation), leading up to the fact that some characters are more multilayered, while others exhibit only specific type-cast character traits.

Overall, the novel's plot focusses on the everyday lives of the five adolescent boys and their process of growing up in the GDR. Their daily experiences with their friends, but also with the GDR's repressive political system are represented. The reader is introduced to the boys' encounters with state officials as well as their experiences with the military, school authorities and the police, which are all under the control of the ruling GDR-party, the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands).

However, despite the fact of living in a repressive regime, the novel is also concerned with several typical problems of teenage boys, which might appear trivial at the first glance, for instance, love, resistance and personal growth, but which will be of crucial importance during the content analysis of this work. Two separate love stories move the plot forward: On the one hand, Micha is in love with a girl named Miriam, who the reader does not know much about. She is described as beautiful and mysterious, and all the boys at school – including Micha's friends – have a crush on her. Miriam, however, does not appear to be interested in any of them, and instead, she goes out with several older boys, many of which turn out to be from the West. Towards the end of the novel, Miriam does respond to Micha's advances, who then finds out that her interest in western boys mainly derived from a severe thirst for freedom and was therefore her very personal form of rejecting the system. This aspect will be explored in depth shortly.

While Micha's and Miriam's love story is very innocent and platonic for most of the novel, Mario's love story is by far more intense. In chapter seven, Mario meets a woman who is only referred to as 'the Existentialist', and who represents everything that is forbidden in the GDR. Being older and more mature than the rest of the group, she introduces Mario to thinkers such as Sartre and the fundamental ideas of Existentialism, and from their first encounter, an intense emotional and sexual love affair derives, which results in Mario being

expelled from school, him being taken into custody, the plotting of a utopian revolution against the GDR-regime and, finally, an unexpected pregnancy.

By the end of the novel, all of the main characters have undergone major personality developments, regarding personal matters as well as regarding their positions towards the GDR-regime. Even though the plot is centrally concerned with everyday experiences and problems of adolescent boys, regime-critical aspects are omnipresent, even though they are often disguised in humoristic episodes. This combination of both personal struggles as well as the struggle against the system makes the novel particularly interesting in terms of cultural analysis: The author tells a story within a story, he puts individual experiences into a larger historical and sociocultural context, which allows for an interesting evaluation of the interplay between personal and collective experience and the memory deriving from it.

4.2. *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* & its Representation of the GDR

4.2.1. Structural Analysis

4.2.1.1. Genre Patterns & Narration Techniques

While discussing the theoretical framework of this research project, we have learned that analyzing the content alone is often not sufficient when conducting literary cultural analysis in the field of Memory Studies. Therefore, a few structural observations need to be discussed which can later be considered side by side with the outcomes of the content analysis.

Beginning with the genre patterns or patterns of interpretation of the novel, several approaches of interpretation need to be taken into account. Volker Krischel, a German scholar who has written one of the most widely spread interpretative approaches about Brussig's work, suggests that the novel can be read within the framework of six different literary genre patterns (*ibid.*: 79-84). Even though not all of these potential lines of interpretation are equally important for us, I would like to briefly pick up on his potential classifications of the novel.

Formally, Krischel suggests that *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* has to be understood as an *episodic novel*. Besides the love story between Micha and Miriam, which forms the center of the plot, there are several subplots evolving around it, leading to the fact that the novel does not have one continuous plotline (*ibid.*: 80). This perception of the book as an episodic novel will be crucial for our analysis, for the episodic style can be understood as an indicator for the episodic, autobiographical memory laying ground to the structure and

plot of the story. Just like the novel, memory – especially biographical memory – is also organized in the form of single episodes which together contribute to the life-story of an individual. Through this interpretative approach, parallels between the author's biographical memory and the plot of the novel can be drawn.

The second suggestion Krischel makes regarding the possible patterns of reading the novel is also important for the interpretation in the context of this work. The scholar claims that Brussig's work can be read as a *time and space novel*, for it deals with life in both a time and place which no longer exist today. Several episodes in which Brussig displays the particularities of the GDR-state support this interpretative approach, some of which will be discussed at a later point. Furthermore, the author's critique towards the political system of the GDR supports such a reading of the novel (*ibid.*: 81f).

The third potential pattern of interpretation relevant in the context of this work is the one of the *satirical novel*. Krischel grounds his argument of classifying the novel as such in the fact that Brussig satirically exaggerates and overdraws several characters and episodes. This humoristic-satirical strategy allows the author to reveal many aspects of the reality of living in a state as particular as the GDR on the one hand, but, on the other hand, it bares the potential danger of ridiculing and trivializing a brutal and repressive system (*ibid.*: 83f).

Even though Brussig has been criticized for the humoristic nature of his novel (more on that shortly), this stylistic strategy of his will be very important during our analysis of his work, for we will explore that the author's satirical approach is in fact a way of establishing a specific form of memory as well as a coping mechanism, not merely a simplification or romantization of the circumstances of the past.

The last three possibilities which Krischel puts forward regarding the novel's possible classifications are of lesser relevance regarding our analysis, but, as some aspects of these suggested genres will pop up throughout the following chapters, they shall briefly be mentioned for the sake of completeness.

First, Krischel suggests that the novel can be read as a *coming-of-age novel* or even as a classical *Bildungsroman*, which is probably the most obvious classification of the novel. The topics of maturing and growing up are omnipresent throughout the story, as well as the challenges resulting from this process. Since we have established that the center of the plotlines is the love story between Micha and Miriam, but also the one between Mario and 'the Existentialist', the characteristics of a *Bildungsroman* are mostly fulfilled, for such is

often concerned with a hero winning the heart of a woman and growing up in the process. Also the extreme character developments that all protagonists undergo throughout the novel are an indicator for the aptness of the classification as a *Bildungsroman*. Regarding this work, this classification of the novel will only play a minor role, even though certain aspects will become important later on (*ibid.*: 80f).

The last two potential classifications deal with specific motifs from the novel. First, the work can be read as a *music novel*, as music is a motif which continuously reappears throughout the story and moves along several plotlines. Lastly, Krischel suggests a potential reading of the novel as a *mystical legend of salvation*, which refers to the novel's symbolic and atypical ending in particular (*ibid.*: 82f).

Even though both of these motifs mentioned above will be picked up during the content analysis, this research project is not going to interpret the entire novel according to these specific aspects, which is why the classifications of the episodic novel, the time and space novel and the satirical novel will suit our research interests better and shall therefore serve as the framework of interpretation from now on.

In terms of the dominant narration techniques, we have already established that *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* is structured episodically. The perspective of narration is auctorial, meaning that all episodes, no matter which characters are in the focus, are being narrated by an anonymous third-person narrator, who is not directly involved in the plot, but who rather fulfills an observatory purpose. However, even though the narrator does not directly participate in the actions of the plot, he is at the same time less distant than auctorial narrators usually are. He sometimes comments on emotional as well as contextual aspects, thus involving himself in the story to some extent. This circumstance becomes particularly evident at the end of the novel, when the narrator comments and evaluates the events in the final paragraphs (Brussig, 2001: 156f).

However, this ambivalent relationship between distance and involvement of the narrator leads to a number of interesting access points of analysis. As we have discussed in section 2.4.2.3., a third-person narration in the form of an 'observational memory' is not unusual, especially when the experienced events are no longer part of the recent past. When the temporal gap between the experience and its narration is big, the individual whose memories are at stake can occupy the perspective of a third-person spectator, which, in the

case of Brussig's work, would support both the loose episodic style of the narration as well as the distant but at the same time involved role of the narrator.

Furthermore, the partly-involved auctorial narrator allows the reader to acquire an emotional insight into more than one character, leading up to the fact that readers can identify with all characters, which does not limit their perspective in a way a first-person narration would. This may be evidence of the fact that the novel centers around the aspect of community, allowing its readers to identify with a whole group, namely the people living in the GDR, instead of one protagonist alone. This aspect will return later during the content analysis as well as during the establishment of the dominant rhetorical modes of collective memory in the novel, but it had to be mentioned at this point, for this particular narration technique is a crucial structural feature of the novel.

4.2.1.2. Formal Structure of the Novel

Formally, the novel is divided into 14 chapters differing significantly in terms of length as well as content. Just like the episodic style of the novel does not allow for one continuous plotline, the division into chapters does not allow for a specific classification system.

In formal terms, all chapters are between three and 24 pages long, and also the chapter titles do not suggest any clear organizational system, which supports the loose episodic nature of the novel. The chapters are not numbered, and the titles refer to names of people or groups of people, song titles and content-related aspects. These observations suggest that the narrator does not wish to prioritize certain parts of the plot, but that his intention is to present the reader with independent episodes which, like memories, are all interlinked, but can only be evaluated by each individual as such.

In terms of content, the structural aspects are a little clearer. The first three chapters can be understood as introductory chapters. The first chapter fulfills all introductory criteria, it introduces the protagonist and his surrounding as well as the central plotline, namely the love story between Micha and Miriam. Furthermore, the title of the novel is explained, supporting the introductory character of chapter one. During the second and third chapters, the framework for the plot is set and the most important characters, plotlines and motifs are introduced. Chapter two focusses on Micha's friends, who are now presented according to their most relevant character traits. The same applies to Micha's family in chapter three.

Overall, each plotline determining the course of the plot as a whole throughout the novel is presented within the first three chapters.

Chapters four to 13 form the actual course of action. Each chapter is dedicated to a different plotline and thus focused on different characters. In an episodic manner, these chapters form the body of the novel by telling individual stories which are all brought together in chapter 14. The final chapter of the novel brings all plotlines to an end and is thus one of the few chapters which combines several episodic experiences, forming an exception together with chapter one to three. As we will discuss shortly, the final chapter also differs stylistically from the rest of the novel, for it introduces a mythical symbolism and reveals the ‘true voice’ of the narrator in the last pages.

4.2.1.3. Reception of the Novel: Critique and Potential

Before moving on to the content analysis, I would like to make a brief excursion into the reception history of *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee*. Volker Krischel has compiled a brief overview of the most important critiques which were published in almost all major German newspapers after the novel was released (Krischel, 2019: 85-88), and, reading his compiled findings, it immediately becomes clear that Brussig’s third book found great approval as well as criticism in the eyes of the public.

While almost all reviewers commented positively on the author humoristic-satirical style, it is his representation of the GDR and the historical revision he provides that bring forward a number of different opinions. On the one hand, Brussig’s satirical representation draws a clear image of the utopian ideals of the GDR, which he represents as a kind of parallel universe in which the logic and laws of the outside world do not seem to apply. Some critics also underline the importance of the distinction between simple comedy, which is not what Brussig does, and real-life satire, whose goal it is to hold up a mirror to society and comment on real problems through the means of humoristic exaggeration. These critics therefore argue that Brussig is not at all drawing a harmless picture of the East-German state, but, quite the opposite, that he is still unreconciled with the GDR-regime and therefore with his life and childhood spent there (*ibid.*: 85ff).

However, other critics, for instance Andreas Nentwich or Till Weingärtner, took a different position regarding Brussig’s GDR-representation, they understand his humoristic style as a way of avoiding real issues and of taking a clear stand against the old regime. They

do not understand his work as political, for it does not account for the horrors committed by the regime and instead focusses on trivial and humoristic episodes which the author treats as if they were the historical truth of that time (*ibid.*: 87f).

Taking these arguments one step further, reviewers such as Elmar Krekeler have come to the conclusion that Brussig's work is leaning towards a nostalgic representation of the past rather than towards a factual representation. Even though he describes real-life circumstances of the past, he makes them appear somehow enjoyable and harmless. These reviewers especially disagree with the ending of the novel, in which the narrator comments on the appeasing force of memory, which, according to these critics, does nothing else than contribute to the already trivialized representation of a repressive regime (*ibid.*: 88).

The ending of the novel will be discussed in detail later on. For now, it is important for us to note that, even though the novel has been perceived very critically, this criticism is also one of the factors which makes Brussig's work an interesting object of analysis. As the upcoming chapters will show, Brussig is not trivializing the circumstances of the GDR, but he is applying a very particular style of narration that allows him to draw a specific picture of the past. However, the fact that the author's work has been received so diversely raises the question of whether and how the novel challenges or confirms previously established memory images of the GDR.

4.2.2. Content Analysis

4.2.2.1. Carriers of the Plot

Even though we encounter a number of characters in the novel, not all of them move the plot forward equally. Therefore, we shall begin the analysis of the novel's content by considering the most important carriers of the plot, their central character traits and their contribution to the GRD-representation of the novel. At this point, it can already be noted that several important attributes of the characters will be of relevance during the evaluation of the novel's central plotlines and key motifs.

Michael 'Micha' Kuppisch

Micha Kuppisch is the protagonist of the story and at the same time the connection between the two main groups of characters. He is approximately 16 years old, which indicates that he does not know any other life besides the one in the GDR, for the Berlin

Wall was constructed in 1961, whereas the plot takes place only in the late 1970s to early 1980s. Together with his parents and his two siblings, Micha lives in a very small apartment located on the east-part of the Sonnenallee. Due to the size of the apartment being entirely insufficient for a family, Micha soon begins to relocate most of his life to the streets. There he meets his friends, which are all struggling with the same suffocating living situation (Brussig, 2001: 9f).

Micha has a good relationship with his family, even though he becomes more detached in the course of the novel, illustrating his process of growing up. While in the beginning he gives in to his mother's wish of him attending the elite school 'Rotes Kloster' (*ibid.*: 129), he soon stands up for himself, declaring that he has no desire to attend the school or study in the USSR, a situation which his parents eventually accept (*ibid.*: 133). Also Micha's relationship to Miriam develops outside of the sphere of his family life, again indicating his increasing independence.

Even though Micha exhibits some rebellious character traits, for example in the course of the episode of purposely getting expelled from the 'Rotes Kloster' (*ibid.*: 132), he is also a cautious character who tries to stay out of trouble with the authorities. Due to his intelligence, he often manages to talk himself out of difficult situations (*ibid.*: 78), for example in the early stages of the novel, when Micha and his friends get caught speaking about forbidden western music, and Micha quickly explains to the ABV (local GDR-policeman¹¹) that the term 'forbidden' is nothing more than a popular expression of the youth (*ibid.*: 12). Micha's courage to stand up to the authorities also becomes evident later on, when he decides to take the blame for Mario's prank at school, which leads to him having to give a talk on a socialist topic in front of the whole school, causing him to worry about Miriam thinking less of him after such a 'red speech' (*ibid.*: 22). Also during later episodes, Micha's increasing courage becomes clear, for example when he finally becomes bold enough to talk back to the tourists making fun of him from the observation tower at the west-side of the wall (*ibid.*: 136).

Micha endures many harsh situations (at least early on), for instance the frequent ID-inspections of the ABV and the disrespectful behavior of western students who continuously make fun of him from the observation platform overlooking the wall and Micha's house. This endurance supports the claim that Micha is a moderate, reasonable character who

¹¹ ABV = Abschnittsbevollmächtigter.

disagrees with the system, but who does not say so publically, even though he wishes to have a more venturous reputation (*ibid.*: 21).

Despite the fact that Micha does not publically question the system in a way that other characters do, the reader discovers early on that Micha is a curious, creative and critical character, for he always tries to find explanations for things, especially for the circumstances in the GDR. This character trait of his becomes evident in chapter one, when Micha tries to come up with an explanation for why the Sonnenallee has been split up when Berlin was divided, and he eventually concludes that is had to be due to the beautiful name of the street that neither of the allies wanted to give it up (*ibid.*: 7f). Also the narrator underlines this characteristic of Micha by stating in the first introduction of him: “Michael Kuppisch suchte immer nach Erklärungen, denn viel zu oft sah er sich mit Dingen konfrontiert, die ihm nicht normal vorkamen” (*ibid.*: 8). This desire of explaining his own living conditions can be read as juvenile innocence, but it can also be understood as a display of critical thinking, two aspects which can potentially be interpreted as a way of criticizing the GDR-regime on Micha’s behalf.

The biggest part of Micha’s development as a character derives from his love for Miriam, which is also the central motivation for most of his actions throughout the novel. Micha’s main goal is to win Miriam’s heart, and while this conquest is only little successful in the beginning, he eventually gets her attention, but has to undergo a severe process of maturing in order to do so. At the beginning of the novel, Micha romanticizes Miriam, describing her as “die fremde, schöne, rätselhafte Frau” (*ibid.*: 17) and admitting to Mario that he is only looking for a platonic relationship of admiration, in which he would eventually die for her (*ibid.*: 19). This attitude of his is also the reason why he is not bothered by the fact that Miriam is seeing other men – at least in the beginning: As Micha matures as a person, his feelings for Miriam mature with him, his love becomes less platonic and he becomes increasingly jealous of her other relationships.

The dynamics of Micha and Miriam’s relationship change after Mario meets his girlfriend, ‘the Existentialist’, and tells Micha about his first sexual experience with her, which Micha finds fascinating (*ibid.*: 77). From that point on, Micha realizes that he has to grow up in order to truly win Miriam’s love, especially since she clearly has a sexual interest in men, which is evident from her behavior around her boyfriends throughout the novel.

Micha's final step into a responsible adulthood occurs towards the end of the novel. After a visit to the movie theater, Miriam falls into a state of apathy, for she realizes that the GDR-regime with all its restrictions causes her to miss out on the adventures of life. Once Micha realizes how serious Miriam's psychological situation is, he comes to the conclusion that he has to rescue her, for he knows what the life in the GDR can do to people: "Er kannte die Geschichten von Leuten, die in diesem Land kaputtgehn, und er hatte nur einen Wunsch: Daß er Miriam retten wird" (*ibid.*: 146). Micha eventually succeeds in his attempt of rescuing Miriam by reading to her from his forged diary, in which he makes clear that she is not the only one suffering and hoping for a life in freedom. This final heroic act of Micha is at the same time the true beginning of his relationship with Miriam, who finally keeps her promise of kissing him and thus enters into a non-platonic relationship with him (*ibid.*: 147ff).

Overall, Micha's process of growing up can be summarized in two central character developments: First, it is his relationship with Miriam that guides his process of maturing. He becomes increasingly bothered by the fact that Miriam is dating other men, and discovers that he is more and more sexually interested in her. Furthermore, the cautious and thoughtful Micha eventually reaches his breaking point at which he can no longer accept the treatment he receives as a GDR-citizen, causing him to stand up to all restrictive parties: his parents, the official authorities as well as the condescending spectators at the wall. After Micha liberates himself, he appreciates the freedom of no longer having to obey which adulthood has brought upon him (*ibid.*: 133). This aspect of resisting the regime and its authority will return shortly, for it forms one of the central motifs of the novel overall.

Miriam

Even though Miriam is one of the characters who has a greater impact on the plot development, her role is rather passive, for she is mostly the trigger of actions and not a member of the two central groups of characters. Furthermore, the reader as well as the other characters know very little about her, which makes her role in the plot even more obscure. However, two factors about Miriam's character are of particular interest.

Miriam enjoys the company of men, she is sexually mature and not prude, which Micha experiences during their first real interaction behind the stage at school, when Miriam deliberately changes her shirt in front of him while they are waiting to give their public talks (*ibid.*: 28). She furthermore has a number of partners throughout the novel, beginning with

the mysterious older man on the AWO-motorcycle¹², and later another unknown man who visits her daily in a different car. For Micha and his friends, these are all indicators that Miriam lives in an entirely different world than they do (*ibid.*: 19).

Despite the fact that Miriam appears a bit superficial, especially due to her beauty (which she uses deliberately and strategically around men), Micha eventually finds out that he had underestimated her and that her character is by far more complex than he had assumed (*ibid.*:92). It is also at this very moment that Micha becomes aware of the fact that Miriam's liberal sexual behavior is caused by something other than adolescent naivety, and he begins to understand that Miriam is struggling with issues that he cannot fully understand yet, so he can only make assumptions about her true character: "Wer so was sagt, der versteht was vom Warten, Sehnen und Hoffen [...]" (*ibid.*: 93). This passage indicates that Miriam's character is indeed complex and multilayered, for she embodies many of the central motifs of the novel, namely the motifs of hope and resistance as well as the desire for freedom.

What all Miriam's partners have in common is the fact that they are from West-Berlin, which becomes increasingly important throughout the story. The first episode indicating the importance of Miriam's preference is the school disco-episode in chapter two: After Micha embarrasses himself by asking Miriam to dance during an unpopular GDR-song, a group of unknown students appears, and Miriam soon starts dancing and heavily making out with one of them, causing Micha to feel like he has been cheated out of a life-changing experience by this stranger (*ibid.*: 25). However, the school's principle breaks up the situation immediately, for the stranger is wearing a T-shirt from a school in West-Berlin, indicating right away where he is from. Miriam gets punished for her permissive interaction with a western boy and has to prepare a public talk, which is where her first real interaction with Micha begins.

While waiting together for their talk behind the stage, Miriam all of the sudden tells Micha that western boys kiss differently, and even offers to show him one day (*ibid.*: 29). This observation of hers already indicates that her choice of western partners is not random, but that kissing someone from the West means more to her than the observer might think.

¹² AWO = motorcycle brand produced in the GDR.

How much it truly means is revealed in the last chapter of the novel. While chapter two states that Miriam's relationship to men is very obscure (*ibid.*: 18), she later opens up to Micha and explains that her desire – or her 'kissing-complex' (*ibid.*: 144) – of kissing western boys is her own way of showing that the authorities cannot rob her of every possible freedom. Through this peaceful, small gesture of revolution, Miriam is silently crying out for more than the GDR can offer her, and therefore tries to stand up to the system by reassuring herself that they do not yet have all power over her:

Miriam versuchte Micha zu erklären, daß 'die' alles vorschreiben wollen, das 'die' alles verbieten. [...] Alle, die das Sagen hatten. "Die wollen uns alles verbieten oder alles vorenthalten", meinte Miriam. Und irgendwie muß sie sich dagegen wehren, irgendwie muß sie doch spüren, daß die ihr eben nicht alles verbieten können. Und wenn sie sich mit Westlern knutscht, dann gibt ihr das so ein Gefühl, daß die nicht alle Macht über sie haben [...]. (*ibid.*: 144f)

Once Micha finds out that Miriam's earlier rejections had nothing to do with him personally, but that her previous choice of men had a deeper purpose, he brings up the courage to ask her out. During the date episode, Miriam's second important characteristic feature is revealed, namely her vulnerability and its effects.

After Miriam confesses the reason for her kissing-complex to Micha, he invites her to go to the movie theater and see the film *Around the World in 80 Days*. Miriam, in her deep desire for adventure and freedom, perceives this suggestion as evidence that Micha truly understands her: "Miriam, die von Sehnsucht, von ihrem Horror vor der Enge und von Fernweh sprechen wollte, fühlte sich wie erlöst: 'Endlich versteht mich mal einer!'" (*ibid.*: 145). So the two go to see the movie, and for a while they get lost in the colorful, adventurous world of the film and contemplate the things lying beyond their own limited experiences. Miriam feels so comfortable escaping from the real world that she even cuddles up against Micha's shoulder during the film (*ibid.*). However, when they leave the theater, they are catapulted back into their own harsh reality: Due to an upcoming military parade, a number of loud and steamy war-tanks rolls along the main avenue, forming a strong contrast to the colorful and happy images they had just seen in the film (*ibid.*: 146).

As a result of this insurmountable gap between the world she desires and the one she lives in, Miriam suffers a breakdown. She bursts into tears and falls into a state of apathy, which causes her to stay in bed for days, without speaking or reacting to anyone or anything (*ibid.*). When Micha finds out about her condition, he knows that the situation is serious, because he has heard stories of people who cannot cope with life in the GDR and eventually

crack under the heavy pressure of the system. Only Micha's forged diaries, through which he convinces Miriam that she is not the only one feeling locked up and misunderstood, liberate her from her condition and bring her back to life (*ibid.*: 146ff).

Miriam's character hence symbolizes two important aspects which the author wishes to discuss. On the one hand, she tries to resist the system on a personal level. By kissing western boys, Miriam believes to preserve her personal freedom, which is enough for her to feel like being in control of her own life. However, even though Miriam obviously is a strong woman, the author also broaches the issue that even the strongest people can break under the pressure of the regime. Caged behind the wall like a zoo-animal, Miriam's spirit begins to weaken, and the glimpse she acquires through the film into a better world combined with the subsequent reality check in the form of the military parade cause her to give up all hope. All of these values Miriam symbolizes, resistance, hope and freedom, will return in the analysis of the central motifs of the novel.

Mario

Despite being one of the main characters of the novel, Mario is already more type-cast than Micha or Miriam. He displays many attributes that are undesired in the strictly socialist GDR-regime and is therefore one of the two characters that represent the revolutionary spirit of the youth in the East.

Right at the beginning of the novel, the reader finds out that Mario has long hair, which is the reason why people tend to immediately believe that he is up to no good, regardless the circumstances (*ibid.*: 14). Furthermore, Mario's rebellious nature is implied by the fact that he has been on the school's 'red-list' even before the actual plot sets in, resulting in the fact that Micha has to take the blame for one of his pranks (*ibid.*: 21). Even though Mario dislikes to play by the rules, he is also invested in his future, for his goal is to graduate high school or at least find a job as a mechanic (*ibid.*). Overall, Mario is a genuinely honest character who stands up for his friends and his beliefs, but at the same time is willing to make sacrifices for what he wants. This instance becomes particularly clear through the fact that he cuts off his long hair twice, first when taking his moped-exam and then again while planning a vacation to Eastern Europe, for both these activities require him to display a certain amount of conformity towards the GDR-ideals (*ibid.*: 67f, 95).

Mario is highly respected amongst his friends, who believe that he is extremely mature and knowledgeable regarding issues involving life-experience (*ibid.*: 57). This impression might derive from the fact that Mario is the only one who openly admits to his rejecting attitude towards the regime, an aspect in which he truly is bolder and more mature, but at the same time also more reckless and more daring than his friends. Due to this fact, Mario does not always understand people who make an effort to fit into the system, not even when it comes to his friends. This aspect becomes particularly clear in chapter six, when Micha's mother displays her socialist conformity in front of him, which causes Mario to heavily insult Micha for adapting to the Soviet ideals and lifestyle (*ibid.*: 67).

While Mario tries to keep his rebellious nature hidden in public at the beginning of the novel, his attitude and behavior become more radical after he meets his girlfriend, who introduces him to the ideology of Existentialism. After this encounter, Mario is no longer afraid of standing up to the authorities, which causes him to get kicked out of school (*ibid.*: 80f), but at the same time initiates the best time of his life – namely a life in freedom.

Mario's process of maturing and his hence resulting radicalization continue from there on. Not only does he have his first sexual experience, but he also experiments with drugs and even comes up with a plan of how an independent counter-republic could be founded in the GDR through the purchase of land (*ibid.*: 77, 101, 104). However, even though these actions indicate Mario's increasing maturity and willingness to break the rules, it soon becomes evident that he is not yet fully grown up, for he takes some naïve decisions and makes several juvenile errors in the course of the plot. First, the party he hosts at his parents' house gets entirely out of hand, causing them to finally kick him out (*ibid.*: 109). Furthermore, Mario eventually realizes that the land-purchasing-plan he had developed with his girlfriend was entirely flawed due to a simple calculus error, leaving them with the realization that all the efforts they had made in the name of their revolution had turned out to be in vain (*ibid.*: 125f).

By the end of the novel, Mario's development is completed when he finds out that he will be a father (*ibid.*: 141). He is ready to take on the responsibility, causing his revolutionary energy to decrease. He is now focused on providing a good life for his family, which includes coming up with a way of earning money. However, staying true to his rebellious nature, Mario decides to make his living by driving an illegal taxi, but only once he turns eighteen (*ibid.*: 153).

The Existentialist

Mario's girlfriend is the second character symbolizing the rebellious nature of the GDR-youth. Even though she is also one of the central plot carriers, she is even more stereotyped than Mario, which becomes evident in the fact that her name is only revealed in the last page of the novel. Until then, she symbolizes the ideology she stands for and is therefore only referred to as 'the Existentialist'.

Looking like a true Parisian, she represents everything that Mario finds appealing, which is why he pursues her right after their first encounter in an elevator (*ibid.*: 73f). The Existentialist is in her early twenties, thus a little older than Mario, which fascinates him even more. She is a painter and dedicated to the philosophy of Sartre and the Existentialism, both of which she introduces Mario to in chapter seven. Mario, who has never met anyone who believes this openly in the freedom of decision, immediately falls for her, not only due to her age and maturity, but also because she shares the beliefs and values he too desires to live by. During their first conversation, he has the feeling that she is talking about something big and special, and thus the insight she gives him changes his life entirely: "Und wie jemand, dessen Fenster zum Todesstreifen ging, das Hohelied der Freiheit sang, es geradezu beschwor, das imponierte Mario nicht nur, es änderte sein Leben" (*ibid.*: 75f).

The Existentialist actively pursues her desire for change, for she believes that change can only come if the people fight for it. If nobody is willing to stand up, nothing will ever change, and this would go against her strongest belief, namely the inevitability of freedom, which she illustrates in a way that seems unbelievable to the young and inexperienced Mario:

Sie stand auf und schaute aus dem Fenster, wo die Bogenlaternen den Todesstreifen beleuchteten. Die Existentialistin hatte schon über eine Flasche Wein getrunken. "Wir sind zur Freiheit verurteilt", sagte sie. "Weißt du, was das für die Mauer bedeutet? Was Sartre zur Berliner Mauer sagen würde?"

Mario war noch nicht richtig vertraut mit dem Existentialismus, deshalb mußte er raten: "Daß ich irgendwann in den Westen fahren darf."

"Nein", sagte sie, "das genaue Gegenteil."

"Daß ich *nie* in den Westen fahren darf?", fragte Mario.

"Daß es sie irgendwann nicht mehr geben wird", sagte die Existentialistin, und das war für Mario so ungeheuerlich, das überstieg alles Vorstellbare. Er hätte niemals den Gedanken formulieren können, daß die Mauer plötzlich nicht mehr dasein könnte. (*ibid.*: 76)

This first dialogue between Mario and the Existentialist indicates two things: On the one hand, the Existentialist is clearly more radical and more mature than Mario. She has a multilayered, critical world view, resulting in the fact that she can contemplate a life outside the GDR. On the other hand, the dialogue reveals how unbelievable it was for the majority of the young GDR-generation to imagine a life without the wall by their side, even though they wished for nothing more than to escape it. For a young boy like Mario, it takes a woman as open-minded as the Existentialist to familiarize him with the sheer thought that the wall could indeed be gone someday, a circumstance which today is no longer imaginable in our contemporary society, but which draws a very clear picture of the impact that the wall had on the generation that grew up in the GDR.

However, the Existentialist generally knows what she wants, and not even the law stops her from getting it. This character trait of hers becomes evident in several episodes, for instance in her getting arrested for stealing a book of Simone de Beauvoir at the Leipzig book fair, which leads to the fact that she is no longer allowed to travel (*ibid.*: 101), or even in the development of her meticulous (but utopian) land-purchasing-plan.

Mario and she share a very strong relationship build on mutual trust (*ibid.*: 121), and together their main goal is to find a way of escaping the firm grip of the regime. While the Existentialist is represented as a strong and independent woman with great impact on Mario throughout the novel, the last chapter reveals more aspects about her as a person. For the most part of the plot, she is a representation of her ideals. It is only in chapter 14 that her character becomes more multilayered: She confesses to Mario that she is afraid of not making it out of the GDR in time, and in a long monologue she declares her frustration with the fact that she lives in a state where the only color she sees is grey and the only faces she sees are fed up (*ibid.*: 140). Her statement acquires additional authenticity through the fact that her dialect shines through for the first time (more on that later), which eventually makes her appear more like a person than an incarnated ideology. Furthermore, her name is finally revealed in the final chapter: Elisabeth.

Right after her revealing monologue, the reason for her increasing anxiety over having to stay in the GDR is uncovered: The Existentialist is pregnant, and her biggest fear is having to face life in the GDR by herself, being forgotten in a place where nobody cares about what happens to her, where she cannot make a difference (*ibid.*: 141).

Wuschel

The last of the plot-determining characters is Wuschel (Eng.: ‘fluffy’, ‘frizzy’), another of Micha and Mario’s friends whose nickname derives from the fact that he looks like Jimi Hendrix (*ibid.*: 12). Just like the rest of the group, Wuschel is also against the regime, but unlike Mario or the Existentialist, he has found a subtler way of dealing with his desire for freedom.

Wuschel’s way of escaping his reality is through music, or more precisely, the music of the Rolling Stones. Throughout the entire novel, Wuschel’s actions are guided by his quest of finding the rare *Exile on Main Street* double album, a record which is strictly forbidden in the GDR, just like any other album of the Rolling Stones. In the context of its escapist purpose, the title of the album is highly symbolic, as we shall discuss in depth shortly. Even though Wuschel is a rather quiet character, he is fearless when it comes to his music. He drives many kilometers on his old foldable bike in the pursuit of his record and even deals with convicted criminals who are said to be in the possession of the album (*ibid.*: 51ff).

Despite the fact that Wuschel’s way of resisting the regime is subtle compared to the others, he is not afraid of speaking his mind about things, even though he usually does it in a manner which is not immediately understood as being critical of the regime. Examples for his sassiness can be found in his interaction with teachers, for instance with his physics teacher in chapter two (*ibid.*: 26), or his Physical Education teacher, who wants to convince him to join the TSC¹³, and to whom Wuschel boldly replies that the only sport he is interested in is pole vaulting, knowing very well that the teacher is not aware of the fact that pole vaulting-skills could be used to escape the GDR by jumping the wall (*ibid.*: 53f).

For Wuschel, music is a way of expressing individuality and experiencing a freedom that he does not have in real life. His appreciation for music also makes him receptive to other forms of art, becoming evident, for instance, during the party at Mario’s place in chapter eleven, when Wuschel defends the questionable performance art of one of the guests by stating: “Nein, das ist Kunst! Es wühlt auf, wenn einer etwas macht, das sonst keiner tun würde! Das ist wie Elektrizität! Das ist elektrische Kunst!” (*ibid.*: 106f). For Wuschel, the ultimate goal is escaping the system emotionally, which is why he is less involved with most actions of the plot and prefers to focus on perfecting his own world of escapism.

¹³ TSC = Turn- und Sportclub.

However, Wuschel's musical pursuit is not unrelated to the rest of the plot, and this becomes clear in the final chapter. During a power-out in the border zone, a watchman at the wall mistakes Micha and Wuschel for terrorists, even though they are merely trying to fish a letter out of the Death Strip. When he begins shooting at them, Wuschel gets hit in the chest, causing Micha to believe that he is dead. Once the others get to the scene, they realize that Wuschel moves, eventually sits up and pulls out the shattered *Exile on Main Street* album from under his jacket – The Rolling Stones' record had caught the bullet and prevented it from entering Wuschel's heart. Even though the record had saved his life, Wuschel is devastated that the album is broken, for it no longer offers him an escape from his reality (*ibid.*: 143).

Conclusively, we can note that, together with the other plot carriers, Wuschel symbolizes the second kind of resistance, namely the mental and emotional escape from the regime. While the others display their rejection more openly, Wuschel does it rather subtly, but not less effectively. Due to the importance of music as a motif of the novel, Wuschel can be considered as one of the characters centrally moving the plot forward, even though his storyline is not as closely interlinked with the ones of the other characters.

Doris Kuppisch

Micha's family does not actively move the plot forward, they can therefore be considered secondary characters. However, they greatly contribute to the representation of the GDR in the novel and play a supporting role throughout the story, which is why their characterization is of importance at this point.

Doris Kuppisch is Micha's mother, whose central concern is conveying the impression of leading a model socialist family. Appearances are everything to her, which is why she calls Micha 'Mischa' mimicking the Russian pronunciation (*ibid.*: 9), and even convinces her husband to switch from his liberal newspaper to the socialist one, so that all the neighbors would know that they are friends of the regime whenever they see the family's newspaper in the mailbox (*ibid.*: 35, 63). Despite her relentless efforts of mimicking the socialist ideals, Mrs. Kuppisch is furthermore afraid of getting into trouble with the authorities, which causes her to always demand caution from her husband, who gets easily upset with the circumstances in the East (*ibid.*: 36). Her caution and fear of the regime go so far that she convinces Micha's brother Bernd to join the army, even though he had not received an official conscription order (*ibid.*: 32).

While Mrs. Kuppisch's behavior seems rather odd at the beginning of the novel, the reader soon discovers why the perfect exterior impression is so important to her: She wants to ensure a good life for her children, and therefore does anything to make sure that Micha will get the opportunity of studying in the USSR, which is only possible with a perfect personal and academic record (*ibid.*: 39f).

Even though Doris Kuppisch goes to great lengths to convince the rest of the world of their loyalty to the regime, two episodes indicate that in reality, she is not devoted to the socialist regime at all and that her excessive mimicking of the socialist ideals is nothing more than a survival technique. First, Mrs. Kuppisch changes her appearance drastically throughout the novel, and the reason for that is only revealed relatively late: Doris Kuppisch has found the lost passport of a West-German lady, who, unfortunately, is 20 years older than she. In a planned attempt of crossing the border with the stranger's passport, Mrs. Kuppisch uses makeup in order to make herself look older, but then, in the last minute, decides that she is not brave enough to take the risk (*ibid.*: 63, 68, 98ff). However, her desire to leave the GDR, even under great risk, indicates that her devotion to Socialism is only a façade and a tool to survive.

This observation is furthermore supported by a second episode, namely the one in which Micha gets expelled from the 'Rotes Kloster' – the place his mother has worked so hard to get him into all his life. After being upset with Micha for only a short while, Mrs. Kuppisch is actually relieved that from now on she no longer has to pretend to be someone that she is not, does not have to keep up the façade any longer, for the door on Micha's future in Russia has now been closed for good (*ibid.*: 130f, 133). Following this relief, Mrs. Kuppisch no longer displays any loyalty to the regime. In the end of the novel, she even engages in a smuggle activity after returning from the West, indicating that she has undergone a transformative process of liberation from her fears (*ibid.*: 151).

Horst Kuppisch

Mr. Kuppisch appears to be very different from his wife. He works as a street cart driver and likes to articulate his rejection of the regime openly – at least as long as they are at home. Horst Kuppisch is a suspicious and paranoid person (a common character trait in the GDR for the system was largely based on surveillance) who tends to believe that

everything happens for a reason. So, for example, the fact that his neighbors read the ND¹⁴ and own a telephone tells him that they must be working for the Stasi¹⁵ (*ibid.*: 35).

Mr. Kuppisch likes to complain about things in private, and likes to threaten to complain about things in public, which usually makes his wife very nervous. Whenever something displeases him, he threatens to write a ‘Eingabe’, a formal complaint through which the GDR-citizens should be appeased by conveying the impression that they could make themselves and their problems heard. Even though Mr. Kuppisch never actually writes a complaint, he strongly believes that ‘Eingaben’ are a powerful tool that enable people to stand up to the authorities (*ibid.*: 35f). However, Mr. Kuppisch is never determined enough to actually complain, but the awareness of knowing that he could if he wanted to gives him a certain satisfaction and the feeling of having the power to make a difference. The only time Horst Kuppisch actually writes a complaint is after Micha gets kicked out of the ‘Rotes Kloster’, indicating that – just like his wife – Mr. Kuppisch is going to great lengths to ensure the happiness and future of his family (*ibid.*: 131).

To sum up, we can note that Micha’s parents have adapted to the living conditions of the GDR without actually agreeing with the system. They remain optimistic and try to make the best of the situation, always believing that things will get better at some point in the future (*ibid.*: 33). This optimism, however, often results from a flawed logic, especially when they are trying to embellish or explain the conditions under which they live, leading to the revelation of how surreal the circumstances of living in the GDR truly are, as indicated, for instance, in the discussion evolving around the newspaper (*ibid.*: 35).

The fact that they are powerless to change anything about their situation makes them somewhat oblivious to certain things, which can be seen in the cancer-episode in chapter three, during which they try to convince themselves that they have not been living in the contaminated apartment long enough to be affected by the asbestos. Had they admitted that their apartment made them sick, this realization would only have led to the awareness that they are unable to change anything about their living conditions, which would not have been beneficial to anyone (*ibid.*: 38f). The fact that the family is trapped in a vicious circle from which they cannot escape is illustrated in chapter three, during which everything seems to

¹⁴ ND = Neues Deutschland, socialist newspaper in East Germany.

¹⁵ Stasi = Staatssicherheitsdienst, secret news service and police force in the GDR, under the restriction of the SED.

spin around without leading anywhere – an interesting stylistic tool of representing the GDR-reality:

Wenn Heinz im riesigen Sessel des engen Wohnzimmers Platz genommen hatte und den Blick schweifen ließ, seufzte er jedesmal: “Die reinste Todeszelle ist das!” Er hatte schon vor Jahren hinter der Heizung Asbest entdeckt und damals ausgerufen: “Asbest, ihr habt Asbest! Das macht Lungenkrebs!”

Herr Kuppisch, der noch nie das Wort Asbest gehört hatte, rief: “Ich mach ‘ne Eingabe!”

Frau Kuppisch rief: “Aber vorsichtig Horst, mach vorsichtig!”

Interesting to observe is also the contrast which Micha’s parents – as members of the ‘older’ generation – form in comparison to Micha and his group of friends. The representation of the parents indicates the generational differences which exist at the time of the novel, an aspect which implies that some kind of change or renewal will approach due to the changing desires and attitudes of the young generation. While the older generation, i.e. the generation of Micha’s parents, is afraid of overstepping the line – which might be explained through their war and post-war experiences – the young generation has a thirst for freedom and change, and they are not afraid to stand up to the authorities anymore. For the further course of the analysis, this observation of generational differences will be of great importance.

Uncle Heinz

The last character who requires deeper consideration is Micha’s uncle Heinz, for he is the counterpart to all other characters in the novel. Heinz is the brother of Mrs. Kuppisch and lives at the longer end of the Sonnenallee, which makes him the only character living in the West. Throughout the novel, he is thus referred to as the West-uncle (*ibid.*: 34).

Heinz visits his sister’s family so frequently that he has his own armchair which resembles a throne in their small living room (*ibid.*: 34f). On the one hand, this clearly shows how responsible Heinz feels for his family in the East, and on the other hand, how important the contact to their western relative is for the family. This aspect will become even clearer at the end of the novel.

Even though Heinz spends a lot of time in the East, many of the habits and circumstances there are incomprehensible for him. Due to the fact that he wants to help his family, but at the same time does not really understand the GDR that well, Heinz has made a habit of smuggling things across the border in his clothes – without knowing that all of

them would be perfectly legal to import. When it comes to illegal things, however, Heinz is not willing to risk smuggling them into the GDR, for he is afraid of getting into serious trouble, should he ever get caught (*ibid.*: 36f). Due to that fear, Micha does not possess any rare western goods, despite his West-uncle: “Micha hatte keine Westplatten – trotz Westonkel. Platten ließen sich nicht in der Unterhose schmuggeln, und für solche Abenteuer wie doppelter Boden war Onkel Heinz nicht der Typ” (*ibid.*: 59). Heinz’s alleged smuggle activities indicate that he has good intentions in terms of helping his family, but at the same time, his efforts are in vain, for he is not willing to take any risks in order to truly help them. Much of his goodwill is thus merely a way of making himself feel as if he is supporting his family, and them as if they have someone who cares for them on the other side of the border.

Despite the fact that Heinz never actually brings anything illegal into the country, he sees himself as a victim of the regime and finds it unfair that none of the other family members understand the anxiety he has to endure every time he crosses the border (*ibid.*: 61). This slanted perspective is another indicator for the fact that Heinz – as a representative for western people – does not truly understand what life in the GDR is like. Even though he criticizes their living conditions heavily, he does not know what it means to live in a place where all personal freedom is limited: “Wenn Heinz bei der Familie seiner Schwester zu Besuch war, geschah fast immer etwas, was ihn schockierte” (*ibid.*: 62).

Heinz and his lack of comprehension are highly symbolic for the general lack of understanding, communication and compassion extant between East and West. As this aspect reappears several times throughout the novel, it will be discussed as one of the central motifs of the novel in the upcoming part of the analysis.

The one true sacrifice Heinz makes for his family in the East occurs in chapter six, when he loses almost 40 pounds in order to smuggle a suit for Micha’s prom across the border by wearing it under his own suit – once again, an action that would have been perfectly legal, but Micha appreciates the gesture so much that he could never find the heart to tell Heinz that his sacrifice was unnecessary (*ibid.*: 68f).

Apart from being a little oblivious and set in his ways, Heinz openly criticizes the GDR-regime whenever he is with the Kuppisch family. As the family’s only connection to the West, he tells them about things that they have never heard of before, for instance the fact that asbestos can cause lung cancer (*ibid.*: 38f), or that a person can be allergic to specific pollen only: “Und bei euch sind sie nur gegen manche Pollen allergisch und gegen andere

nicht?’, fragte Herr Kuppisch ungläubig, der nie geahnt hatte, daß sich der westliche Individualismus in solchen Verfeinerungen ausdrückt’ (*ibid.*: 65).

All the more devastating is it for the Kuppisch family, when uncle Heinz unexpectedly dies in the final chapter of the novel – ironically from the lung cancer that he has been warning them about all along (*ibid.*: 149). As one final act in his honor, his sister smuggles his ashes back into the GDR after the funeral in the West, and so the legendary smuggler Heinz experiences one last adventure at the border (*ibid.*: 151).

The true importance of Heinz is emphasized during his funeral service in the East, which is attended by all the people from Sonnenallee. Mr. Kuppisch states in his brief but dignified speech that Heinz was not *only* their brother and uncle, but that he was their West-relative (*ibid.*: 152). These final words illustrate how much the family, and all the people in the East, valued their connections to the West, which reminded them that there was a life outside of the GDR. In this context, being the connection to the West is even more important than being a family member, a fact not only supported by the speech, but also by the fact that Heinz’s funeral was attended by the entire Sonnenallee, no matter whether people were related to him or not. This extreme contrast between East and West is one of the central motifs of the novel, and will therefore be further discussed shortly.

Other Characters

The remaining characters of the novel do not require detailed discussion, for they do not fulfill a critical role in the plot. Most of them are strongly stereotyped, thus supporting the specific GDR-representation Brussig aims to achieve. Brille and der Dicke are also part of Micha’s friends. Brille is extremely smart, even to the extent that he knows certain things about the GDR that most people do not, even though they concern them all, for instance how high the Berlin Wall is and why so many sports are prohibited in the East, namely to prevent people from escaping (*ibid.*: 53f). Brille’s main concern throughout the novel is to come up with a non-political university major, which appears to be impossible to find, for every profession somehow has to serve the system in Communism. Der Dicke is a quiet character who does not have any immediate impact on the course of the plot.

Micha’s siblings Bernd and Sabine represent the exact opposite of Micha and his friends. Even though they are both older than him, they are easily impressionable, by the system as well as by third parties. After Bernd joins the army, he turns into an entirely different person. His family is shocked, for they barely recognize him: his language is

incomprehensible and he only speaks in socialist military slogans: “Vor uns kamen Tausende, und nach uns kommen Millionen” (*ibid.*: 117). Sabine is a similar case, only it is not the army that brainwashes her, it is her boyfriends, of which she has a new one every week. Whenever she has a new boyfriend, she tries to emulate them, almost causing her to join the SED once, which her father prevents anxiously (*ibid.*: 34). Overall, Micha’s siblings represent a group of impressionable, uncritical young adults, that simply go along with whatever they are told without questioning anything or anyone, eventually leading to the stabilization of the system through conformity and lack of interest.

The last character who remains to mention is the ABV, the local policeman responsible for patrolling the Sonnenallee. Representing the GDR-regime, he is obsessed with rules, authority and military ranks (*ibid.*: 13f). He influences the plot mainly by always being present in the most inconvenient moments, thus delaying or blocking certain actions. He furthermore has a personal issue with Micha, resulting in constant ID-controls and harassment whenever Micha leaves the house. Despite his pettiness and lack of intelligence, he turns out to be a good man, for he is the one who informs Micha about Miriam’s condition and even attends Heinz’s funeral in the end of the novel (*ibid.*: 146, 152).

4.2.2.2. Context, Central Plotlines & Key Motifs

Throughout the analysis of the plot’s main characters, many of the central plotlines and motifs have already been touched upon. In the following pages, these elements of representation will be considered in depth, for they will allow us to draw conclusions about the novel’s representation of the GDR and its resulting impact on the collective memory of this time and space.

a) Life in the GDR: Everyday Experiences as the Context of the Plot

One of the central concerns of the novel is the discussion of the everyday experiences the citizens of the GDR see themselves confronted with. Apart from the main courses of action, the living conditions in the GDR are central to the representation of the East-German state, which is why they can be considered the context in which the actions that move the plot forward are embedded.

A reoccurring element in the representation of everyday life in the GDR is the omnipresence of the regime. Early on in the novel, the reader learns that the private life of the people is extremely restricted due to numerous prohibitions. In fact, the very first action of the plot, namely the group of friends listening to western music, is an infraction of the law, resulting into the immediate intervention of the regime represented through the ABV (*ibid.*: 11-15). Throughout the novel, more and more restrictions of the people's private space are brought into play: specific sports are prohibited in the GDR, specifically those that could be used to escape the country, such as for instance sailing or paragliding (*ibid.*: 53f). Constant surveillance has to be expected, for the regime is known for planting spies within almost every surrounding, no matter how private. This causes many people to not trust anyone, which becomes evident in the way that Micha's parents suspect their neighbors of working for the Stasi (*ibid.*: 35, 153).

However, the GDR-regime does not simply prohibit certain things, but it also takes their rules to extremes, which is made evident in the novel through several means. First, this aspect is emphasized through a linguistic tool, namely the use of superlatives, even for adjectives that are not gradable, such as for example 'forbidden', or 'permitted' ('am verbotensten', 'am erlaubtesten', *ibid.*: 11, 15, 33). This excessive use of the superlative and its effects will be discussed in more depth later, but for now, we can note that this linguistic attribute contributes to the representation of the GDR as a state of extremes in which everything is regulated excessively. Another indicator for this aspect is the obsession of the authorities with numbers and appearances such as statistics, election outcomes and official ranks (*ibid.*: 27, 112-115, 13f).

Going into a similar direction is the fact that the authorities tend to interpret every action and event in a way in which it serves the purpose and the legitimization of the regime. Micha's enthusiasm during his public talk – which derived from his almost-kiss with Miriam backstage – is interpreted as passion for the socialist ideals, and Heinz's frequent visits to the East as admiration for the order of the GDR-system (*ibid.*: 30, 59). On the other hand, this tendency of the regime to interpret all events in its favor can also be used against it, as Micha proves in chapter seven: In order to talk his way out of a punishment for a regime-denouncing photograph printed in a western newspaper, Micha simply reinterprets the situation in his favor, claiming that the western press is lying, which has to be an indication for the fact that the West-German state is close to collapsing. In order to make his argument

more compelling, he even uses the regime's preferred jargon, such as trigger words ('opponent', 'lies') and the exaggerating superlative: "Wenn die Lügen am schmutzigsten sind, ist der Gegner am in die Ecke getriebensten" (*ibid.*: 80).

Nevertheless, the regime also knows how to manipulate its people, which happens frequently and within all kinds of settings. At school, the students have to give public talks endorsing the socialist values as punishment, as for instance Micha and Miriam had to do in chapter two. In the military, people are being brainwashed to an extent where even their language becomes incomprehensible (*ibid.*: 116f), indicating the strong ideological indoctrination during military service. At the same time, this indoctrination is a way for the regime to secure its influence over time, for serving in the military is mandatory for all young adults in the GDR, posing an opportunity for the regime to form the young generation according to their ideals. Further efforts of manipulations are constant political campaigns as well as public events such as military parades, which can be understood as means of keeping the people in line, reminding them of the influence of the regime and at the same time keeping them motivated and engaged in supporting the state, its policies and ideology (*ibid.*: 112, 146). Finally, the fear of the omnipresence of the Stasi is the final factor through which people are manipulated to play by the regime's rules.

Another important aspect regarding the omnipresence of the regime in the people's everyday lives is the constant fear of punishment. Throughout the novel, Mario, Micha and the Existentialist are being taken into custody, mostly for trivial reasons such as not carrying an ID or attending a language class (*ibid.*: 121-129), and at school, all forms of resistance or disobedience are punished with public talks, showing once more how the regime expands its influence into both public and private affairs. Furthermore, these episodes indicate how random and unpredictable punishment in the GDR is, thus explaining why people such as Mrs. Kuppisch or Heinz are so afraid of misbehaving or even appearing suspicious in any way. The randomness with which punishment is being practiced is furthermore supported by another episode: Günter, another inhabitant of the Sonnenallee, was unexpectedly imprisoned for espionage, even though everybody knew that he could not even stand up to his wife, let alone to a foreign government. One year and eight months later, Günter was released, but ever since then, he needed an oxygen tank for breathing; nobody in the Sonnenallee knows exactly what happened to him (*ibid.*: 124f).

These episodes mentioned above already indicate the next crucial aspect regarding the representation of everyday life in the GDR, namely the poor and dangerous overall living conditions described throughout the novel. Starting with the apartments that are genuinely too small and in addition contaminated with asbestos (*ibid.*: 9f, 38f), the regime obviously mistreats its prisoners and its opponents, even though nobody knows exactly what they do to them. Mario, for instance, experiences this maltreatment first hand when he is told during his questioning by the authorities that he has to earn a glass of water (*ibid.*: 126). All these elements combined confirm that the novel represents life in the GDR as difficult and unjust, and power structures strongly build upon the fear of the people.

The reason why the people of the GDR do not fall into despair despite their difficult situation is also explained: because they are used to it. In the final chapter, this aspect is supported by a paragraph explaining how trivial the wall seems to the people who live next to it, a curiosity simply deriving from the fact that the wall has been such a large part of their everyday lives for so long that, should the wall ever be opened, they would be the last ones to notice. However, at some point, something always happens that eventually reminds the people of where they truly are, no matter how hard they try to integrate the wall into their lives and thus to accept their fate (*ibid.*: 137f). In a nutshell, it can thus be noted that, even though most people try to accept their circumstances as well as possible, living in the GDR is a reality that nobody can escape from, no matter whether their strategy is to adapt, to resist or to flee into their own secluded world of escapism. This inevitable confrontation with reality is an experience that all characters of the novel come to share in the final chapter, during which they are forcefully reminded of the destructive force of the wall by having to believe for a minute that it has taken the life of an innocent – the life of one of them.

b) The Love Story: Center of the Plot

As discussed earlier, the love story between Micha and Miriam forms the center of the plot, with all other plotlines evolving around it. Due to the episodic style of the novel, not every chapter is concerned with either of the two characters, which is why this central plotline is often represented through the love letter-issue, which reappears as a central theme throughout the plot and ties many of the other plotlines back to the center of the story.

The love letter and the terrible experiences related to it are already mentioned in the first chapter of the novel, even though Micha only receives it much later, thus indicating its importance early on (*ibid.*: 9). In fact, he receives the letter after attending the prom of his dance class with Miriam, leading him to believe that the letter might be from her. Unfortunately, the wind carries the letter away and into the Death Strip before Micha gets the chance to read it. Obsessed with the desire of knowing whether the letter is from Miriam, Micha tries everything to get it back, which is why the mysterious letter becomes one of the central motifs and plot-propulsions throughout the novel (*ibid.*: 72).

In terms of symbolism, the letter's central purpose is the representation of hope. Even though Micha does not even know whether Miriam is the one who wrote it, the letter is what keeps him going, always clinging to the hope that things are going to work out between Miriam and him.

Micha's obsession with the letter also symbolizes the increasing intensity of his feelings for Miriam. While at the beginning his attempts of getting back the letter are rather simple, he later reaches a point in which he even considers joining the army, with the sole purpose of being able to enter the Death Strip and getting back his letter. Micha's determination increases along with his jealousy: The less platonic his relationship to Miriam gets, the more he is bothered by the fact that she still sees other men, causing him to cling more and more to the thin hope the letter represents to him (*ibid.*: 138).

Eventually, Micha's obsession causes him to take things too far, and during his final attempt at retrieving the letter with an extended vacuum cleaner, he and Wuschel are being mistaken for terrorists, resulting in Wuschel getting shot. As the love letter catches fire due to the flares of the ammunition and eventually glides back over the wall, two separate realizations take place simultaneously: For once, Micha realizes that he has taken things too far in risking his friend's life in order to retrieve the letter. Secondly, Miriam, who witnesses the whole scene, comes to the realization that she had been unknowingly involved in the event, and that she has been causing Micha pain through her behavior (*ibid.*: 142ff).

Despite the fact that Micha never actually gets to read the letter, the dramatic events at the wall and the final destruction of the letter are the trigger to the dialogue between Micha and Miriam, during which she explains herself to him and which finally initiates their relationship. The letter has thus fulfilled its purpose, even though it did so in an unexpected way. The fact that Micha does not actually get to read the letter can thus be read under a

further aspect, namely the one of the unknowability and uncertainty of life. Despite Micha's relentless efforts of learning what the future holds for him and Miriam by retrieving the letter, the fact that the letter remains unread forever indicates that it is generally not necessary to know one's future, for things have a way of working themselves out. In this context, we can understand the letter as a symbol of fate: On the one hand, it is impossible to forcefully create fate, for it can turn into a dangerous and unhealthy obsession, as Micha has to admit to himself at the end of the novel. On the other hand, however, fate is inevitable, supported by the fact that the letter eventually fulfills its purpose, even though its content is never revealed.

The fact that Micha and Miriam's love story – represented through the letter – can be read as a symbol of hope becomes very explicit by the end of the novel. In his attempt at rescuing Miriam from her state of apathy, Micha reveals his deepest feelings for her in the diaries he forges overnight. Hoping that by showing her the important role she plays in his life, he will be able to relieve her from her condition, he confesses how special she is to him and that she has always given him the impression of something bigger living inside of her, something that has given him hope all along (*ibid.*: 147).

Summing up, we can note that the love story between Micha and Miriam stands for more than a teenage romance: it symbolizes endurance and hope, even in times when both seem difficult to maintain. Despite its symbolic value, the letter is furthermore an elegant stylistic tool tying several storylines together throughout the novel. In chapter seven, for instance, Mario tells Micha about his first encounter with the Existentialist while they are trying to fish the letter out of the Death Strip, and in the final chapter, Wuschel's plotline is being tied back into the center of the story through the element of the letter.

However, in addition to these positive aspects, the letter is also the element which always leads the characters back to the wall, giving it a unique double purpose: On the one hand, the letter is a symbol of hope, and on the other hand, it is a constant reminder of their lacking freedom and of the world which lies outside of the characters' reach.

c) Critique against the GDR-Regime: Denouncing the System through Humor

While discussing the novel's reception history, we have seen that a number of reviewers find Brussig's representation of the GDR too humorous and thus too embellished and trivialized for the novel to be considered a 'true' representation of the life in the GDR (see section 4.2.1.3.). As a response to this critique, this chapter will take into consideration a number of humoristic episodes from the novel and explore to what extent they can be read as a critique against the GDR-regime, for it seems Brussig often refers to several layers of meaning, which is important regarding the general image of the GDR the novel conveys, as well as the collective memory deriving from this conveyed representation.

One element the narrative continuously comes back to is the flawed logic of the GDR-regime, going hand in hand with delusive fantasies about the endurance of the socialist system. Brussig illustrates these aspects in several humoristic-satirical episodes, the most easily identifiable of which is the one of the vegetable shop in chapter eight. In order to keep up the appearance of being a well-functioning system, the GDR-authorities decide to stock up the local vegetable shop in Sonnenallee, for this shop is the last place western visitors see before crossing the border back into the West. In doing so, however, they underestimate the fact that word travels fast, and the people, who are used to encounter empty shelves whenever they go shopping, soon find out that there is an exceptionally well-stocked store in Sonnenallee, and this results in the fact that the last thing western visitors actually see before leaving the GDR is a seemingly endless line of people, waiting for their turn to buy at the only place in the East selling sufficient products. In order to counteract this flawed attempt of producing a good impression, the regime acts immediately: they close down the shop and turn it into something that nobody wants to stand in line for – a shop for GDR-souvenirs (*ibid.*: 86ff). Mr. Kuppisch reflects upon this episode retrospectively, stating that whatever action the GDR-regime would take, it would always backfire in the most bizarre ways: “Die Ostzeiten waren ein einziges Schützenfest, bei dem jeder Schuß nach hinten losging” (*ibid.*: 89). This episode thus impressively indicates how the system attempts to support itself by keeping up appearances, especially towards the outside world, and how this obsession with appearances weights more than the well-being of its own people, who eventually have to go back to facing empty shelves after the store is shut down for image-purposes.

The regime's unrealistic and obsessive concern about its self-image as well as their excessive overconfidence is furthermore displayed in another episode, namely the one of Heinz crossing the border into the East, and noticing that the white line marking the border on the ground had been renewed. The border guard, a passionate and loyal socialist, tells him that during the renewal, they had secretly moved the border-line ten centimeters further to the West. According to his calculations, the line would thus only have to be renewed and moved another ten centimeters every two years, and in only 70 million years, the GDR would extend all the way to the Atlantic coast (*ibid.*: 94). This episode is very representative for the loss of perspective suffered by overly loyal regime-servants in particular, and thus the point of critique the author formulates becomes very clear, even though the episode is satirically exaggerated:

Eines Tages, als Heinz wieder in den Osten kam, führte ihn der Grenzer vertraulich an den weißen Strich, der die Grenze markierte. Dieser Strich war gerade erneuert worden, und der Grenzer eröffnete Heim im Flüsterton, daß der neue Strich zehn Zentimeter weiter westlich verlief. Er hätte bereits ausgerechnet, daß der Strich nur alle zwei Jahre erneuert und immer bloß um zehn Zentimeter nach Westen verschoben werden muss, dann würde Osteuropa in siebzig Millionen Jahren bis zur Atlantikküste reichen, "und wenn wir *jedes* Jahr den Strich erneuern, schaffen wir's in der halben Zeit." (*ibid.*)

On an individual level, we encounter a variety of satirical anecdotes, which illustrate how and to what extent the personal freedoms of the GDR-citizens are limited by the authorities. While Micha's constant personal quarrel with the ABV appears humorous at first, the issue at stake is truly a serious one: All citizens are expected to always carry identification documents, for they can be selected for random personal inspections. Whoever does not carry their documents is arrested, indicating a high level of surveillance and the loss of personal freedom. These personal limitations are a recurring motif throughout the novel, and become particularly clear in chapter six, when the Kuppisch family tries to figure out what they could possibly do in order to get a telephone connection. Eventually, they conclude that, if one of them were seriously ill, the authorities would allow them to own a telephone in order to be able to call for help in case of an emergency. Unfortunately, no one in the family is seriously ill, which causes Mr. Kuppisch to desperately call out: "Wir können doch nicht alle gesund sein!" (*ibid.*: 64). Just like the previous examples, this episode also possesses a deeper layer of meaning: Despite its humoristic style, it displays the despair of the people, who are driven to the extent of wishing for a serious disease only to be permitted a certain amount of personal freedom and property, such as a telephone.

The severe limitation of personal freedom becomes furthermore apparent during chapter ten, which deals with the topics of traveling and people's desire to leave the GDR. At this point in the story, Sabine is dating a mountain climber named Lutz, who, unlike most citizens of the GDR, has already seen much of the world – even though nobody in the GDR is allowed to own a passport. He tells the Kuppisch family the stories about how he has managed to sneak into China and even Mongolia without a passport by simply confusing the border guards with his large variety of identification documents or even by forging official state seals with international coins he has fished out of a wishing well. However, when Mrs. Kuppisch asks him how he would attempt to cross the border in front of their doorstep, he has to disappoint her: The German-German border is absolutely impossible to cross, he concludes (*ibid.*: 95-98). How symbolic this episode is for the severity of the people's situation behind the Iron Curtain is emphasized by the narrator himself, when he states: "Die Mauer konnte einen traurig und verzweifelt machen. Besonders, wenn sogar einer abwinkte, der es bis in die Mongolei und nach China geschafft hatte" (*ibid.*: 98).

Even if they are told in a humoristic fashion, the episodes collected above show that the people in the GDR are very well aware of the poor conditions under which they live, and this results in a dissatisfaction potent throughout most of the novel: Mrs. Kuppisch's attempt to flee, Mario's land-purchasing-plan, Miriam's state of apathy and even Micha's forged diaries point to the fact that the people are desperate to change their situation, but are at the same time powerless to actually do so, mainly due to the fear of the punishment by the omnipresent regime. In chapter 12, another of Sabine's boyfriends discusses with Micha the reason why change in the GDR is impossible, and thus reveals the vicious circle of silence through which the regime ensures the stability of the system: Whoever stands up to them gets arrested, and who does not want to get arrested does not stand up. Thus, all potential criticism fades into silence, and the circumstances remain the same. While he elaborates on this problem and Micha tries to convince himself that this logic must be flawed, he tirelessly juggles with balls, illustrating the endless cycle he has just laid out. This episode thus depicts and explains very clearly one of the core problems of the GDR (*ibid.*: 119f).

Fear of punishment and suppressed dissatisfaction are thus two of the central elements of criticism the novel puts forward. However, the narrative also presents its readers with a very different example during chapter eight, when the author introduces two characters who are not dissatisfied with the socialist system at all. On the contrary, Udo and

Olaf, two young men staying with the Kuppisch family during a youth festival in Berlin, have made it their goal to trigger the ‘communist world revolution’ (*ibid.*: 85). Standing at the border checkpoint at night, they stop every car trying to cross the border back into West-Berlin, forcing West-Germans to sing socialist combat songs and wave little GDR-flags before they are able to cross the border, hoping that their euphoria for the socialist ideology would catch on and the westerners would thus initiate a communist revolution beyond the wall (*ibid.*: 85f).

Despite the fact that the narrator describes this bizarre episode in a very humoristic manner, there is also a satirical-critical aspect to it, as it is the case for most humoristic episodes in the novel. Udo and Olaf, the two enthusiastic communists, are from an area in East-Germany which is commonly known as “das Tal der Ahnungslosen”¹⁶ (*ibid.*: 84), owing its name to the fact that it is the only area in the GDR that does not receive any western broadcasting signals. As a result of that, the people living in this area are literally clueless about what is going on in the rest of the world, and this means that the only reality they know is the one promoted by the GDR-regime. By introducing Udo and Olaf as two characters representing the people from that area, Brussig implies the fact that their enthusiastic attitude towards communism and their childlike worldviews derive from the fact that they don’t know any better, which strongly points to the importance of the media and the lack of information available in the GDR. This unavailability of information is one of the factors out of which the GDR-system acquires its stability, for it is always the uninformed people who believe whatever it is the authorities tell them.

All episodes presented above are merely a selection, representing some of the most important points of critique formulated in the novel. After the analysis of these episodes, which are particularly relevant in the context of this work, it seems appropriate to draw a first conclusion regarding the text’s representation of the GDR. As the previous chapter has shown, the author covers several issues the GDR-citizens have to deal with on a daily basis, thus allowing the novel to paint a picture of the everyday life in the East. These ordinary experiences are sometimes directly interwoven in the plot, sometimes they provide the framework for specific episodes or additional information about what life in the Sonnenallee is like. In this context, we can understand the physical location of the Sonnenallee as an

¹⁶ Das Tal der Ahnungslosen = ‘valley of the clueless’ [my translation].

exemplary representation of the GDR as a whole. Regardless whether he describes ordinary experiences as part of the narratives framework or specific plot actions, the narrator relies on a very humoristic style, which could easily be misread as an attempt of toning down the events and circumstances the novel represents. A closer content analysis of these humoristic elements shows, however, that the stylistic approach of the novel has to be classified as satire rather than as comedy, for all apparently funny episodes are endowed with several layers of meaning, most of which touch upon socially and politically relevant issues and thus formulate a subtle but unmistakable critique of the GDR-regime.

Besides the single episodes from which the novel's particular representation of the GDR derives, we can furthermore observe a number of reappearing motifs that emerge out of the plot. Because these motifs are essential to the evaluation of the novel's representation of the GDR, they shall be divided into two groups and analyzed in the following two subchapters, beginning with the negatively connoted motifs of fear and otherness.

d) East-West Opposition: Issues of Otherness and Fear

The importance of fear as one of the central elements determining the narrative's representation of the GDR has already been touched upon, therefore this motif will only be illustrated briefly here. On an individual level, almost all characters display fear of the regime, especially the members of the adult generation, which is an interesting indication for the generational differences the novel represents (more on that at a later point). Even though the narrative does not specify how exactly the regime punishes its prisoners, the people know that whatever they do to them is bad, as the Günter episode clearly shows (*ibid.*: 124f).

On the one hand, fear of punishment is one of the central motifs of the novel. The motif of fear also appears in a different form, namely as the distinct fear of having to stay in the GDR; more precisely: the fear of never being able to escape the system. The two characters displaying and articulating this fear in the clearest manner are Miriam and the Existentialist. Towards the end of the novel, both characters admit to this fear to their partners: Wishing for nothing but an escape from her confinement, Miriam fears that she will miss out on all the experiences life outside the wall has to offer, causing her to suffer a breakdown after going to the movie theater (*ibid.*: 145f, see section 4.2.2.1.). The Existentialist, despite being presented as one of the strongest and most enduring characters,

suffers from a similar fear: After she finds out about her pregnancy, her desire to escape the GDR grows stronger, for she is afraid of staying behind alone while everybody else will find a better life outside the GDR (*ibid.*: 140f). In this context, the role of the female characters, and of mothers in particular, is worth considering. Unlike the male characters, who are focused on resisting the regime from within the GDR, Miriam, the Existentialist and Mrs. Kuppisch are the ones who openly display their desire of escaping the East, with the latter actually attempting an escape. The female fear of having to raise a family under the repressive regime and the strong responsibility the female characters feel towards their children is thus a recurring topic in the narrative.

These two manifestations of the fear motif are very interesting, for they divide the characters again into two groups: On the one hand, the people who are afraid of standing up to the system due to their fear of punishment, and, on the other hand, the people who are afraid of *not* standing up to the system due to their fear of never-ending confinement within the limitations of the walls. Most of the characters are constantly torn between the two extremes, with a generational shift in attitude clearly noticeable: The young generation is afraid of not being able to change the system, while the older generation is afraid of standing up to the system.

Much like the motif of fear, the motif of otherness also fulfills the purpose of illustrating a contrast between two groups of people. However, in this context, we are no longer considering the internal differences amongst the GDR-citizens, but are instead focussing on the differences between the East and West, playing a crucial role in narrative's representation of the past.

The fact that life in the East is generally different from life in the West is obvious, the interesting manifestation of the otherness motif hence derives from the representation of the East-German and West-German characters, their communication and interaction with one another. Throughout the narrative, West-Germans are being represented as superior characters from the perspective of the GDR-citizens, beginning in the very first chapter. During the introduction of the plot's physical setting, the reader is acquainted with the fact that Sonnenallee can be observed all the way from the West, from a vantage point beyond the wall from which citizens of the West can look over the wall and into the East. Besides observing the inhabitants of the Sonnenallee like zoo animals, the western spectators

furthermore enjoy humiliating the eastern citizens whenever they leave the house, calling them names, yelling and taking pictures:

Genauso wenig gewöhnte er [Micha] sich an die *tägliche Demütigung*, die darin bestand, mit Hohnlachen vom Aussichtsturm auf der Westseite begrüßt zu werden, wenn er aus seinem Haus trat – ganze Schulklassen johlten, piffen und riefen “Guckt mal, ‘n echter Zoni!” oder “Zoni, mach mal winke, winke, wir wollen dich knipsen!” (*ibid.*: 9).

This very first representation of the interaction between East-Germans and West-Germans already points to the fact that the communication as well as the level of respect are unbalanced. While the people from the East envy western citizens, the latter show them no compassion and thus reveal clearly that they neither have a good understanding of the living conditions in the East, nor any respect for the citizens beyond the German-German border. Despite the fact that the wall has only been up for a few years at the time the story takes place, the humiliations reach an extent that seems to evince that the people on either side of the wall do not have the slightest thing in common. In the course of the novel, the denouncing behavior of the people on the observation tower is a recurring element, and for most parts of the story, Micha bears their insults without any reaction (*ibid.*: 46, 77), until the final chapter, in which his process of maturing has reached its climax and he is finally confident enough to talk back at them:

Als er [Micha] wieder mal von einer Schulklasse auf dem Aussichtsturm auf Westberliner Seite ausgelacht wurde, brüllte er wütend zurück: “Wenn ich achtzehn bin dann geh ich für drei Jahre an die Grenze – und dann knall ich euch alle ab!” So wütend wie in dem Moment hat ihn nie einer in der Sonnenallee gesehen. Aber sein Wutausbruch hatte auch etwas Gutes: Micha ist danach nie wieder ausgelacht worden.” (*ibid.*: 136).

The lack of understanding as well as the disrespectful behavior are two indications of why otherness has to be considered an important concept in this context. According to the reflections of Stuart Hall, a person does only perceive his/her identity when seeing him-/herself confronted with a significant other (Hall, 1978). Taking this approach one step further, for instance in the tradition of Althusser, the Other does not only help us realize who we are in our own eyes, but it also actively participates in the creation of this self-image through the way in which the Other sees the subject whose identity is at stake. It is this dynamic that Althusser refers to as ‘interpellation’ (Althusser, 1970). In the context of the narrative, we can thus assume that the way in which the GDR-citizens are perceived and treated by the West-Germans has a great impact on how the former perceive themselves.

The identity of the Eastern citizens is thus determined by two factors: First, by how they see themselves compared to their West-German counterparts, and second, how the West-Germans – or the Other – treat and view them in return. These dynamics thus underline why the otherness motif is of great relevance in the narrative: By seeing themselves in contrast to the people from the West (not only those at the viewing tower, but also in the course of interactions with western visitors), GDR-citizens realize who they are, and thus build their self-image and identity in dialogue with the Other. At the same time, the way in which West-Germans treat GDR-citizens actively influences their self-image: Due to the fact that they are viewed with no respect, the GDR-citizens perceive themselves as lesser beings, while the western citizens perceive themselves as more valuable due to the admiration and envy they receive from their eastern vis-à-vis. The Other therefore has tremendous impact on how GDR-citizens perceive themselves, their lives and thus how the GDR is represented in the novel.

This perceived difference in value is furthermore supported by a number of episodes spread throughout the novel, the most obvious of which are the encounters at the viewing tower. In addition to that, the family's high appreciation of uncle Heinz, who even gets to sit in a throne-like chair whenever he comes to visit, is another indicator of this double standard, as well as the interaction at the school disco, during which western students confidently ask only pretty girls to dance, leaving the eastern students – who genuinely lack self-confidence – with the feeling they have been robbed of a great and important experience (Brussig, 2001: 25). Taking this issue of unequal value to a symbolic level, even the high appreciation of western money in the GDR can be read as such manifestation: Despite the fact that it is basically worthless for the people there, western money and the prestige coming along with it endow it with a symbolic value, due to which the people appreciate it even more than the money they can actually spend. This aspect becomes particularly clear in chapter five: When Wuschel finally tracks down the Rolling Stones record, the dealer selling it demands 300 East-Mark¹⁷. Once Wuschel points out that it would take him four weeks of work during the summer to earn this much, the dealer declares that he would also accept 50 West-Mark (*ibid*: 56f). This variation in value clearly depicts the prestige and value of West-German money in the East – a value which is, however, symbolic, for western money cannot be spent officially in the GDR.

¹⁷ Mark = former German currency.

The gap between people from the East and people from the West is not only apparent in terms of the value attributed to them, although this may well be the most interesting implication of the motif of otherness. We are furthermore confronted with a mutual gap in knowledge, meaning that neither the westerners nor the easterners know much about the situation and the experiences of the people on the opposite side of the wall. While most western people react with prejudice and incomprehension to the circumstances in the East, as for instance uncle Heinz and the viewpoint-spectators, the easterners also lack general knowledge about all kinds of things, from lung cancer over allergies to the political situation outside of the GDR. Only the ones who can overcome this gap of information – for instance through a personal connection to the West – eventually learn about these things. The ones with no connections to the outside world (like Udo and Olaf) remain isolated and eventually come to acritically support the socialist ideals, for they are the only ideals they know.

The difference between East and West is presented in the most impressive and direct way in the episode of Mrs. Kuppisch's attempted escape from the GDR: In perfect makeup and with a passport she found, Doris Kuppisch is all set to cross the border to the West; until she arrives at the checkpoint, where she realizes that clothes and looks are not the only distinctive things between her and the West-Germans. They are self-confident, talk and laugh out loud without any fear of potential consequences, making Mrs. Kuppisch understand that she will never be anything like them, eventually causing her to give up on her plan and go back home: "Und sie wußte, daß sie niemals so werden wird wie die. Und daß sie tatsächlich keine Chance hatte, über die Grenze vor ihrer Haustür zu kommen" (*ibid.*: 99).

Summing up the observations of this chapter, the novel displays two different kinds of divide between the characters. For once, there is the obvious and primary divide between East and West. The motif of otherness dominates the representation of the clash between eastern and western characters, practices and realities, indicating why it has to be considered one of the central motifs and means of representation within the novel. The second divide evident in the novel is to be found *amongst* the GDR-citizens, namely into the ones that fear standing up to the system, and the ones that fear not standing up to the system and thus remaining caught in a forever-lasting state of arrested development. This divide primarily manifests itself between the generations, as will be explored shortly.

e) **Hope, Community, Resistance and the Hunger for Freedom**

The two motifs presented above play an important role in the narrative's representation of the GDR. However, there are also several positive motifs shaping the novel, the most important of which shall be discussed at this point (note that 'positive' in this context does not mean glorifying the system or the events of the past, and we shall shortly see why). Due to the fact that these motifs are very closely connected and thus not always analytically separable, they have been grouped together and will hereafter be considered side by side.

The motif embracing all the others is the motif of **hope**. While the beginning of the novel implies a certain level of hopelessness (evinced, for instance, in the fact that after Micha's generation, there were no more children born in the Sonnenallee (*ibid.*: 11)), hope grows continuously in the course of the plot. This hope translates to a number of narrative elements, for instance the recurring love letter, but is also supported by a number of different motifs, such as, for example, the motif of **community**.

The importance of the communal spirit and the shared experiences is already emphasized at the very beginning of the novel. By stating that they are not only a group, but that they are a 'potential', Micha refers to the fact that everybody in the Sonnenallee experiences the same things, everybody shares the same taste in music and even in girls. This sense of community leads Micha to believe that all of them are part of something important, of something they cannot quite comprehend at the beginning, but it gives them a little more strength every day, so that eventually, they will have the power to do everything differently once they are grown up:

Und weil fast überall am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee fast dasselbe passierte, fühlte sich Micha als Teil eines Potentials. Wenn seine Freunde meinten "Wir sind eine Clique", sagte Micha "Wir sind ein Potential". Was er damit meinte, wußte er selbst nicht genau, aber er fühlte, daß es etwas zu bedeuten hatte, wenn alle aus der gleichen Q3a-Enge kamen, sich jeden Tag trafen, in den gleichen Klamotten zeigten, dieselbe Musik hörten, dieselbe Sehnsucht spürten und sich mit jedem Tag deutlich erstarren fühlten – um wenn sie endlich erwachsen sind, alles, alles anders zu machen. (*ibid.*: 10)

Already in these first pages, the close connection between the ideas of hope and community becomes apparent. The common experience of growing up in the Sonnenallee gives them the strength and the hope to believe in a better future, for it makes them feel empowered to take action and to change the course of history in the way they want. What is already implied here is a strong generational bond based on shared values and experiences. How closely community and hope are truly interlinked becomes furthermore evident during

the episode of Miriam's apathy. Only after Micha makes it clear to her that she is not alone in her suffering, but that he too shares her feelings of despair and despises for the reality they live in, does Miriam find new strength and hope, and thus is able to return to being her normal self with Micha by her side (*ibid.*: 147ff).

Suffering as well as hoping is hence what binds the friends together as a community. Nevertheless, hope and pain are not the only things the group of friends have in common. All of them share a revolutionary and progressive attitude, they despise the system they live in and wish for change more than anything. This shared attitude leads us to the next central motif of the novel: revolution or resistance.

Resistance as one of the key motifs of the novel manifests itself in several episodes as well as in a variety of narrative symbols. The most important narrative element that symbolically represents the spirit of revolution is music. Music is a recurring element throughout the novel and fulfils a variety of purposes. However, all of its functions can be linked back to the motif of revolution/resistance as well as the process of growing up, which also fits into the symbolical dimension of progress and resistance.

The importance of music becomes first apparent in chapter two, which is when the reader finds out how much the group enjoys listening to music together – to forbidden music in particular, already indicating its symbolic value. Music is furthermore what causes the group's first legal infraction: They get caught by the ABV listening to the forbidden song *Moscow, Moscow* at the playground (*ibid.*: 11-15). The fact that music reinforces the group spirit and is furthermore one of the central propulsions of growing up becomes evident several times throughout the plot. They draw strength from their music because it brings them together, revealing once again the importance of the community motif:

Man mußte sich gar nicht groß kennen, es reichte ja, daß die Leute dieselbe Musik gut fanden. Sie konnten reden oder der Musik zuhören und hatten alle Zeit der Welt. Sie fühlten, wie es ist, ein Mann zu werden, und die Musik, die dazu lief, war immer stark. (*ibid.*: 58)

References to music recur throughout the novel, music titles support events, ideologies or important steps in the process of maturing. Mario and the Existentialist share their revolutionary ideologies over the song *Non, je ne regrette rien* and fall in love to the song *Je t'aime*. Wuschel, trying to mentally flee from the limitations of his reality, risks everything to find the record of *Exile on Main Street*. All of these titles are highly symbolic, supporting the core values and steps of developments of all the novel's characters. Aspects

such as resistance, escapism, adulthood and maturity are illustrated through musical elements, which can all be linked back to the main motif of revolution and progress, either on a personal or on a collective and political level.

The element of music is furthermore used to illustrate the circumstances in the GDR. In his attempt at finding the forbidden Rolling Stones album, Wuschel encounters several criminals and eventually finds the record with a dealer who sells records under a bridge like a drug dealer (*ibid.*: 51-56). This narrative use of the musical element illustrates the extreme circumstances and the restrictiveness of life in the GDR.

As one of the central symbols for the revolutionary spirit, music not only represents the attitudes of the groups, but of the whole young GDR-generation. During the school disco, nobody wants to dance to East songs (*ibid.*: 24). Even more evident becomes the gap between the generations during Mario's party in chapter eleven, when the teenagers break the antique musical instruments Mario's father is collecting (*ibid.*: 104-109). This episode can be read as an indication that the young generation no longer appreciates and shares the values of their parents, but instead craves change, renewal and the literal 'breaking' with old traditions and thus with the system they live in. Such a development is not unusual, for a shift in generations often brings along a shift in values and attitudes, as was previously discussed in the theoretical part of this work.

Finally, the importance of music receives its final emphasis during the last chapter, in which music is transformed from a symbol of resistance into an actual life-saver. Due to the fact that western music is strictly forbidden, Wuschel hides the Rolling Stones record under his jacket when he and Micha approach the wall in their final attempt to retrieve the love letter. When the shots are fired, the album blocks the bullet from entering Wuschel's chest, thus saving his life. This physical act of salvation can once again be transferred onto the symbolic level: Music has given the characters the strength to survive the system, and while only Wuschel is physically saved by music, all of them are spiritually and psychologically saved. In these terms, music can be read as an alternative language through which, on the one hand, the young generation of the GDR expresses their desires and beliefs. On the other hand, this alternative language is used as a stylistic tool throughout the narrative, illustrating the reality of the characters and of life in the GDR as well as the changing societal spirit.

Moving on from the element of music, resistance and revolution as one of the central motifs of the narrative become evident in almost all episodes. Early on in the novel, this motif is rather subtle. Instead of taking action against the system, resistance occurs within the personal sphere of the group, for example in discussing non-political degrees (*ibid.*: 41), the public display of long hair or the attendance of a language class, which gives the people the impression of having a connection to the outside world and thus serves as a symbolic form of escape and personal resistance:

Zu den vielen kleinen Absonderlichkeiten am kürzeren Ender der Sonnenallee gehörte nämlich auch das exzessive Interesse ihrer Bewohner an Sprachkursen, vor allem von Sprachen, die in Ländern gesprochen werden, in die sie sowieso nicht fahren konnten. Es war vielleicht eine Art, Fernweh auszudrücken. Oder eine Art Trotz: Wenn wir schon nicht dorthin fahren können, dann lernen wir eben die Sprache. [...] Es ging nicht nur darum, die Sprache zu lernen, sondern auch, Kontakte mit allen zu kriegen, die dort wohnen, wo man nicht hinfahren durfte. (*ibid.*: 123f)

In the course of the plot, the means of personal and political resistance gradually increase in intensity. Mario and his girlfriend conduct their first experiment with drugs (*ibid.*: 101), Miriam reveals the true intentions behind her kissing-complex (*ibid.*: 144f), and Micha begins to openly stand up for himself and his beliefs, for instance by shouting back at the western spectators at the watchtower (*ibid.*: 136) or by offering anti-communist paroles during his interview at the Soviet school 'Rotes Kloster' (*ibid.*: 133). Small gestures of resistance on a personal level are thus omnipresent in the novel, escapism is one of the central goal of most characters. While the female characters rely on escapism through sexual means, the element of fiction is crucial in this context. Music as well as the movie Micha and Miriam see during their date symbolize the young generation's desire for escape, even if it is only a mental escape from the dull reality of their lives in the GDR.

Politically, the increasing intensity of the willingness to take action against the regime reaches its climax when Mario and the Existentialist begin to develop their land-purchasing plan in chapter eleven. Due to the fact that land is relatively cheap in the GDR, their idea is to gradually buy up land and eventually establish an autonomous counter-republic within the Eastern state (*ibid.*: 104). In the following chapters, they meticulously plan their underground-revolution, despite the fact that this dangerous plan could get them arrested for treason. When Mario eventually does get arrested due to an unlucky coincidence, he suddenly realizes that they have made an error in their calculations, leaving them with the painful realization that their plan was utopian and naïve, and that their hope for freedom

seems to be further out of their reach than ever before (*ibid.*: 125f). This episode shows not only the increasing willingness of the young adults to take action against the regime, but it also shows their increasing level of despair and their desire to change their own situation. The **hunger for freedom** can thus be understood as the fourth motif centrally shaping the novel's plot as well as its representation of the GDR.

Interestingly, the motif of the hunger for freedom is centrally represented through the female characters of the novel. Both Miriam as well as the Existentialist articulate their fear of not being able to escape the system, with the latter resorting to more drastic measures, whereas the former tends to limit her revolutionary desires to her personal sphere. Besides the two main female characters, also one of the female supporting characters displays an intense desire for freedom. Mrs. Kuppisch, despite being a fearful and well-adapted person, is also driven by her wish to leave the GDR. She is already at the checkpoint when her fear of fateful consequences kicks in, causing her to turn back and abandon her escape plans. The male characters, on the other hand, have either accepted their situation, like most of the male supporting characters, or attempt to quench their thirst for freedom by taking action against the authorities in order to change the system, as touched upon earlier. None of them, however, considers a physical escape from the GDR in the way the female characters do, underlining once again the interesting notion of gender in the narrative.

Regardless of what kind of escape they attempt, all characters experience the peak of their despair during the final chapter. Despite their private problems, which also reach their climax in this chapter, it is the moment that Wuschel gets shot that turns out to be the crucial turning point for all inhabitants of the Sonnenallee, for it is this event that brings home to them the true brutality of their reality, no matter how hard they have tried to escape it until then. Symbolically at this juncture, the love letter, which can be read as a symbol of hope throughout the narrative, bursts into flames in front of their eyes, conveying the notion of hopelessness that now befalls all characters (*ibid.*: 142ff).

Following this crucial tipping point, the feeling of hopelessness intensifies, for instance with the death of uncle Heinz and Miriam's state of apathy. This brings us to the final scene of the novel, to a very complex episode that, on the one hand, is highly symbolic, and, on the other hand, fulfils an important double purpose regarding the central motifs in the plot.

The final episode takes place several months after the main plot ends. Life has gone back to normal in the Sonnenallee, and everything would have stayed this way, hadn't there been an unexpected turn of events (*ibid.*: 153). Mario, who has bought an old Trabant in order to make a living as a taxi driver, is in the garage fixing the car, when his girlfriend suddenly goes into labor. Having no telephone, he decides to take her to the hospital in his Trabant. On the way, they are stopped by a policeman who tells them to turn off the engine and wait for the Russian delegation to pass. Mario, overwhelmed by the situation, does not obey the order and instead races on, overtaking the Russian delegation cars one by one, until two of their cars surround them and the old Trabant breaks down. With the Existentialist screaming and crying out on the passenger seat, Mario's despair and helplessness reach their climax.

He gets out of the car into the pouring rain, making begging gestures towards the cars of the Russian delegation, hoping that one of them shows pity and helps them. And indeed, a Russian man gets out of his car. He has a birthmark on his forehead and appears frightening at the beginning, but then, he moves his hand towards the sky, and the rain stops. He reaches into the Trabant, and a few minutes later, puts a newborn child into Mario's arms. Before he leaves, he touches the hood of Mario's Trabant, and the engine starts again. "Das ist 'n Russe, der Wunder vollbringt!" (*ibid.*: 156), the Existentialist cries out, but before Mario can ask the man his name, he is gone, along with the delegation, heading towards the city. Mario and the Existentialist, whose name is now revealed, stay behind, struggling to comprehend what had just happened to them (*ibid.*: 154ff).

This final scene of the novel is full of symbolism. Unlike the rest of the narrative, which is told in a realistic style, the symbolic aspects take the upper hand in this final episode. The Russian man, who is no other than Mikhail Gorbachev, performs several miracles at a time when Mario's despair has reached its climax. In a series of actions rich in religious symbolism, Gorbachev solves the dramatic situation with only one touch of his hand. Like the messiah, he miraculously saves Mario and the Existentialist from their trouble and even brings new life into the world – a baby as a symbol for hope.

Finalizing this sequence of highly symbolic events, the reader finally learns the name of the Existentialist: Elisabeth. Under the angle of religious symbolism, this name is extremely meaningful, for in Christianity, Elisabeth is the mother of John the Baptist, the prophet who forespeaks the arrival of the Redeemer, and thus a future of peace and

liberation. In the context of the novel, the birth of Elisabeth's child and the simultaneous appearance of Gorbachev, the man who will soon liberate the Eastern states, are thus symbolic indications for the upcoming era of change and the hope for a peaceful future.

The double purpose of this final chapter hence becomes clear. On the one hand, the circumstances and events symbolize the zenith of despair, until something unexpected happens that points towards a great change in the future, an upcoming miracle that nobody can quite comprehend at that very moment. Through the birth of the child and through the intervention of this strange man, Mario and Elisabeth can breathe again, and little do they know that very soon this man will bring back hope and peace to all citizens of the Sonnenallee and the entire Eastern state.

The final chapter thus ties the previously discussed motifs together: The endurance and spirit of resistance that the group has given each other over the years has paid off, and hope returns to their lives as they sense that change and freedom are about to come upon them. With this final episode, the motif of hope and the perspective of a better future close the circle and form a response to the first chapter, in which the protagonist Micha speaks of a 'potential', of something strong and meaningful that is going to happen, even though he does not quite understand what exactly this means at the time (*ibid.*: 10).

4.3. Memory Concepts and the Novel's Impact on Collective Memory

4.3.1. Which Rhetorical Modes of Collective Memory are used?

Now that the content analysis as well as the structural analysis have been conducted, it is time to consider the outcomes side by side. With the help of the classifications put forward by Astrid Erll (see chap. 3.2., Appendix A), we shall now determine which rhetorical modes of collective memory are evident in the novel in order to be able to evaluate the novel's contribution to memory culture.

Throughout the novel, the plot is located within the sphere of communicative memory, a structure of selection typical of the experiential rhetorical mode. While the monumental mode often relies on cultural memories conveyed through other media or previous cultural texts, the experiential mode typically draws from personal experiences and contents of the communicative interpersonal memory, as it clearly is the case in the novel. However, the antagonistic mode also has to be considered in terms of the configuration of the text: The construction of a clear self-image, especially in front of the strongly contrasted

other, speaks for an antagonistic approach. The fact that the novel focusses on the memory contents of a societal subgroup, namely through the inhabitants of the Sonnenallee representing the citizens of the GDR, supports this claim. In terms of the ways in which literary memory is created and the displayed memory elements are selected, we can thus determine the evidence of the experiential mode as well as the antagonistic mode of collective memory.

Regarding the plot structure and the subgenre of the novel, we have established the narrative's classification as an episodic novel during the structural analysis. This open structure, also classifiable as a low mimetic mode, is a characteristic of the experiential rhetorical mode of collective memory. The loose episodic way in which the story is told closely resembles the structure in which autobiographical, experiential memory is organized, thus facilitating the process of identifying the dominant mode in terms of plot structure, for there is only one mode fitting these structural characteristics: the experiential one.

Moving on, let us now take into consideration how social memory is being produced in the novel. Linguistically, the experiential mode is clearly evident. Brussig uses a simple, everyday language, contributing drastically to the novel's authenticity. Through the use of nicknames and informal adolescent language, the reader feels close to the characters, thus facilitating the process of identification and appropriation of the experiences described. The frequent use of dialect fulfills a similar function, it emphasizes the importance of spatial narrative aspects and forges authenticity in the tradition of Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia' (Bakhtin, 1979). Also the use of language as a way of emphasizing specific features of the GDR, for example the previously discussed excessive usage of superlatives, intensifies the experiential proximity between the reader and the circumstances of the past captured in the novel.

In addition to the experiential mode, linguistic elements corresponding to the antagonistic mode of collective memory can also be observed in the novel. Stereotypical expressions are being used by representatives of the GDR-regime, for example military language or GDR-typical abbreviations. Even though this linguistic tool contributes to the 'authentic' representation of the GDR, it is also a judgmental and/or biased form of representation through which the dominant subgroup (GDR-citizens) distances itself from other memory communities (GDR-representatives, western citizens). Once again, we can

determine the presence of both the antagonistic as well as the experiential mode in terms of linguistic composition and presentation.

Regarding the narration technique, the antagonistic rhetorical mode is dominant. In order to understand why, we need to take a closer look at the role of the narrator. Unlike most experiential texts, which are often narrated in a first-person style, the novel discussed here uses an auctorial narrator. This auctorial narrator, however, does not distance himself from the plot, and even though the reader does not discover who the narrator is, he perceives very clearly that the narrator is part of the community, thus embodying the communal voice typical to the antagonistic mode of collective memory. The narrator comments actively on the events of the plot as well as on the circumstances of the past and the present, for instance in chapter five, when he states: “Die Musik damals war gut, viel besser als heute” (Brussig, 2001:57). He sees himself as a member of the community, for he establishes a strong notion of ‘we-identity’, for instance by using the pronoun ‘we’ (*ibid.*: 94), and thus supports the importance of the community motif discussed during the previous chapter. Furthermore, the fact that the Sonnenallee is frequently referred to as a collective of shared experience (*ibid.*: 10, 123, 142f) supports the communal voice as the dominant technique in terms of narration, thus confirming the dominance of the antagonistic mode.

Regarding the representation of characters, the classification of the narrative becomes less clear again. Speaking for the experiential mode is the fact that we are dealing with everyday heroes as protagonists and thus with a bottom-up view of society. However, the constellation of characters also displays oppositions, especially between the eastern protagonists and the GDR-representatives as well as western characters. Through this representation of contrast within the character constellation, the antagonistic ‘we-group’ distances itself from the other groups, an aspect which has already become apparent during the content analysis of the novel. We are therefore once again confronted with a hybrid combination between the experiential and the antagonistic mode of collective memory in terms of the representation of characters.

Similar circumstances derive from the novel’s structure of perspectives. Due to the episodic nature of the plot, we are facing a plurality of perspectives, manifesting itself in the fact that the reader gets to experience different episodes from the perspective of different characters, thus intensifying the experiential immediacy of the represented contents. Nevertheless, the structure of perspectives is not entirely open, for most episodes are told

from the perspective of the members of the dominant sub-community, namely the GDR-citizens. The reader is never offered a glimpse of the regime representative's perspective, and also the perspective of the western citizens is only rarely represented, mainly through the eyes of uncle Heinz (*ibid.*: 59-62, 94). Thus, even though the novel displays a plurality of perspectives, it does not display a true 'polyphony' in Bakhtin's sense (Bakhtin, 1979), for all perspectives displayed belong to the same dominant sub-community of characters. This closed perspectival representation speaks for an antagonistic rhetorical mode of establishing collective memory.

Regarding the meaning and perception of cultural paradigms, the experiential mode tends to interpret experiences according to dominant culture-specific schemes, while the antagonistic mode tends to devaluate the memory-communities related to such cultural paradigms, for instance through the means of irony. In this context, the humoristic-satirical style of the novel is of particular interest. Through the satirically exaggerated representation of the GDR-regime, the novel devalues the dominant cultural paradigms of its setting and thus the memory-communities affiliated with them, clearly suggesting an antagonistic rhetorical mode of collective memory. What exactly this means for the novel's value within memory culture will be discussed shortly.

The constitution of the literary memory space in the novel is the last narrative element we will discuss. The establishment of a life-worldly memory space indicates an experiential mode. The Sonnenallee as the central space of the plot forms the spatial life-world of all the main characters, supporting the experiential nature of the memory contents conveyed. However, due to the recurring comparison of this space, its inhabitants and its living conditions to another space, namely the West, we can identify an antagonistic tendency regarding the establishment of the narrative's literary memory space. By mapping out the contrast between two different semanticized spaces, the antagonistic mode also establishes itself in this context, leaving us once again with a hybrid classification of the novel as rhetorically experiential as well as antagonistic.

After analyzing the novel as to the specific narrative strategies that underlie the rhetorical modes of collective memory put forward by Erll, it is time to sum up our findings and concretely evaluate their meaning in terms of the novel's value as a medium of memory. As previously discussed in chapter 3.2., Erll has developed her modes of collective memory

in order to evaluate the specific value of a text regarding its contribution to memory culture, for she believes that some forms of literary expression show close resemblance with the memory process itself. Such narrative strategies can then facilitate the conscious or unconscious appropriation of a text as a medium of memory by the reader.

As the previous analysis has shown, *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* fits into the theoretical model Erll has developed, which suggests that the novel may have a particular influence on memory culture. As we have tried to show, the experiential as well as the antagonistic mode are the dominant rhetorical modes of collective memory in the narrative. However, we must not disregard the monumental mode altogether in this context, for, as it was previously discussed, the monumental and the experiential modes together form the two basic registers of collective remembrance, and that literature always corresponds to both of them. Even though the characteristics of the novel appear to translate to an experiential mode, Erll reminds us that literature, even when drawing from communicative memory, is created in order to endure over time, thus automatically anticipating the distant horizon of cultural memory. Literature hence draws from both sides of culture according to Assmann's definition, the monumental side of transgenerational communication, and the life-worldly side of the communicative memory, namely the intergenerational communication (see section 2.1.2.).

In terms of the novel, many features seem to embody the experiential mode. Its experiential rhetoric in terms of speech elements, for instance its interdiscursivity displaying the phenomenon of 'heteroglossia', supports the authenticity of the novel's representation of individual experience and subjective perspectives. Also the element of internal focalization, which is unique to literature as a medium of memory, intensifies the experience provided by the text. All these narrative strategies allow for the text to be more easily transferred into the sphere of collective memory and appropriated by the reader as such, even if he/she has no first-hand experience of the events displayed. Whenever the represented contents of a literary work entail the realistic representation of everyday communication and thus a specific life-world, the appropriation of this content into the collective memory of its recipients is even further facilitated, as it is in the case of the narrative at stake. The fact that we are dealing with a realistic work drawing from communicative memory indicates the novel's importance for memory culture, for it constructs a generational self-image as well as an identity, as the analysis of the novel's content has shown.

Regarding the representation of time and space, the novel provides us with a special case, and the interlink between the monumental and the experiential mode becomes once again important. As discussed earlier, Erll points out that the establishment of time and space are crucial social frames within which all life-experiences are situated and interpreted. In specific cases, however, a communicative location can turn into a cultural memory site, and this is precisely the case of the novel. While the Berlin Wall, the Death Strip and the GDR are merely communicative locations within the plot, their symbolic meaning has tremendously changed in the course of time, resulting in the fact that they have acquired a cultural relevance in addition to their communicative orientation function in the plot. The place 'GDR' thus obtains a double purpose: On the one hand, it represents the life-world of a past generation, but at the same time, it is also turned into a symbolic memory site, situating it into the distant horizon of cultural memory as well as the proximate horizon of communicative memory. Let us briefly revisit chapter 3.2. in order to understand the meaning of this particular characteristic of the novel:

As was discussed earlier, literature functions as a way of transferring vivid experience into cultural meaning. However, some cultures have to construct meaning from experiences which are part of the communicative memory and the cultural memory of a community at the same time. In this specific case, the literary memory of wars, revolutions or other traumatic events is often characterized through the attempt of bringing both spheres of memory together, the recent vivid one and the symbolic cultural one. In the case of the novel and the GDR as its fundamental memory site, we are confronted with this exact dynamic. What we can thus conclude is the novel's attempt of representing memory contents which are part of both the communicative memory due to their contemporariness, but also the cultural memory due to the symbolic and historical importance of the GDR-era in contemporary memory culture. In order to make sense of the events of the time, the vivid experiences of the repressive regime have to be brought together with the cultural memory of the community, and here the combination of the experiential and the monumental mode as a unique feature of literature are of crucial importance:

The experiential mode and the monumental mode are nothing more than two complementary ways of referring to the past. On the one hand, the cultural memory of the GDR is enriched through experiential elements, and on the other hand, individual memory is included into the timeless, distant cultural horizon of the collective. More precisely,

literary works such as *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* thus form a touching point between the past and the present by facilitating the transfer process from vivid memory to temporary unlimited cultural memory. This double function makes literature a unique medium of memory.

These reflections explain the novel's experiential and monumental value as a medium of memory. The aspect that remains to discuss now is the fact that the narrative displays such a large variety of characteristics ascribed to the antagonistic mode.

Due to the fact that the antagonistic mode is strongly evident, we have to assume that the novel's value is not limited to the representation of experience and the facilitation of the transfer of memory contents from the communicative to the cultural sphere, but that Brussig's work also actively impacts the struggle for dominant memories within memory culture itself. Through the creation of counter-memories, literature corresponding to the antagonistic mode challenges the dominant cultural memory of a collective by introducing new memory constellations, for instance the collective memory of a marginalized group or a societal minority. Due to the high level of selectivity, perspectivity and site-dependency of the displayed memory content, we must assume that the author's aim is to take an active stand within memory culture by introducing alternative/non-dominant memory constellations into the identity and memory discourse surrounding the GDR as a place of memory.

Through the introduction of an alternative or non-dominant past version, the plurality of memories is increased and the competitive memory discourse enriched, eventually leading to the emergence of a 'multiplicity of memories' in Benjamin's sense. This multiplicity of memories challenges the dominant collective memory, as can be supported by several of the narrative strategies evident in the novel.

First, we have shown that, in terms of content selection and structure of perspective, the text focusses on one social group whose memories are being displayed, namely the people living under the GDR-regime. Their feelings and experiences are represented in direct confrontation with those of other societal subgroups, more precisely the representatives of the GDR-regime as well as the West-German citizens. The fact that the perspective and thus the memories of the group in focus are favored by the text is clearly evident in the fact that only their insights and perspectives are shown, while the values and experiences of the other groups are displayed in a satirical-humoristic style, thus challenging

their memory-authority and consequently the dominant collective memory of this moment in history.

As discussed earlier in the methodological chapter 3.2., literature focussing on the collective memory of a small subgroup is most likely of an antagonistic nature. As the analysis has shown, the novel displays this characteristic very clearly: By fostering a sense of 'we-identity' through both the episodic style as well as the specific narration technique of the involved auctorial narrator, the narrative illustrates the alternative memories, values and beliefs of a societal subgroup, namely of the young generation of critical GDR-citizens. They are the ones conveying the 'true' memory, as the character constellation within the highly contrasted setting clearly indicates, whereas the non-dominant perspectives are systematically deconstructed, for instance through satirical humoristic exaggeration, confirming the previously established fact that the novel does not convey true polyphony in terms of a true plurality of perspectives and memory contents.

Through the incorporation of antagonistic features, the novel thus not only facilitates the transfer of experienced memory into cultural memory, but also models new collective memories through narrative elements while rejecting the collective memories of other societal subgroups.

We can hence conclude that the analysis of the dominant rhetorical modes of collective memory has revealed its three crucial contributions to memory culture: First, due to the monumental mode every work of literature relies on, the novel enriches cultural memory with experiential elements, making it easier to appropriate and thus re-embody cultural memory contents, even for generations without first-hand experience. Secondly, due to the experiential rhetorical mode, the text introduces individual memory into the broad horizon of collective memory, and later into the potentially limitless horizon of cultural memory, thus creating a touching point between the vivid communicative past and the symbolically transmitted cultural memory of the past. Finally, the evidence of the antagonistic mode indicates that the novel fulfills an additional purpose, namely the introduction of an alternative or non-dominant collective memory, challenging and enriching the previously existing memory discourse evolving around the GDR. By focusing on the memory of the young GDR-citizens, Brussig displays the collective experiential memory of a very small group in contemporary society, thus enabling this memory to enter the broad discourse of GDR remembrance as well as to confront other collective memories concerning the GDR.

4.3.2. Which Modes, Functions and Dimensions of Memory are at the Core?

The analysis has now revealed that the novel shows many narrative characteristics confirming its function as a literary medium of memory. The present chapter will, in the tradition of Mieke Bal, return to the concepts discussed in the theoretical framework of this dissertation, and methodologically evaluate how these memory concepts influence the narrative in order to acquire a better understanding of what aspects of memory are at its core, and how these aspects shape the novel's value and contribution to memory culture.

Beginning with the question of the novel's relevance in the field of culture, it can now be confirmed that the text influences the spheres of both sides of culture according to Aleida Assmann's distinction (see section 2.1.2.). On the one hand, the narrative draws from and influences culture as a life-world, for it covers the everyday experiences of a group of people at a specific moment in time and space. Due to this, the narrative connects people of the same generation who share the same experiences and are thus members of this particular life-world. As shown during the analysis, the novel relies on subjective perspectives and is strongly based on the social actions, interactions and communication between social groups, thus reconstructing a lived reality which no longer exists. Due to the extreme subjectivity of past life-worlds, they are often difficult to reconstruct, but, as Raymond Williams has suggested, literature can be an effective way to capture these usually less well documented realities of the people's lives (Williams, 2013), which is precisely what this novel does.

On the other hand, however, due to the fact that we are dealing with a work of literature, the monumental side of culture is also impacted by the novel. With the goal of enduring over time, the novel not only links people from the same generation, but also from different generations together, for the experiences and the reality captured are carried on and hence allow the young generation to communicate with their ancestors. Every work of literature intends to convey a message, thus placing it in the monumental sphere of culture.

Due to the fact that the 'lived reality' of past generations has become more and more important in academia over the years, the novel furthermore supports the historiographic paradigm-shift away from one history and towards a 'multiplicity of histories' in the sense of Benjamin by conveying the subjective values, experiences and practices of a group of people at a specific moment in time and space, namely the ones of the young GDR-generation during the 1970s and 1980s.

With respect to early memory theory, the social dimension of memory proposed by Halbwachs proves to be highly relevant in the text. The author's memories of the GDR are socially framed and shaped by the cultural context surrounding them. Interactions with and experiences of other members of the surrounding group are essential, as the strong notion of 'we-identity' indicates throughout the novel. This 'we-identity' furthermore proves that the individual memory conveyed in the novel has to be understood as a collective phenomenon at the same time, for it is the shared memory and the shared experiences that hold the group together. In this context, the group of friends in the novel stands symbolically for the generation whose memory Brussig represents. Also the fact that society is divided into subgroups of remembrance, one of the core aspects of Halbwachs' theory, is reflected in the narrative and made particularly clear through the East-West opposition, the confrontation between GDR-representatives and citizens as well as the generational differences.

The text hence entails both of Halbwachs' fundamental theoretical reflections: On the one hand, the author's individual memory is strongly shaped by his social surroundings, during, as well as after, the GDR-era. On the other hand, the episodic and multi-perspective style of the novel indicates the fact that the collective memory of the group is made up by the sum of individual memories of its members. In other words, the image that the text conveys of the memory of the GDR comes into being through the variety of characters and their experiences, all eventually brought together as one 'we-experience' of the life in the GDR and thus a representation of collective memory through the representation of many small individual memories. Halbwachs' social conditions of memory can therefore be identified as one of the memory concepts clearly recognizable in the novel.

In the previous chapter, we have already touched upon the fact that, in terms of physical location, we are faced with a double purpose in the novel: On the one hand, the GDR and the Berlin Wall are the sites in which the communicative memory of the novel is located. On the other hand, these spaces have turned into symbolic places over the years, explaining the importance of Nora's 'memory sites' in this context. According to Nora's definition, memory sites summon memory images, they are reminders of the past and hold a collective emotional value to a group of people (see section 2.2.1.2.). Due to the fact that the novel was only written after the Berlin Wall had fallen, the GDR as well as the wall are not only the spatial framework in which the communicative memory of the novel is embedded, but they are also symbols of remembrance that nowadays have value not only for

the people of the GDR-generation, but for German national memory and identity as a whole, thus elevating the communicative memory value of the novel onto the cultural level.

Furthermore, according to Nora's reflections, the novel itself can be understood as a memory site, for he defines memory sites as artificial replacements for the weakening connection to vivid memory. Due to the fact that the narrative preserves the memory of a life-world of a societal group over time, it can contribute to the collective sense of remembrance of that specific moment in time and space through the literary appropriation of this memory by others. Especially in the case of generational renewal, which is usually the time when collective memory changes and memory sites shift in meaning as well as in relevance, literature can determine which aspects of collective memory remain relevant.

Concluding the discussion on the relevance of original memory theory in the novel, it has become evident that both Nora's approach of symbolic sites as carriers of collective memory as well as Halbwachs' notion of the reconstruction of everyday life in order to establish collective memory are interesting approaches to better understand Brussig's work. Bearing these findings in mind, it is now time to specify the functions, modes and dimensions of memory the text confronts us with.

From Jan Assmann, we have learned that two functions of collective memory can be distinguished, depending on the period of time it refers to and the function it fulfills (see section 2.3.1.1.). In terms of the novel's content, we are dealing with collective memory in its communicative function: The memory contents represented are concerned with the recent past, they are strongly based on generational experience and are hence located on this side of the 'floating gap'. At the same time, however, due to the fact that we are dealing with a work of literature, aspects of collective memory in its cultural function are also displayed, namely the fact that the communicated contents rely on a sign system and are hence constituted by a fixed form, which Jan Assmann thinks unusual for memory contents corresponding to communicative memory.

However, Aleida Assmann, who has developed the idea of cultural memory further, has shown that the collective remembrance of an identity-ensuring recent history also falls under the category of cultural memory, thus indicating that the novel has to be located on both sides of the 'floating gap' simultaneously: On the one hand, the novel is concerned with the communicative recent memory reaching back 80-100 years, but at the same time, the historical importance of the memory contents displayed in the novel makes them highly

identity-determining and thus culturally relevant in the sense that people constitute their self-image based on the events of this recent history.

These reflections thus confirm what has been mentioned in the previous chapter, namely that the goal of Brussig's novel is to experientially make sense of events which are simultaneously part of both the communicative as well as the cultural memory of a memory culture. The value of the novel in this context derives from the fact that, through the individual experiences it represents, the transfer of the memory contents from the vivid communicative memory into the distant sphere cultural memory is facilitated. The novel thus helps transporting specific memory contents across the 'floating gap' and into the horizon of cultural memory. Due to the novel's experiential and antagonistic features, it additionally enriches the collective cultural memory by adding new formations of collective memory as well as experiential liveliness to the disembodied cultural memory of a collective.

Now that we have suggested that the novel corresponds to both functions of collective memory, the communicative and the cultural one, let us see which dimensions of memory are of relevance in the novel (see section 2.3.1.4.). According to Aleida Assmann's approach, memory can be divided into further sub-dimensions, most of which contain collective elements. In the context of the novel, individual memory plays an important role. The author has first-hand experience of the events represented, indicating the importance of this first memory dimension in terms of the novel's content and its representation of the GDR. Also the episodic style of the novel point to the strong presence of individual memory, for autobiographic memories are also organized in an episodic manner. Just like in the novel, these episodes are fragmented, but at the same time crosslinked and embedded into a larger memory context. They are of a perspective character and change according to the conditions of the present, as we will discuss shortly.

Despite the fact that individual memory most likely lays ground to the content of the novel, it is not the only memory dimension relevant in this context. As Assmann has put forward based on Halbwachs' theory, individual memory is always embedded into a social context. Every individual is part of several 'we-groups' entailing different memory horizons, all of which influence and frame the individual's memory. In terms of Brussig's novel, this notion of the 'we-group' becomes very clear, indicating that we are not only dealing with the dimension of individual memory, but also with the dimension of social memory within which individual memory is grounded.

In the narrative, it is the group of friends surrounding the protagonist that fosters the strongest sense of ‘we-identity’, an aspect which is representative of a community of experience, and in this particular case, it is the experiences and memories of a generation that are at the core of the novel. As discussed in the theoretical reflections in section 2.3.1.4., historical key experiences link the memories of the members of a generation together, with most of these personality-forming experiences occurring between the ages of 12 and 25. This dynamic is very apparent in the novel: The main characters are teenagers who are all experiencing the same living conditions, circumstances and problems, a fact which strongly enables their sense of ‘we-identity’, as stated in the first chapter of the novel when the protagonist claims that they are not only a group of friends, but that they are a ‘potential’ due to their similar circumstances and experiences (Brussig, 2001: 10).

These similar experiences individuals make, especially during their formative adolescent years, are the ones that link them together as a generational memory community. The cumulated memories of a generation’s members turn into one dominant generational narrative, which is always agreed upon in retrospect. This narrative then frames all individual experiences a person of this generation is going to make in the future, for members of the same generation tend to share values, norms and cultural strategies of interpreting their own life experiences. This dynamic is very evident in the novel: Not only are the characters strongly linked together through their generational memory and experiences, but we can also assume that the author’s memories, for he grew up in the exact generational setting represented in the narrative, are strongly framed by the real-life generational experiences he made during that time; experiences which then might have flown into the generational representation of memory and experience in the novel.

This common background of experience that the characters as well as the author share leads to the formation of generational memory clusters within a society. The author’s own cluster is represented through the young main characters of the novel, which explains why the sense of ‘we-identity’ is so strongly emphasized and maybe even why the narrator understands himself as a member of the group, assuming of course that the narrator reflects the voice of the author. Due to the fact that generational experience brings forward such a strong framework of shared values, norms and attitudes, it is easy to explain the contrast between the adolescent generation and the older generation the narrative depicts. Generational memory can cause great tension between the age groups, for every generation

shares a different experiential background and thus a different interpretational framework of experience. Whenever a generational shift occurs, as it is the case in the novel, the memory profile of society changes, for the new generation introduces new value systems and frames of experience into the memory discourse and thus triggers the renewal of societal memory. This dynamic might also explain the antagonistic nature of Brussig's novel.

The strong interlink between individual and generational/social memory explains the importance of both dimensions in the context of the novel. Aside from representing his own experiences and memories, the author displays the values and experiences of a generation within which his individual experiences are embedded. The memory horizon represented in the novel is thus being extended, and single autobiographic memories are being put into the larger context of their sociocultural surrounding.

The *content* of the novel is thus based on the first two dimensions of memory, the individual and the social one. The *purpose* of the narrative as a work of literature, however, corresponds to the two remaining dimensions of memory, the cultural and the collective one. First-hand individual experience is being captured and preserved in a way in which it can be appropriated by generations to come, and the experiential memory of a generation finds access into the unlimited cultural memory horizon of a collective through the transfer of embodied vivid memory into sign-based, media-conveyed memory. Through this translation of individual embodied memory into a symbolic form, the novel's communicative memory contents are stabilized and hence preserved and made accessible to all post-memory generations to follow. Collective memory, in the sense of a shared identity based on a common ground of experience, derives from this transfer of individual memory onto the cultural sphere: Through the adaptation of individual identity and generational narratives in art and literature, they are made accessible to larger groups of people, they become temporary unlimited and thus enter into the cultural memory horizon.

At this point, however, we have to bear in mind that, even though the novel at stake allows later generations to appropriate the individual and generational memory contents it preserves, the reception of these memory contents will always differ between the generations that share first-hand experiential memories, and the ones that merely appropriate the represented memory contents. Even though future generations will be able to appropriate the memory contents displayed, incorporate them into their knowledge fund and regard the displayed experiences with empathy, the emotional quality of the experiences will never be

as intense for them. During the transfer process from individual and generational memory to cultural memory, the aspect of emotional authenticity is hence always weakened.

4.3.3. How much 'Truth' is in the Novel?

The remaining concepts of memory we encounter in the narrative all build up to one question, namely the one of how much 'truth' the novel actually conveys. In order to be able to answer this question, we have to consider the remaining memory concepts and their impact on the memory contents the novel represents, beginning with the dominant modes of memory.

Because the novel is concerned with individual and generational experiences, it is the Vis-function of memory that has to be taken into account, meaning that time has a crucial impact on how personal experiences are remembered and how memory contents are retrieved. Memory contents within the Vis-function are always reconstructed and depend strongly on the circumstances of the present, they are subject to a constant transformation process and thus have to be considered unstable. Memory in this context thus has to be considered a productive force rather than a reproductive entity (see section 2.3.1.2.).

Due to the fact that the author relies on first-hand experiences regarding the content of his work, we furthermore have to assume that we are dealing with the identity constituting, conscious function-memory playing an active role in the reconstruction process of the memory contents represented. Resulting from the fact that the function-memory only contains a very small part of an individual's total memory fund, namely only those memories that determine the individual's identity and biographical narrative, we are confronted with another aspect that makes the reliability of the novel's displayed memory content uncertain. The identity constituting function-memory and the unconscious storage-memory stand in constant interaction with one another, meaning that elements can be exchanged and transferred from the foreground into the background at any time. Just like the experiential Vis-memory overall, the contents of the function-memory are highly dependent on the conditions of the present: Whenever the individual's present situation changes, memories can be interpreted according to these altered circumstances, new memories can be considered identity-shaping and moved up into the function-memory, while other elements lose their relevance and thus drop into the unconscious background of the storage-memory.

With regard to our object, these observations are very important. The novel was written in 1999, and thus at a time in which the author's experiences of the GDR were already an element of the past for a considerable time. Considering the general selectivity and re-constructiveness of memory, we have to bear these circumstances in mind when evaluating the novel's claim to 'truth' and the reliability of the memory contents displayed.

Now, when evaluating the level of 'truth' the narrative conveys, we have to discuss a second concept that goes hand in hand with the concept of memory, namely forgetting. At this point, it is time to take into consideration the final paragraph of the novel, which has already been briefly touched upon during the content analysis. This final paragraph is a brief monologue of the narrator, and it is concerned with the issue of memory:

Wer wirklich bewahren will, was geschehen ist, der darf sich nicht den Erinnerungen hingeben. Die menschliche Erinnerung ist ein viel zu wohliger Vorgang, um das Vergangene nur festzuhalten; sie ist das Gegenteil von dem, was sie zu sein vorgibt. Denn die Erinnerung kann mehr, viel mehr: Sie vollbringt beharrlich das Wunder, einen Frieden mit der Vergangenheit zu schließen, in dem sich jeder Groll verflüchtigt und der weiche Schleier der Nostalgie über alles legt, was mal scharf und schneidend empfunden wurde. Glückliche Menschen haben ein schlechtes Gedächtnis und reiche Erinnerungen. (Brussig, 2001: 156f)

With these final words, Brussig makes the role of memory in his work very clear. He states that memory conducts the miracle of reconciling a person with the past, indicating that he is very well aware of the fact that memory can have an adulterating character, especially due to its retrospectivity and re-constructiveness. However, the issue that Brussig truly touches upon in this final paragraph is the one of forgetting, namely forgetting so that a person to come to terms with the past. Therefore, we shall now see how the presence of the concept of forgetting impacts the memory contents the novel conveys.

We have shown in the theoretical reflections that forgetting is not necessarily a bad thing, but that the process of forgetting is inseparably linked with remembering. The two go hand in hand, for example in case of the modes of memory: Whatever lies in the sphere of the storage-memory is not truly forgotten, but it is merely inactive and therefore not accessible at all moments. However, this inactive information can reenter the conscious sphere of the function-memory at all times, indicating that forgetting and remembering work together according to the same fundamental dynamics of constant exchange (see section 2.3.2.2.).

From Brussig's final paragraph, we can interpret that certain dynamics of forgetting are relevant in the context of the narrative; however, the fact that the author is aware of this already indicates that we are not dealing with any definitive forms of forgetting, but rather with forgetting as a coping mechanism usually applied when the remembered experiences are painful or traumatic – such as, for instance, the memory of growing up in an authoritarian regime such as the GDR.

One of the techniques of forgetting most likely applied by the author is the one of covering up certain memories. These memories are not truly forgotten, but they have lost their emotional charge, which is what Brussig implies when he writes that memory has the power to transform anger and painful experiences into something soft through the 'veil of nostalgia' (Brussig, 2001: 157).

The second technique of forgetting we have to take into consideration with regard to the novel's content is the one of overwriting, which causes the memory of a specific place to change, especially when this place suddenly acquires symbolic value. Considering the fact that the novel was written after the GDR was no longer just Brussig's childhood home, but was now also a symbol for the German division and the Soviet dictatorship, we have to assume that some of the memories the author used to associate with this place as a child have undergone severe alteration processes, which can have great impact on the way he reconstructs his autobiographical experiential memory and thus on the ways memory is represented in his work.

However, despite the fact that certain dynamics of forgetting are evident in the novel – as Brussig states himself in the final paragraph –, his work does not seem to display any negative forms of forgetting according to Assmann's classification (see section 2.3.2.2.). The fact that Brussig criticizes the GDR-regime indicates that he is not impacted by negative dynamics of forgetting such as denial or repression, but instead, the forms of forgetting evident in the novel seem to be positive ones, as we can once again assume from the final paragraph.

The narrator states that memory has the power to reconcile a person with the past, pointing to the fact that we have to take into consideration the two positive forms of forgetting Assmann put forward, beginning with 'constructive forgetting'. Just as Brussig suggests, this form of forgetting has the purpose of providing a person with the strength to move on from the past, it is the foundation of the possibility of identity renewal as well as a

political fresh start, and is thus highly relevant in the consideration of GDR-memories. After the Soviet Union and hence the GDR fell apart, people like Brussig, who did not know any other life, had to adapt to the new circumstances quickly. Such an adaptation can be very painful, especially regarding the fact that the author's generation lost their entire reality, the only life-world they had ever known, after the Iron Curtain fell. Constructive forgetting can thus be considered a coping mechanism that can help the individual as well as the group to make a fresh start after their past has been lost.

The second form of positive forgetting relevant in the context of the novel is 'therapeutic forgetting'. Even though Brussig does not emphasize this form of forgetting as explicitly as the previous one, his work itself indicates why therapeutic forgetting is of relevance. Therapeutic forgetting entails the acceptance of the past through memory, and due to the fact that Brussig writes about his experiences and memories, we have to assume that this form of forgetting is the dominant one in the context of the novel. Therapeutic forgetting is often applied when it comes to overcoming a violent and traumatic past, such as, for instance, a childhood under a repressive regime. Through confrontation and discourse, therapeutic forgetting creates a certain distance between the past and the present, allowing the individual to make a fresh start. This distance might be a potential explanation for why Brussig has decided to not use first-person narration in the novel. In the context of therapeutic forgetting, the victims of a traumatic experience need to have their story told, they need to experience empathy and find that their experiences and memories are heard. Only after that can the group collectively move on, but at the same time preserve their memories without clinging to the traumatic experiences.

This technique of forgetting strongly coincides with Assmann's third model of dealing with a traumatic past, namely 'remembering in order to forget', which seems to be one of the underlying intentions of the novel. In the context of this model, remembering is being used as a tool of reconciliation and healing – thus exactly what Brussig implies during the final paragraph of *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee*. Under the premise of 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung', a painful past has to be confronted in order to be overcome, for instance through the public sharing of experiences and the narration of the traumatic memories to an audience. Literature can be a very effective way of communicating such experiences, and Brussig's novel can therefore be read not only as an attempt of sharing his subjective experiences of the GDR with future generations, but also as a personal attempt of

reconciling with his own past through the public articulation of his memories. In this specific context, remembering the past is not the goal of the narration, but memory is the medium through which a person can enable him-/herself to move on from the trauma of the past by confronting it.

At this point, we can conclude that dynamics of forgetting most certainly play a role with regard to the novel, as indicated by the narrator himself during the final paragraph. Within these two final pages of the novel, the narrator furthermore points out that memory is no way of truly preserving what happened, for memory is too soothing in its nature to capture the past (Brussig, 2001:156f). This observation leads us back to the initial question of this chapter, namely the level of ‘truth’ the novel conveys.

We have already discussed that the experiential function-memory on which the novel’s content is built is generally unstable. Furthermore, we have seen that the novel is impacted by several dynamics of forgetting, and finally, that the narrator openly emphasizes the unreliability of memory as a means of capturing the past. The question deriving from these observations is rather obvious: Does the novel convey *any* truth with regards to the memory contents it represents? Getting ahead of myself for one last time, I would like say: Yes, it does, and we shall hereafter explore how and why.

From the narrator’s final statement, we can conclude that the narrative is not a factual representation of events, and, due to the final paragraph, it furthermore becomes evident that narrator is aware of that and furthermore wants to share this fact with the reader. The authorial voice of the narrator thus does not claim factuality, but, as we have learned in the course of the theoretical reflections, this does not necessarily mean that the contents the text conveys are untrue.

According to what Ricoeur’s model of mimesis suggests, even fictional literature incorporates elements from its extra-literary surroundings, it merely reassembles them through literary means and thus equips them with a new layer of meaning (see section 2.4.2.1.). The reality represented in fictional literature is thus not an exact representation of the past, but, coming back to Walter Benjamin, an exact representation of the past is neither desirable nor possible. As discussed earlier, Benjamin puts forward several reasons in the favor of his thesis. First, he states that the past is always reconstructed according to the circumstances and the conditions of the present. What Benjamin refers to as ‘Jetztzeit’ is essentially what the narrator calls to our attention in the final paragraph: The memories of

the past change over time because the circumstances of the present change, things that were once perceived as painful lose their emotional charge, memories are reevaluated and thus reconstructed in an ever-changing manner. Due to this dynamic between the past and the present, Benjamin claims that the past can never be reconstructed the way it truly was, for “the true image of the past flits by” (Benjamin, 1940: 390).

Developing this argument further, Benjamin reasons that an objective or factual reconstruction of the past is not the goal, for the past is by its very nature subjective. It is constituted by many single perspectives, experiences and memories that come together in a ‘dialectical image’ that can never be recreated twice in the same way. At this point, we reach another crucial aspect of the novel: The memory contents displayed are characterized by experiential subjectivity and a particular perspective as well as a clear personal stand within memory culture, as the presence of the antagonistic rhetorical mode suggests. Following the assumptions of Benjamin, this subjectivity and re-constructiveness does not make the represented memory contents untrue; on the contrary, he believes that the true image of the past can only emerge from single subjective perspectives of history, eventually coming together as a polyphony, a ‘multiplicity of histories’ revealing the past as it was. In this context, no memory is irrelevant, no matter how small, fragmented, personal or subjective it might be, for they all contribute to the reconstruction of the ‘dialectical image’ and thus to the reconstruction of the historical truth.

With regard to this novel, this means that it is precisely its subjectivity, its perspectiveness and its experiential nature that make it valuable to memory culture. Modern historiography has come to the conclusion that memory and history have to be considered side by side, for historical events can only be explained through the combination of factual evidence *and* the subjective perceptions of the people who witnessed these events. Through this polyphony of perspectives, individual stories, memories and experiences contribute to history as a whole. In this context, Aleida Assmann follows the direction of Benjamin’s philosophy by claiming that this very duality is fundamental in achieving real truth: On the one hand, historiography requires the meaning provided by memory, and on the other hand, memory needs the corrections and verifications provided by historical facts (see also section 2.3.2.3.).

What the novel conveys is thus not necessarily factual truth, but experiential truth. The author tells a story based on his experiences, knowing very well that memories are subject to the dynamics of alteration, may it be due to their traumatic nature, to dynamics of forgetting or to alterations during the translation process from sensual into verbal memory. However, by making this subjective experiential memory accessible through the medium of literature, the novel provides its readers with the possibility of ‘affectively appropriating’ the memory contents conveyed (see section 2.3.2.1.).

The novel’s value in terms of cultural and collective memory is thus to allow members of a group to appropriate an experience which is not their own, but which helps them understand what other members of their community have experienced. Through psychological appropriation, the experiential memories that have become disembodied through the translation into the sign-system of literature can become re-embodied through their appropriation by other members of the collective, and through this very individual appropriation, members participate in the shared memory of the individual experience as a collective.

This sharing of experiences is what Renan has determined as the emotional glue that keeps a community together, regardless the fact that for some members of the community, these experiences are merely appropriated and not truly their own (see section 2.3.2.1.). The question at stake is how the past was experienced rather than the factual truth, for the future-orientation of a community is always based on the shared experience of that past. This is precisely where literature comes into play: By providing access to experiences, not historical facts, literary works such as *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* allow members of a community to share the experiences of the past across all generations to come. Experiential gaps in a society, may they be due to generational or geographic differences, can be bridged and a common experiential past can be reconstructed through the medium of literature, eventually allowing for a collective identity to emerge from this appropriated past.

In order for a collective to share one identity, the experiences and memories of all sub-communities have to be made accessible, as it is the case in Brussig’s work. The majority of the German population has not experienced life in the GDR, which is why the novel represents the subjective, experiential memories of a subgroup of the German society whose remembrance contributes to the memory discourse and the plurality of memories of the German memory culture as a whole. Due to the fact that the memory represented in the text

is only shared by a relatively small group of people, namely only one generation in one specific place, the antagonistic features of the novel indicate that the memories represented may challenge the dominant narratives about life in the GDR. This subgroup of people has made subjectively different experiences during the time of the German division than the rest of the country has, and their memories and experiences have to be confronted by all members of the collective so that society can arrive at a ‘multiplicity of histories’, a version of the past in which all individual and generational memories are included and on whose basis a collective sense of identity can be fostered by closing the experiential gap between the sub-communities and generations.

The value of ‘truth’ Brussig’s novel conveys thus lies in the fact that it introduces an alternative, non-dominant, subjective and experiential memory of a particular moment in time and space into the memory discourse. Through the medium of literature, this memory can be preserved and appropriated by future generations, allowing for the individual experience to become part of cultural memory. Through the acknowledgement of the fact that history is shaped by many single stories, perspectives and memories, societies can foster a common ground of experience based on the memory contents conveyed through literature, and the present novel is the best example. It is the individual stories of the people that shape the memory and the identity of the collective, in other words, it is not historical facts that shape who we are, but the subjective experience of the past reconstructed according to the conditions of the present.

5. Conclusion: *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* as a Medium of Memory

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the relationship between memory and literature, with the particular interest of discovering how one particular novel, Thomas Brussig’s *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee*, contributes to the collective memory of the GDR and thus to reveal its value to contemporary German memory culture as a whole.

After a thorough consideration of the most important theories and sub-concepts surrounding the concept of cultural memory, we were able to suggest during the analysis that all the aspects of the memory concept influence the way in which memory contents are represented in the novel. According to Mieke Bal’s take on cultural analysis, cultural memory was approached openly and from as many angles as possible, allowing for a

productive dialogue between its different conceptualizations, which were then applied methodologically in the analysis of the selected cultural object.

Aside from trying to provide a thorough insight into the theoretical framework necessary for analyzing issues of memory, special attention was paid to the unique functions of literature as a medium of memory. After establishing that collective remembrance is only possible through media, we have discovered that the relationship between memory and literature is a unique one, for they both possess the same core characteristics, indicating that they rely on similar ways of constructing versions of reality. Through aggregation, both memory and literature break down complex past events by representing them in the form of specific narratives, *topoi* or motifs within which the meaning of the past is condensed. The importance of such a representation of the past through particular motifs has become particularly evident during the analysis of the novel, when we discovered that Brussig's representation of life in the GDR is mainly guided by six central motifs, namely fear and otherness, on the one hand, and hope, community, resistance and the hunger for freedom on the other hand.

Through the element of narration, memory as well as literature construct meaning through the selection and combination of particular aspects of the past. By arranging these elements in a narrative way, they are forged into a meaningful story, a process which happens in both the domain of autobiographical memory as well as literary narration. How closely connected individual memory and literature truly are has also become clear during the analysis of the novel's episodic structure, which mirrors very closely the reconstructive and flexible character of autobiographical memory on which the novel's memory contents may be based. Finally, literature and memory rely on patterns, for collective experiences are more easily accessed and interpreted through familiar patterns.

However, it is not only these structural similarities between memory and literature that point to literature's importance as a medium of memory, but also a number of unique features only literature possesses, making it particularly effective in the conveyance of memory contents. First and foremost, literary representation allows for a large variety of perspectives, positions and voices. Such a polyphonic display may serve to represent the plurality of memory discourses within a memory culture. As the analysis has shown, Brussig's work does not display a true 'polyphony' of perspectives in Bakhtin's sense, for the antagonistic nature of the novel favors the perspective and the memory contents of one

specific societal subgroup. However, the novel does contribute to the plurality of memory discourses within memory culture, for it introduces a non-dominant counter-memory into the memory discourse, namely the subjective and experiential memory of the generation that was born and raised in the GDR.

The second feature making literature unique as a medium of memory is its fictional privilege, a fundamental aspect in the evaluation of the text's contribution to collective memory. Through the means of fiction, literature has the ability to fundamentally restructure our cultural perceptions, a dynamic achieved through the combination of fictional and real elements in a literary text. As Ricoeur has suggested in his model of mimesis, literary texts always draw from their extra-literary surroundings. Through a process of selection, particular elements of reality are absorbed while others are disregarded, and it is this very selectivity that makes it possible for a literary work to present its readers with a critical perspective or an antagonistic past version, as it is the case in the novel. Because memory is always bound to subjective perspectives, Brussig's work represents one specific memory angle through which he attempts to formulate criticism against the GDR while at the same time convey the everyday life-world of the people in a time and space that no longer exist.

However, as it was also discussed early on, neither memory nor literature provide an exact representation of the past, for they both rely on reconstruction and the conditions of the present, as the author also emphasizes in the last paragraph of the novel. During the second step of mimesis, the configuration, the selected extra-literary elements are removed from their original context and are instead rearranged and brought together in a new model version of reality. Even though this new fictional entity is not a mirror-image of the past, literary configuration can be a means through which existing memory versions can be altered, extended, reinterpreted or questioned. Such an exploration of alternative worlds of memory, made accessible through fictional elements, can restructure the collective experiential reality. In the case of the novel being discussed here, the author takes a number of extra-literary elements and embeds a fictional plot within them, meaning that, even though the actions of the plot might be fictional, they serve as a way of exploring and interpreting the real-life conditions serving as the extra-literary, prefigurative framework of the novel.

Finally, the true value of literature as a means of altering collective memory and cultural perceptions only comes into being during the last step of mimesis, the refiguration, taking place in the process of reception. The moment the reader absorbs the conveyed

memory contents, literature serves as a touching point between an alternative world and the real world of the recipient. Through the particular meaning a literary work gives to its selected extra-literary elements, the reader's perception of the extra-literary world can be altered, leading to literature being understood as a productive force within the individual as well as a collective process of meaning construction. For the novel at stake, this means that, through the fictional alternative world, the alternative memory and identity constructions it displays, it can contribute to the re-evaluation and the re-perspectivization of extra-literary memory culture.

By providing us with memory contents from a specific perspective, Brussig allows us to see the displayed past in a new light. His goal is thereby not to glorify or devalue the GDR-regime; quite the opposite, for he criticizes the regime strongly through both the motifs chosen for the novel as well as the novel's formal characteristics such as its satirical style and antagonistic features. Instead, the author's aim is to enlarge the collective memory of the GDR by emphasizing that the people who lived there were in fact leading normal lives: Through the representation of a past life-world, Brussig takes a stand for the memory community of the people who grew up in the GDR, he displays their everyday experiences and problems without ever overlooking the great impact the wall and the authoritarian regime had on their lives; but beyond all these difficult circumstances that life in the GDR entailed, Brussig also makes it very clear that the people led rather normal lives, nonetheless. With this notion at the core of the novel, Brussig goes up against the dominant collective memory of the GDR, which is usually limited to the remembrance of the repressive regime, by emphasizing that the sun also shone east of the wall.

By making these experiential generational memories accessible to a large community of people through the medium of literature, the narrative allows future generations as well as people who did not grow up in the GDR to empathize and understand the memories and experiences of a sub-community they are not personally part of. By allowing these subjective experiences to enter into the temporary and spatially unlimited sphere of cultural memory, the novel provides a way of appropriating experiences and memories that extend the personal memory-horizon of the individual, thus allowing him/her a glimpse into a life-world they have never experienced, but that forms part of the plurality of memories within their memory culture.

Through this literary appropriation of memories, a common ground of experience can be created, even between people who share or do not share first-hand experiences of the events the novel is concerned with. As discussed earlier, such a common basis of shared experiences is indispensable for a community to remember and identify as one. This aspect leads us back to some of the reflections discussed in the introduction as well as the theoretical section of this work, namely the remaining divide between the former East and West in Germany's contemporary society. While literature may not be a way of solving political issues, we can now conclude that its true power lies in its ability to close the experiential gap existing between certain subgroups of society. During the period of the German division, the German people were not only divided geographically, but they also made fundamentally different experiences, a factor that made it extremely difficult to come together as one again and move forward into a common future after the country's reunification. A shared sense of belonging, of identity and of future orientation has to be based on shared experiences, and experiential literary works like *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* can allow the people from different experiential backgrounds to understand each other, to come together as one again and to overcome the experiential gap that prevents their community from identifying as a unite of belonging.

The fact that the narrative is highly subjective and characterized by antagonistic features does not take anything away from its relevance for memory culture, for the variety of functions literature can fulfill can only truly be grasped when assuming a plurality of memory communities and thus a multiplicity of collective memories. As Benjamin has suggested, the past will never look the same for two people, which is why history has to be understood as a 'multiplicity of histories' within which no memory is too small, too personal or too anonymous to make a contribution to the polyphony of the memory discourse. This observation furthermore entails that memory, individual or collective, is always subject to competing interpretations, not every memory is equally relevant to all members of a memory community and their meaning can drastically change depending on the conditions of the present.

This aspect leads us to another of the novel's greatest contributions to memory culture, despite its experiential and antagonistic nature. Through the element of fiction, literature can stress the re-constructiveness of memory, for instance by applying certain temporal structures underlining the conditions of the present. With regards to the novel, the reconstructive nature of memory is made clear through several means, the most important of which is the commenting role of the narrator. By referring to the conditions of the past through comparisons to the present, the narrator emphasizes the retrospective nature of the novel's memory contents. The narrator knows how drastically the conditions of the present differ from the conditions in the story, which is why the plot often displays hints indicating that change is about to come. The memory represented in the novel is thus reconstructed under the temporal paradigm of the present. This becomes particularly clear during the symbolic ending of the story, in which the upcoming liberation of the people is implied through the almost mystical appearance of Gorbachev. This symbolic ending is only possible due to the reconstructive nature of the novel, mirroring the reconstructive nature of memory itself. However, the importance of the reconstructive aspect becomes even more evident during the narrator's final monologue, in which he emphasizes the great impact the present has on the memory of the past. Through these final lines, Brussig's novel acknowledges its own reconstructive and retrospective character, and thereby underlines the importance of the present in memory culture through the element of fiction.

After summarizing all the reflections stated above, it is now the time to return to the three research questions that guided this research project, for we are now able to answer them conclusively. Beginning with the question of how life in the GDR is represented in the novel, two central aspects have become clear: Conveyed through the subjective eyes of a specific societal subgroup, the text draws a critical image of life in the GDR, but at the same time, degrading the system is not its central goal. Despite the difficult living conditions, Brussig strongly emphasizes the fact that the people in the East were trying to lead their lives as normally as possible – despite always being aware of the wall in front of them. By describing the everyday problems of a constellation of stereotypical characters, Brussig's goal is to reconstruct the life-world of the GDR exemplary, portraying a normal life inside the authoritarian regime.

The author achieves this particular representation of the GDR through a number of narrative tools and motifs thoroughly discussed during the analysis part of this work, leading us to the second research question of this dissertation. Indicating the ambivalence between good and bad memories of the GDR, the motifs shaping the narrative are very diverse. On the one hand, the people's fear of the regime and of not being able to escape their poor living conditions is omnipresent. The representation of life in the GDR is furthermore strongly shaped by the confrontations between the East and West, the second recurring motif coined as the issue of otherness during the analysis. By seeing themselves confronted with the unknown, yet seemingly superior West, the eastern characters become more and more aware of their own life-world, contributing to the narrative's specific representation of the GDR as an ambivalent place. This ambivalence becomes more evident when taking into consideration the second set of motifs the novel draws from, namely the positive motifs dominating the story. Through the strong sense of community underlined in the novel, the author emphasizes the fact that, despite all difficulties, hope, resistance and the desire for freedom served as the guiding principles for the young GDR-generation. Through this particular combination of dominant motifs, the author achieves a deep emotional and experiential insight into the life-world of a generation who grew up in the GDR, constantly torn between obeying and challenging the system, between enjoying their lives and hoping for a better tomorrow.

With regards to the narrative and stylistic tools, we have suggested during the analysis that the author relies on a set of methods that make his representation of the GDR appear particularly authentic, beginning with the novel's experiential and realistic character implying the presence of autobiographical memory contents. Furthermore, linguistic tools such as the incorporation of informal speech elements and GDR-jargon contribute to the authenticity of the text's representation of the GDR. In addition, all of the novel's narrative elements are of an experiential and/or antagonistic nature, supporting the author's aim of depicting the subjective, experiential life-world of one memory community whose private experiences with the GDR often vanish within the dominant memory discourse of the GDR as a repressive regime.

This final aspect already points to the answer to our final research question, namely how the novel and its representation of the GDR contribute to the collective memory of this very specific moment in time and space. By capturing the subjective and experiential

memories of a societal subgroup in a work of literature, Brussig allows future generations and uninvolved members of a community to participate in the remembrance of the GDR. Due to the fact that the narrative is a work of fiction, it allows its readers to explore new perspectives and alternative reality versions within the framework of extra-literary memory culture, leading to the fact that cultural perceptions of the past can be genuinely altered through the appropriation of the memory contents conveyed in the novel. The fact that the novel is a work of fiction does hereby not mean that its representation of the GDR is untrue, on the contrary, as determined by Theo de Boer, the element of fiction allows for experience to be transformed into a way of exploring reality more deeply: “By intensifying reality, then, we mean a reality whose meaningful content has been enhanced at the expense of factuality, but not at the expense of truth” (de Boer, 1999: 283).

The value of Brussig’s work in terms of the remembrance of the GDR today is to remind us that, besides the horrors of the authoritarian regime, the GDR was more than a repressive system, more than a disembodied chapter of history. It was a home to many people, it was a real place in which real people made real experiences, and these subjective experiences are the contribution the novel makes to contemporary memory culture. Factuality is not its main concern, but the subjective life-world, the emotional and experiential aspect of the collective memory of a specific generation, which forms part of the pluralistic discourse of memory culture as a whole. Only by considering the plurality of subjective experiences and by incorporating them into the sphere of cultural memory, a multiplicity of collective memories and thus a ‘multiplicity of histories’ can be achieved. By allowing future generations to appropriate the experiences, memories and emotions of past generations through the medium of literature, a common ground of experience can be achieved, and based on this very ground, a common sense of identity, belonging and remembering can be fostered, enabling a community to move on from the past and into a future based on mutual understanding and a collectively shared past.

Concluding this research project, I would like to return to the three quotations prefixed to each part of this work, for they summarize the key thoughts and findings of this dissertation. The reflections of Barbara Kingsolver, Albert Einstein and Thomas Brussig shall therefore be considered once again, serving as our final résumé.

“Memory is a complicated thing. A relative to truth, but not its twin.”

The past can never be retrieved in the way it truly happened. Every memory is a reconstruction, unstable in its very nature, and always subject to alteration. However, memories remain a relative to truth, their reconstructive and subjective nature does not make them untrue, for every moment of the past is constituted by a number of subjective perspectives and perceptions, a ‘dialectical image’ substantiating Benjamin’s claim of a ‘multiplicity of histories’ and thus a multiplicity of memories within every memory culture.

“Memory is deceptive because it is coloured by today’s events.”

The conditions of the present determine how memory is reconstructed and retrieved. The process of meaning-construction happens retrospectively, and memories thus become ever-changing reconstructions mirroring the present conditions and needs of a person or a group. For the novel’s representation of the GDR, this aspect is crucial, because the memory preserved in it is colored by the fact that the GDR no longer exists at the moment the story is told, meaning that all aspects chosen to represent the memory contents conveyed in the novel were evaluated retrospectively and thus selected in the light of today’s conditions. In this sense, the very nature of the novel closely resembles the nature of autobiographical memory.

“Glückliche Menschen haben ein schlechtes Gedächtnis und reiche Erinnerungen.”

In the very last lines of his text, Brussig summarizes the key points of his work by stating that ‘happy people have a poor memory, but rich memories’¹⁸ (Brussig, 2001: 157). Through this observation, Brussig implies the reconstructive and instable character of memories, and at the same time emphasizes the reconciling power of memory, its ability to overcome the past, allowing people to move forward without being trapped by the trauma and the pain. Brussig, in the context, plays on the double meaning of ‘memory’: At first sight, people’s capacity to remember (Gedächtnis) appears to be flawed and unreliable, for the events of the past can never be captured in the way they truly were. However, on the other hand, this dynamic is also what makes memory such a powerful tool, for it allows people to let go of their pain and look back at their memories (Erinnerungen) in reconciliation, eventually acknowledging the fact that sometimes, the sun shines even in the darkest of places.

¹⁸ My translation.

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Modi der Rhetorik des kollektiven Gedächtnisses literarische Formen	Monumentaler Modus	Erfahrungshaftiger Modus	Antagonistischer Modus	Reflexiver Modus
<i>Grundlegende Weisen des literarischen Gedächtniserzeugens: (Selektion/Konfiguration)</i>				
Selektionsstruktur	Referenz auf kulturelle Gedächtnisse (dominant Intertextualität und Intermedialität)	Referenz auf kommunikative Gedächtnisse (dominant Interdiskursivität)	Referenz auf Selbst- und Fremdbilder (intertextuell/-medial/-diskursiv)	Referenz auf (Spezial-) Diskurse über kollektives Gedächtnis
Plotstrukturen und Gattungsmuster	Geschlossene Strukturen <i>high mimetic modes</i>	Offene Strukturen (Episodenhaftigkeit) <i>low mimetic modes</i>		
<i>Soziales Erinnern im literarischen Text</i>				
Sprachliche Gestaltung	Archaisierende Sprache	Alltagssprache Soziolekt	Stereotypisierende Wendungen	Lexikon der Spezialdiskurse/ Gedächtnismetaphorik
Erzählerische Vermittlung	<i>authorial voice</i>	<i>personal voice</i> (auch: intradiegetische Erzählungen/interne Fokalisierung)	Explizite <i>communal voice</i>	Gedächtnis thematisierende <i>authorial voice</i> /erinnernde <i>personal voice</i> (auch: <i>unreliable narration</i>)
Figurendarstellung	Vertreter wissenssoziologischer Eliten/ Autoritäten als Perspektiveträger	Alltagshelden als Perspektiveträger („Sicht von unten“)	Oppositionen in der Figurenkonstellation	
Perspektivenstruktur	Tendenziell geschlossen	Tendenziell offen	Geschlossen	Offen (Multiperspektivität)
<i>Kulturelle Paradigmen</i>				
Intertextualität (intertextuelle, -mediale und -diskursive) Verweise auf das kollektive Gedächtnis	Autoreferentielle Funktionalisierung → Selbstmonumentalisierung	Heteroreferentielle Funktionalisierung → Deutung von Erfahrung anhand kulturspezifischer Schemata	Ironische Funktionalisierung → Abwertung der mit den kulturellen Paradigmen verbundenen Erinnerungsgemeinschaften	
<i>Literarische Gedächtnisräume</i>				
Zeit- und Raumdarstellung	Mythisierter Gedächtnisraum (z.B. durch kulturelle Paradigmen, Symbol, Allegorie)	Lebensweltlicher Gedächtnisraum (z.B. durch Deixis; <i>effèt de réel</i>)	Kontrastierung semantisierter Räume	

Appendix A: Tendencies of the constitution of the different rhetorical modes of collective memory through ensembles of literary forms (Erll, 2017: 210)