# Blurred Borders

## Art As Mediator Between Individual And Collective Memory



Ina Marie Schmidt, 2017

# Introduction

When I was a seven-year-old child, my individual memory was greatly influenced by collective memory. The place where I grew up was surrounded by beautiful forests. Back then, it was common for my family to go into the woods for walks and hikes. After the summer months, when it is still a little warm but the rain starts falling harder, the whole family, equipped with knives and baskets, would walk deep into the woods to collect mushrooms. The person who found the biggest amount of porcini, a fairly rare species, would be celebrated for the rest of the day. All wet, hungry and tired but also very happy we would walk back home and cook the mushrooms for dinner.

In 1986, the Chernobyl disaster had a deep impact on the above-mentioned events and on my individual memory. I remember my mum turning up the radio, panicky. A monotonous voice telling us to stay inside and to keep the windows closed. Keep your children inside the house, don't let them play outside. At first, it seemed exciting and adventurous. It was raining and I wasn't interested in playing outside anyway. I stared out of the closed window, trying to see the dangerous particles the news anchor was talking about, but saw nothing. A few weeks later, however, this abstract event started to impact my life greatly. During one of our regular strolls in the woods, I learned that my beloved wild berries that were just beginning to grow along the way might be contaminated. I was not allowed to pick and eat them. After the summer, my grandmother told me that we would not be going to collect mushrooms, and she couldn't tell me how long this would be the case.

My life got influenced by the Chernobyl disaster, although to a far smaller extent than the lives of people who experienced the disaster in Chernobyl. Through my personal experience, I got interested in the subject, and the empathy with those people grew, though I didn't know them. Years after the events took place, I started to read books about Chernobyl and tried to empathize with the children (I was also still a child) who had experienced it. In an abstract way, my personal connection to those events made me empathize with the people who had directly experienced the Chernobyl disaster.

A different event took place in New York City on September 11th, 2001. I had just started studying at the art academy in the Netherlands. For the

first time in my life, I was confronted with the discrepancy between my individual memory and what collective memory constructed.

After the plane had crashed into the Twin Towers in New York City, I was consuming the images on live television. The reporter assured that this event would change the world forever. Sure, I had just moved to a different country and finished my first week at art academy, but the images and comments of the TV program didn't really affect me. I didn't feel the deep shock everybody was talking about. My individual 9/11 was the struggle of finding a place to stay in a city I didn't know that was inhabited by people I barely understood, in a culture that was new to me.

My individual experience was completely disconnected from collective memory. What I experienced during my first weeks at art academy had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks.

During research on memory and family photographs, I became interested in the gap between what the individual remembers and what collective memory establishes. I found that there is a difference between how these two memories are established and a discrepancy of how they mutually influence each other.

My goal in this paper is to define these differences and claim that art can be used as a strategy to bring these two forms of memory closer together. I believe it is important to be individually connected to collective memories. It prevents us from making the same historically related mistakes in the future.

In the first chapter, *Different Kinds of Memory*, I will introduce individual, social and collective memory. I will explain the differences of how an individual, a social group and the collective remembers. The distinction between these different types of memories is crucial to understanding why individual memory is often isolated from collective memory. The lines that separate how these different groups remember are not always very clear, rather asymmetrical cross-influences are taking place.

In the chapter *Memory and History*, I will compare two very different archives with each other: The archive of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC; and The Truth and Reconciliation Commission archive that was formed in South Africa after Apartheid.

The chapter *Memory and Art* refers to art as a mediator between individual and collective memory. I will illustrate my proposition with two examples,

a movie and a novel. Both deal with the discrepancy between individual and collective memory.

I will conclude my paper by explaining the self-reflective power that art can have. This self-reflection in the artwork is important to make us feel responsible and empathic towards certain events. I will explain why we always need to be alert that collective memory does not become abstracted from us as individuals.

# Different Kinds of Memory

The things that are individually remembered can be very different from the constructed collective memory. In this chapter, I firstly want to explain how an individual, a social group and the collective remembers, and secondly I want to show the differences between these forms and their cross-influences.

The distinction between the different kinds of memory is important in order to understand the timespan that memories have. The individual's memory usually fades with the passing of the individual. What is remembered collectively stays alive for a longer timespan, it is transmitted into symbols and myths that can exceed generations of people. It is also important to take a look at how the different forms of memory influence each other. The separating lines between individual and social memory are fluid, individual and social memory are influenced by each other and by collective memory. In contrast, collectively agreed upon memory is not so easily influenced by individual and social memory.

## Individual Memory: The Sins of Human Memory

One episode of Charlie Brooker's science fiction anthology series *Black Mirror* deals with humans' ability —with the help of technology— to remember everything[i]. Every human has access to a system that records everything that one does, sees and hears. If you meet someone new and you forget the name of the person, you can log into this system and check for the name that person introduced himself or herself with. The series mainly deals with the problems linked to such an omniscient memory. For example, one man has an important business meeting that from his point of view fails totally in the end. He recalls the meeting over and over again, which, of course, makes the situation even worse for him. Moreover, his relationship is being destroyed due to the system, too. He becomes paranoid by recalling the memories of his wife's former relationship. The series examines the problems that might come up if humans could remember everything.

So let's praise the imperfection of the human memory! During the process of remembering —encoding, memorizing and recalling— a lot of information gets lost or is wrongfully associated. We forget things, or information fades while time passes by. We tend to preserve rather positive memories than negative ones. We try to keep a much more

positive self-perception of ourselves alive, even though that may include adjusting our memories. This makes individual memory per se untrustworthy —it adjusts and is opportunistic to its own needs. Our human memory is far from perfect, but its imperfection is what makes us human. I believe that Brooker's science fiction series shows only a fraction of the problems an unerasable memory would pose.

Individual memory is influenced by its surroundings. The separating lines between things that are self-experienced and things experienced by others fluctuate. Individual memory becomes influenced by the memories of its direct surroundings —family and friends— as well as by larger social groups —the culture, the nation and the state it is born in or lives in.

The change of individual memory following political changes in a national context —this is what Paul Padover observed in 1944. That year, the historian and political scientist observed a switch in the minds of Germans. While accompanying the American troops invading Nazi Germany, he noted hundreds of conversations with individuals from the German population, from farmer to statesman. Everyone denied their involvement in the Nazi regime. To quote Padover:

> *"We have been here for two months now, we have spoken with many people and asked all sorts of questions, but we still haven't found a single Nazi. Everybody is against the Nazis. Everybody is against Hitler, they have always been. What does that mean? It means, that Hitler has done the whole thing by himself, without the help or support of a single German. He started the war, he conquered all of Europe, he overran at least half of Russia, he killed five million Jews, he starved six to eight million Poles and Russians to death, he built four hundred concentration camps, he recruited the biggest European army and made the trains arrive in time."ii*

In 1944, towards the end of the Second World War, the German population had already realized the hopelessness of Germany's situation. Fearing not only legal consequences, they wanted to uphold their positive self-image by switching sides. The individuals denied any kind of involvement in the Nazi regime.

Another important fact is that the timespan of individual memory is limited to the individual's lifetime. It can only survive for a longer period if it is connected to social memory —for example family and friends— or

when documented in a certain way, e.g. in memoirs, photographs or similar documents.

In short: Individual memory is perspective, subjective, inaccurate and temporary. Nevertheless, it is active and alive. It connects to social groups and exchanges stores of knowledge with others. Individual memory can be seen as an active memory factory, whose products are short-lived and mostly self-serving.

## Social Memory

My mother received a photo album of her grandfather —my great-grandfather. It contained a few pictures of this late member of our family. Most photos showed people my mother didn't know at all. We tried to decipher the photos and reconstruct that man's live shown on them. No written information accompanied the photos. We couldn't make out who he was shown with, where he had been and why the photos had been taken. Usually, if photos lose their connection to the living, one can find them at the local flea market or, as my mother suggested for our photo album, in the trash can.

Social memory is always dependent on individuals. They participate in a social group and form its content. Within this group, the individuals mutually influence each other. Social memory is established through communication, conversation and participation. The closest and most intimate social groups are family and friends. In general, social memory is constituted by a temporary connection with living generations of people and has a timespan of approximately three generations. These people have direct contact with each other, whether it be through direct exchange or by simply knowing about each other. After this period of time, the chances that their memories will be carried on to the next generation shrink.

Objects, such as family photos, usually carry on the memories of the family. They are used as repositories of memories but become increasingly useless if they lose their connection to the living.

Let's imagine a family gathering at a birthday party. The family members start talking about an earlier event they participated in. The individuals autocratically agree upon a social memory —a coherent story of that explicit event that suits them best at this very moment in this very constellation. The group stabilizes the memories. But if times change or

they come back together another time, the story agreed upon is once again open for changes.

The truthfulness of social memory (as far as such thing as truthfulness exists) is also questionable. In the research project[iii] led by Harald Welzer (a social psychologist), different families were questioned about their family affairs during the Nazi regime. Mainly three generations where involved in the talking —eye witnesses, their children and grandchildren. Sometimes, the records of the eye witness were only represented by the stories and memories of their offspring. Welzer concluded that most families painted a brighter and even more colorful image of their history —perpetrators became active parts in the resistance to the regime— and so on. Some families knew very little about their family history and used the little information they had to form coherent stories of what had happened, and all of that at the very moment they where talking to each other: the 'missing' family history was being established during their conversations. They sometimes used fictive stories from movies about the Holocaust and connected them to their family story. Fiction and reality were mixed up to form a coherent narrative of the family history. Coherence and understandability were more important than sticking to the facts. They created a story in order to understand their family history themselves.

## Collective Memory

Collective memory is an agreement to keep certain subjects of the past alive and preserve them for the present and the future. It usually captures one perspective, reduced to symbols and myths, that a larger group of people can relate to, read and understand. Collective memory is selective and constructed. It is constituted by experience and knowledge and not so much by the memories and perceptions of the individuals: a collective narrative of past events that is largely detached from the actual memories of people.

To quote Aleida Assmann, a German professor of cultural studies:

> *"[...] collective memory transforms mental images into icons and narratives into myths whose most important feature is their persuasiveness and affective efficacy. Such myths disconnect the historical experience from the actual conditions of its origin and remodel them as timeless narratives that are passed on from generation to generation. How long they are passed on is dependant on whether there is need for them, I.e., whether they fit the desired self-perception and goals of the group or not."[iv]*

Individual and social memory have hardly any influence on collective memory. In contrast to those, collective memory does not collaborate with others. Therefore, collective memory is inflexible. It alters slowly and does not approve multiple opinions or inconsistency. Its nature is that of institutionalized remembering —a memory created from above and not from within. Collective memory serves a long-lasting purpose and stays alive while individual and social memory have already faded away. Its advantage is temporal stability: collective memory transcends time. While individual memory passes away with the passing of its carrier, collective memory is placed into objects that survive all living references. For a state and its educational purposes this is very important for the construction of a national identity.

Collective memory is represented in monuments, archives, museums and rituals. It is part of what we call 'history', an agreed upon version of our past that contributes to the formation of our identity, as an individual and as a group. Our state politics and our self-reflection as a country are based upon our past —or better said on what we declare to be our historical past. Collective memory tells a coherent story of what is important to remember.

## Résumé

In the sphere of individual memory, we are forced to deal with the lack of clarity and unreliability. However, both individual and social memory benefit from being active and alive. Different perspectives can exert an influence on individual and social memory, so that individuals can be personally affected at any time. In the sphere of collective memory, in contrast, we encounter representations of memory that are isolated from individual memory of the living. This poses the problem that if collective memory becomes abstracted from individual experience, the individual can not relate to it. A monument commemorating historical atrocities can

only have a function and an impact if people can understand its meaning and relate to it. If, however, they don't connect to it and don't understand it, it becomes meaningless —nothing but dead matter.

# Memory and History

History is the study of the past, the study of past events in the present. History serves the purpose of making sense of what happened in the past and learning from past events. Usually history forms one coherent narration of the past that is —over the course of time— consistent and understandable to a wider group of people. For the formation of this agreed upon version of the past, history is strongly influenced by collective memory. Individual memory plays no important role here, in fact, the historical perception of the individual can be very different from the collective version. Collective memory does not consider the multiple perspectives of the individual, that would only disturb its coherent narration.

Collective memory can have great influence on individual experiences, and via that, on individual memory. In the opposite direction, this is, however, rarely if ever possible.

## The Archive: A Memory Factory

Archives have the purpose to save and preserve documents and make them available for research purposes. Archival documents can be important to verify events and can be helpful in the potential correction of past events. Archives do not inhibit either memory or history. Instead, archives usually collect remains that have lost their living references and contexts. The classical structure of an archive is based on its inventory. That already excludes things that are not contained in the archive. This structure, predetermined by the content, also determines what will be added in the future.

In this chapter, I want to give two examples of different ways of how collective memory is established. The first example is the museum archive of The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. The items in this collection are mainly donated by individuals who directly experienced the Holocaust or by their family members.

The second example looks at a different kind of archive, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) archive in South Africa. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission deals with the coming to terms with the Apartheid regime. It started with discussions of living victims as well as

perpetrators. The records of these 'hearings' and other pieces of evidence are collected in an archive that is open to the public.

The archive of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission mainly collects the records of hearings that are specifically held for the archive. The archive of The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum collects remains that mainly come from individuals, like photographs and other documents. The Holocaust archive is selective of what it includes in the collection, in contrast to the archive of the TRC, which is open to anyone's individual records or memories.

## The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive

My first example is Marianne Hirsch's observation[v] at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. Marianne Hirsch teaches memory studies at Columbia University. Her example focusses on the information of the individuals that is left out of the museum archive.

Collective memory neglects information about individuals, it serves a wider political function. This is achieved through symbolic representation. The same applies to the archive that Marianne Hirsch visited.

She observed two individual selections of private family photos and what, on the other hand, the selection criteria of the archivist were. The individual has other motivations to bestow value upon a historical experience or representation (photo) than the collective institution does. The former serves its personal self and identity, whereas the latter serves a wider political and national purpose.

In Hirsch's example, two people were invited to the photo archive of the Holocaust Museum to hand over their personal photos, which were to be added to the archive of the museum. Before that, the two individuals had to make a selection of their own. This personal preselection was not so much based on what was shown in the photo but rather on the emotional value of the photo and the stories surrounding it. In contrast, the archivist of the Holocaust Museum neglected photos that were only of personal value but didn't speak a generally understandable language. To the archivist, images showing recognizable institutional buildings or the miserable situation of the jews during that period were preferable as archive material. As a public institution, the Holocaust Museum pursues the goal of commemorating the genocide of the Jewish population in Europe. Therefore, the archivist was interested in photos referring to the

situation of the Jews during that period —one that we afterwards collectively agreed to name. The archivist neglected photos of smiling faces because they were not representative of what had happened. Marianne Hirsch observed that photos of Jews taken in the streets of occupied Eastern Europe show no signs of the atrocities that had already been taking place during that time. The archivist was aware of this dilemma, but the museum had to stick to its purpose. Only by being selective and leaving out information, the museum can achieve this and create its own narrative of the past.

Marianne Hirsch's example shows that individual information is excluded from the archive in order to serve the general purpose of the museum.

## The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa

A different example is provided by The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, a commission established after the abolition of the racial segregation called Apartheid in 1996. In public and non-public hearings, both victims and perpetrators of Apartheid are given the chance to tell their own part of the story. How did the victims experience the Apartheid regime, in which way did they suffer? The exceptional aspect of this approach was that not only the victims but also the perpetrators would be heard, although they usually remain silent after such disasters. Here they were invited to speak openly, aiming at a dialogue between victims and perpetrators to help generate understanding for each other's motives. The concept was less about punishment and more about dialogue.

The TRC didn't have a legal mandate. The advantage was that the perpetrators did not have to fear legal consequences, which in turns made it easier for them to speak openly, admit their mistakes or ask for forgiveness. The overall goal of the TRC was the reconciliation of the population, the clarification of past events and a contribution to the creation of a new state where everyone was supposed to be given equal rights. The detailed protocols were made public in an archive accessible to everyone, enabling an active reprocessing of those painful past events.

The commission excluded deliberately symbolic acts of reconciliation, it was rather interested in sincere debate. It supported differing experiences of past events in order to give each individual the chance to come to terms with what they had witnessed during this difficult period.

In contrast to the archive of the Holocaust Museum, the TRC archive is more interested in the different perspectives and experiences of individuals and less in symbolized remembering. The TRC supports an active discussion about individual perceptions of the events during Apartheid, whereas the archive of the Holocaust Museum mainly collects objects as evidence.

In the next chapter, I will focus on the advantage that art can have by bridging the gap between individual and collective memory.

# Memory and Art

Perceptions of individuals are multilayer, whereas collective memory filters these different perceptions in an attempt to create one agreeable version. The Holocaust Memorial Museum's mission is to keep the events of the Holocaust alive in collective memory and to educate future generations about the atrocities committed at that time. Against this backdrop, not every individual's memories are important. The museum is selective in order to shape its identity. However, it gets complicated if the individual can no longer identify with this identity.

The feeling the two people experienced when their personal stories and photos were rejected at the Holocaust archive must have been very confusing. What was so important to them as individuals was of no interest at all to the museum. In this respect, the TRC archive stays an exception, as it collects every kind of information that people are willing to give. In this sense, it differs completely from the traditional idea of the purpose of an archive.

In this chapter, I will refer to two examples, a film and a novel, which both cross the lines separating collective and individual memory.

## Collective memory, individual memory and the artwork

My first example is the film *Das Schreckliche Mädchen* by Michael Verhoeven. In it, Verhoeven illustrates the obfuscation of the role a town played in Nazi Germany. A brave young girl stands up against the collective memory the people of the town have agreed upon.

Afterwards, I will take a look at the novel *The Return of the Caravels* by the Portuguese writer António Lobo Antunes that had caused a scandal when published in the 1980s. The novel has nevertheless helped the coming to terms with the legacy of the Portuguese conquistadors that was at the time still widespread in the collective memory of Portugal.

Both the film and the novel caused a scandal when they were first published.

## Film: Das Schreckliche Mädchen

Michael Verhoeven's satiric film[vi] takes on the insufficient coming to terms with Germany's Nazi past. In a small town in the 1980s, the high school student Sonja wins a national essay contest and gets celebrated for

her achievement by the whole town. A year later, she enters another contest and chooses the subject *My Town During the Third Reich.* The resistance against the Nazi regime was a collectively agreed upon part of the town's history. During interviews with eye witnesses she receives ambiguous information. People stay quiet and advise her not to dig deeper into the subject. This makes her even more curious. Some people, mainly those excluded from the social context of the town, tell her about close-by concentration camps and the involvement of most families in Nazi activities.

Although she starts her research quite naïvely, it becomes even more serious after some documents from the town archive are deliberately denied to her. The girl, who has turned into a mother of two and studies history at the local university, takes legal action against the public archive. The original excitement of the population about Sonja's research turns into hatred and even physical violence.

At the end, she reveals the town's dark secret. Once deeply involved in the Nazi regime, the town is still ruled by the same people mostly. Sonja receives lots of attention nation-wide and internationally by publishing her research. The former supporters of the Nazi regime are forced to leave politics and —all of a sudden— the entire community celebrates Sonja and her brave fight for the truth.

Verhoeven depicts the mind switch of the town population in a satirical way. Instead of looking back at their local history and reappraising the Nazi past, the town population agrees to suppress their own history and invent a charismatic past —the myth of resistance. Just like in Paul Padover's example that was mentioned earlier in this paper, everyone has always been against Nazi politics and no one has ever supported the regime.

The plot of the film is inspired by the more or less biographical story of Anna Rosmus and the city of Passau. After researching the past of her city and its involvement in the Nazi past, she discovered that most people that were still part of the city's authority had been members of the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party).

## Novel: The Return of the Caravels

The Portuguese writer António Lobo Antunes, born in 1942, is a novelist and medical doctor specialized in psychiatry. Lobo Antunes had to serve in

the Portuguese Army and took part in the Portuguese Colonial War from 1961–1974. The Colonial War served as the main inspiration for his novels, one of which is *The Return of the Caravels***vii**.

After the collapse of Portuguese colonial empire in the 1970s, hundreds of thousand *retornados* (returnees) left Africa to head back to their home country of Portugal. Most of them were born in the occupied countries of Angola, Mozambique and Portuguese Guinea and set foot in Portugal for the first time. The colonies, preoccupied with achieving independence, didn't need the former occupiers anymore. Back in Portugal, the retornados discovered a country which had little to do with what they had learned from the collective memory of Portuguese history. With the so-called Carnation Revolution in 1974 in Portugal, the events effectively changed the Portuguese regime from an authoritarian dictatorship to a democracy. This political switch produced enormous changes in the country. For many centuries, the golden age of Portuguese oversea explorations had formed a legend that legitimated the Portuguese presence in Africa. Back in the home country, the former occupiers were now made responsible for all the misery that followed colonialism. They where seen as the ones keeping these legends alive and ruining the country.

In his novel, António Lobo Antunes tells the fate of several individuals returning to Lisbon and trying to access this new, unknown world. Their lives are overshadowed by the reality of the situation in their homeland.

Furthermore, Lobo Antunes names the characters of his story in the 20th century after heroes of the earlier age of discovery. There is, for example, Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese explorer who sailed the first ship from Europe to India. This heroic figure is relocated in 20th century Lisbon, trying to make a living as a shoemaker. All the former heroes are turned into regular people who try to live an ordinary life. Other characters are named after famous missionaries, aristocrats, scholars, poets and writers, explorers and navigators. In modern Portugal, all these figures face rather unpleasant lives —a sharp contrast to the symbolic function their own characters occupied in collective memory. For years, their heroic images had been kept alive by the authorities of the so-called *Estado Novo*, the New State of dictator António de Oliveira Salazar.

Lobo Antunes demolishes the myths and legends that the Portuguese collective memory had kept alive for such a long time. In his novel, the

collectively agreed upon heroic past is dissolved by the reality of the individual's lives. What they experience in Portugal has nothing to do with the myths their identity was originally based on. Lobo Antunes situates the heroic characters in the rough reality of Portuguese life. The story points towards the gap between individual memory and collective memory that was preserved up until the 1980s.

At its publication in 1988, the book caused a scandal, because the Portuguese identity was still constituted by the myths of a time long gone. The book provoked new discussions. The Portuguese society was forced to reassess questions of identity and to find a way to come to terms with its colonial past.

Using the medium of film and literature, Verhoeven and Lobo Antunes managed to bring two important discussions back into the collective awareness.

In the next chapter, I want to explain why artistic work can bridge the gap between individual and collective memory and why this is so important.

# Conclusion

My grandmother and her family were expelled from Silesia (now Poland) after the Second World War. On a winter evening in 1946, they were informed by the authorities that they would have to leave the country. They were given six hours to pack their belongings and were expected to be ready to leave in the early morning. My grandmother was about six years old when all this happened. In the early morning, her family left the country and never came back. All of a sudden, her parents and seven siblings were forced to start a new life in a town far away from their hometown and friends.

The subject had never been a big conversation issue in my family. I first came in contact with my family's history when I realized that my grandmother's accent and our family traditions were different from most people in town.

When I was a child, my mother and my grandmother had a difficult relationship. After watching a movie about the displacement of the German population after the Second World War, my mother told me that she could understand her own mother much better. Even though the movie had not told the exact story of my grandmother's history, she could identify with the characters and their history.

To quote my mother:

> "The little girl in the movie reminded me of my mum. They lost everything, and when they arrived at their new hometown, they got treated very badly by the residents. It must have been a difficult life to start all over again without anything."

To my mother, the fragmented history of her own mother suddenly became a coherent story and the misery of the family became 'real'.

A film tells a coherent story. This is something we can understand because it is linear and makes sense. Historical events, in contrast, don't always make sense. The things that happen are not necessarily comprehensible. In contrast, a film relates a story that the audience can empathize with.

Against this backdrop, the advantage of art is its use of different potentialities. While a historian must stick to facts and verify every detail, artists have the freedom to move from fact to fiction and back in order to make a point or tell a story, without fear of academic consequences. If a

film triggers new discussions about a subject, no one cares about historical facts being altered.

But personal emotional involvement is not the only important thing. Education is at its core. Without knowledge and the ability to think and analyse what is going on, there is no possibility to come up with realistic conclusions. We need a collective remembrance that the individual can relate to, otherwise our culture turns into dead matter. Unfortunately, we will not learn from the past and make the same mistakes over and over again.

Even though my daughter is now in the fourth generation, she should still be aware of what her great-grandparents did during the Nazi regime. I believe it is crucial for every society to feel individually connected to historical events. Our responsibility is to keep these memories alive —not in form of symbolic objects that are not really connected to us, but in active discussion and communication— so that we can always relate them to current affairs in our daily lives.

In our cultural remembrance, we can find lots of examples of memorials that serve the purpose of reminding us of a person or historical event, for example the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. The Holocaust Memorial is an abstraction of the events that it refers to. Without education, one would not know what the monument is trying to symbolize.

To quote a teenager visiting the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin:

*"Now, let's go and do something sensible —like shopping."*

# Colophon

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**Cover image**

From the photo series *Memento, Hötensleben*, 2008 by Ina Marie Schmidt

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