Authenticity and the Once and Future Self

“Dancing Auschwitz,” Collective Memory and New Media

BY

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

People strive to authentically express themselves, but few face a struggle, as contemporary Germans and Jews do, against the ever-present past of the Holocaust. In summer 2010, controversy erupted over “Dancing Auschwitz,” a YouTube video of a Jewish family dancing at various Holocaust remembrance sites. This novel joyful expression defied the often lugubrious traditional narrative of remembrance. Some feared it trivialized one of the world’s greatest tragedies and undermined the cultural awareness sparked by more traditional remembrances. The video, part of a triptych by a Jewish Australian artist and her Holocaust survivor father, raised questions of narrative authority and of the social media generation’s capacity to sustain Holocaust remembrance. More importantly it provides an opportunity to examine remembrance in terms of contemporary identity construction using social media.

Assuming a relationship between language and thought, the exploration of online remembrance and its implications for self construction begins with a brief explication of terms for both the medium—new media, social media and content community—and its participants—Internet users, netizens and the proposed term netmensch. Netmensch (or netmenschen, plural), a portmanteau of Internet and Mensch, conveys the gravitas of humanistic identity while still expressing the context of the online environment in a way that existing terms in the literature cannot.

To establish the relationship between remembrance discourse and self construction, this thesis connects the new media context to the four concepts underlying remembrance culture—identity (a sense of self), memory (a record of self), remembrance (the act of recalling memory), and memorials (the physical and now virtual objects of memory). Drawing on a cultural understanding of communication, buttressed by Germanic studies, this thesis elucidates the
SUMMARY (continued)


Identity, an answer to the driving question, “Who am I?”, is a fluid, social construct formed through social interaction as communities give meaning and significance to certain types of difference. In response to the stigma of a spoiled collective identity, German identity bifurcates into what Moses (2007a) identifies as the Non-German and German German. The evolution and possibilities of a digital self are defined by disembodiment, anonymity and community.

Memory is defined by, shares its primary characteristics with, and is bound by a symbiotic relationship to self (Howe, 2004). Without memory, no self can exist. Through memory people gain a sense of their personal, collective and cultural past and create a meaningful, inner narrative about the self through time. These narratives in turn lead to ritualized action—remembrance—and/or manifest object—memorial. As the most social type of memory, all collective memories are mediated (Kansteiner, 2002) through place or space (e.g., physical architectures or photography and film, respectively).

In order to explore how people make meaning online, particularly by socially constructing remembrance and collective identities, the study looks at a single iteration of the “Dancing Auschwitz” triptych subsequent to the original January 2010 post. Though online remembrance can be defined broadly and include a number of different artifacts, the one here focuses on the most interactive of these remembrance spaces. Focusing on this type of online space provides the greatest opportunity to understand how everyday netmenschen (i.e., Germans, Jews, Poles and others not affiliated with remembrance organizations or causes) partake in
SUMMARY (continued)

remembrance discourse online. Using an interpretive discourse analysis, high on context and
collectivist in form, the author analyzed 2,121 comments across the four YouTube pages.

Despite some concerns for respecting historical identities, netmenschen ultimately
construct and evaluate remembrance through its relationship to and/or representation of
contemporary identities. Unsurprisingly, Holocaust survivors comprise a special class of
participant viewed by most as holy and almost beyond reproach. However, constructing the
boundaries of participation changes dramatically with the post-Holocaust generations. They are
united by their responsibility to remembrance and their lack of first-hand experience. Yet, the
boundaries, both Other and self-imposed, that guide their participation continue to bifurcate
depending on the association of their contemporary collective identity with the historical
identities of Opfer (victim) and Täter (perpetrator). Place becomes an extension of identity as
netmenschen’s definitions of Auschwitz as a grave, a concentration camp or a memorial
impacted their ultimate evaluation of “Dancing Auschwitz.” Furthermore, these definitions of
place change in relation to the person(s) occupying it.

Netmenschen express dissatisfaction with a remembrance culture that does not appear to
evolve but is instead halted in perpetual grief. Traditional remembrance is passive and overly
reliant on well-worn narratives that impede agency and infringe on the self-determination of
identity construction for Opfer and Täter descendents. Germans in particular respond in one of
two unhealthy ways to guilt and shame: pushing those emotions to excess or resisting them
vigorously, thus stoking resentment.

“Dancing Auschwitz” exemplifies the potential for virtual memorials to supplement
traditional remembrances by providing spaces for unhampered self construction. The inheritors
SUMMARY (continued)

of the *Opfer* and *Täter* identities implemented three forms of remediation: role switching, redefinition, and disassociation. Role switching, predominately a *Täter* activity, refers to the process of denying one’s given role and making an argument for one’s membership in the opposite role. Thus, these German Germans seek to repair the collective self and maintain a German identity by nullifying their inherited perpetrator role with narratives of their own *Opfer* status—often as victims of disempowering mediated representations. Redefinition, an avenue for *Opfer*, accepts the identity assignment but seeks to change its meaning. Contemporary Germans, the inheritors of the *Täter* identity, overwhelmingly seek remediation through disassociation—a non-German German approach to identity. Disassociation describes the process of acknowledging a labeled role but defining an entirely new and separate identity instead.

With online Holocaust remembrance still inchoate, “Dancing Auschwitz” reflects the nascent possibilities of remembrance that give way to the post-Holocaust generations striving to express their most authentic selves. The author concludes that virtual memorials can enhance the remembrance experience by cultivating fluid, interactive and creative spaces that encourage high degrees of participation, collaboration and self-expression. Thus, they can open new avenues of communication and expression that allow participants, especially Germans and Jews, to remediate their identities. Virtual memorials may not be able to replace traditional remembrance, but they could be the best resource available to post-Holocaust generations to reclaim identity construction and cultivate their humanness. Despite the obstacles (e.g. destructive identity forces, commercial culture, and temporalities of social media), technology ultimately aids humanity’s deep-seated desire to remember.
I. INTRODUCTION

“We cannot build the future by avenging the past.” T.H. White (1987, p. 631)

A new generation is changing the face of Holocaust remembrance, a morally laden subject that continues to captivate public imagination, spark controversy and generate dialogue, now through social media. In summer 2010, controversy erupted worldwide as a YouTube video, “Dancing Auschwitz,” defied the existing cultural narrative through a novel expression of Holocaust remembrance. Proponents commended the video’s bold interpretation of remembrance, seeing the joyfulness it inspired as a refreshing departure from the customarily lugubrious tones of Holocaust remembrance. Others took offense and accused the filmmaker of trivializing the world’s greatest tragedy and of undermining the cultural awareness achieved by more traditional remembrances. The video, part of a triptych from a Jewish Australian artist and her Holocaust survivor father, raised questions of narrative authority (e.g., to whom does the Holocaust belong?) and of the social media generation’s capacity to sustain Holocaust remembrance.

“Dancing Auschwitz” is situated in a larger discourse of remembrance suspended over the German cultural landscape. If humans are chained to the past like no other species on Earth (Nietzsche, 1876/1995), then Germans are among the most shackled. The present is defined by a “past that [simply] won’t go away” (Langenbacher, 2003, p. 1). No nation in the world faces the level of expectation to confront the recent past as Germany does (Naumann, 2000). The Holocaust continues to impact German public policy (e.g., government funding of Holocaust
remembrance and education\(^1\)) while remaining just as strong in the vein of popular memory—landing on the front pages of major publications, becoming the subject matter of hit television series and turning books into bestsellers (Naumann, 2000). The third millennium has reached the pinnacle of “memorymania” (Welzer, 2007) in what Hirsch (2008) calls an “era of memory.” The Holocaust dramatically shifted our understanding of memory as well as our sensitivity to the ethics of remembrance (Blustein, 2008). The concern is less about historical accuracy and the preservation of official records than about the conservation and perpetuation of memory (Hirsch, 2008; Langenbacher, 2003; Reading, 2003). The rapidly decreasing number of Holocaust survivors (Gubar, 2003; Jeffries, January 27 2010), raises concern regarding the impact on remembrance when first-hand memory no longer exists (Hirsch, 2008; Hoskins, 2003; Landsberg, 1997).

As I argue below, virtual memorials such as “Dancing Auschwitz” potentially fulfill roles left vacant by more traditional forms of remembrance and may open new avenues of communication and expression that allow participants, especially Germans and Jews, to remediate their identities (Gibson & Jones, 2012). Remembrance continues to captivate societies because its core concern is the self, a social construct quintessential to our humanity. To establish the relationship between remembrance discourse and self construction, this thesis relates the new media context to the four concepts underlying remembrance culture—identity (a sense of self), memory (a record of self), remembrance (the act of recalling memory), and memorials (the physical and now virtual objects of memory). The interdisciplinary quality of

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\(^1\) Even as recently as 2008, the German Bundestag doubled its funding for memorials (Neumann, 2011). In addition to funding the building and maintainance of their own museums, archives and other remembrance, Germans donate millions to other nations for their Holocaust remembrance endeavors (e.g., $13 million to Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, DPA 2012, and EUR 60 million to restoring the Auschwitz memorial, DPA 2009).
communication theory and its concern with the formation of self within society is well suited to examining contemporary German remembrance culture’s mediated intercultural identity construction. Drawing on a cultural understanding of communication, buttressed by Germanic studies, this thesis elucidates the symbiotic relationship between remembrance and identity.

Identity is fundamental to the creation and evaluation of remembrance artifacts. In addition to the concern of who may participate, the discourse regarding place illustrates the pervasiveness of identity in constructing the social boundaries of remembrance. Likewise, remembrance is pivotal in the construction of those identities. German and Jewish identities in particular struggle with the identity construction of the inherited *Opfer-Täter* (victim-perpetrator) dichotomy traditional (read: institutional) remembrances promote. “Dancing Auschwitz” exemplifies the potential for virtual memorials to supplement traditional remembrances by providing spaces for unhampered self construction. Through YouTube, Germans and Jews strove to remediate their identities and regain the agency so fundamental to identity construction by taking part in role switching, redefinition and disassociation. These possibilities include concomitant potential obstacles to online remembrance and identity construction, such as destructive identity forces, commercial culture and copyright, and the temporalities of social media.

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2 The relationship between remembrance and identity is a more public, communication-centered extension of the symbiotic relationship Howe (2004) notes between memory and self.
II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. **New Media: Defining Terms**

Understanding the relationship between language and thought, the exploration of online remembrance and its implications for self construction must begin with a brief explication of terms for both the medium—*new media, social media* and *content community*—and its participants—*Internet users, netizens* and the proposed term *netmenschen*.

1. **The dynamism of new media and obfuscation of social media**

*New media* and *social media* labels can be problematic when academics, media and the public fail to define these terms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Lomborg, 2011). *New media* relies on a specified chronology, often only implied. As any media history illustrates, all media were once considered new and novel. For instance, Marvin (1988) uses *new media* in conjunction with the temporal and spatial expansion of the telephone and the electric light. Yet, casting these alongside the newer media of today creates a profound anachronism, especially from a technical standpoint. The technological features and uses embodied by *new media* are in constant motion and development. Furthermore, *new media* may imply significant changes in the type of activities people pursue through media. However, as Rheingold (2000), Marvin (1988) and others find, people ultimately participate in the same core activities with each technological development (*e.g.*, seeking connection, establishing communities, expressing and constructing the self). People do not seek out and create new media and technologies to *change* humanity but to help *amplify* it. For this study, *new media* will refer to a particularly dense network of interactive, instantaneous media with global reach.

*Social media* is perhaps an even more problematic misnomer, as denoting some media as social obfuscates the sociality inherent in all media (Childress, 2012). In doing so, it fails to
accentuate the uniqueness of this media form—the high level of interactivity and creative self-expression. Lomborg (2011) finds that scholars define social media in three ways, here classified as: networked architecture, technological objects, or purpose and activity. Therefore, social media are defined either as interactive, global networks featuring social connectedness and sharing, as mobile and web-based technologies, or as the self-expression of many-to-many. However, none of these can provide a satisfactory definition alone, so scholars like Lomborg (2011) and Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) anchor social media within digital media technologies characterized by interactive content creation and connection or togetherness. These Internet-based applications go beyond the content publishing of Web 1.0 and even the participatory and collaborative content modification of Web 2.0, to enable user-generated content creation and exchange (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Thus social media, in the scope of this endeavor, will refer to a highly participatory community of Web applications seeking to create and share user-generated content.

2. **YouTube and the ‘taxonomy’ of social media**

YouTube represents a particular subcategory of social media that emerges around shared content, known as a content community. The classification systems of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) and Kietzmann et al. (2011) elucidate YouTube’s peculiar combination of social media characteristics. The most popular social media site, Facebook, helps illustrate the similarities and differences of YouTube in the social media landscape.

Kaplan and Haenlein’s (2010) schematic classifies social media based on social presence and/or media richness and self-presentation and/or self-disclosure (See Table 1, adapted from Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social presence concerns the level of intimacy and immediacy a site

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3 Interpersonal communication and broadcast media facilitate one-to-one or one-to-many communication.
encourages. Similarly, media richness refers to the degree of information allowed and its impact on reducing ambiguity and uncertainty regarding community members. They are paired together and judged as low, medium or high in the schematic. Self-presentation and self-disclosure refer to the ability to manage impressions during social interaction and the degree of personal information dissemination, which are measured as high or low.

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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-presentation / Self-disclosure</strong></td>
<td>High</td>
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Both YouTube and Facebook are considered less intimate and immediate than virtual social and gaming worlds but much more than blogs and collaborative projects. However, whereas, Facebook, which develops community around relationships (*i.e.*, who is connected to whom), encourages a high level of self-presentation and self-disclosure through personal profiles, YouTube inspires community building around content. So the distinction between content communities like YouTube and social networking sites like Facebook is one of self-presentation/self-disclosure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).
For Kietzmann et al. (2011), social media are built around seven functions: identity, relationships, reputation, groups, conversations, sharing, and presence (See Table 2).

Table II
Modified Kietzmann et al. (2011) Honeycomb of Social Media’s 7 Functions

Social media with the same primary function are classified in one group and further delineated depending on the other featured functions. For instance, Facebook is classified on the basis of the function of relationships (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The social networking site is founded on the basic premise of connecting people based on shared history (e.g., former classmates), location (e.g., other Chicagoans), relationships (e.g., friend of a friend), or activities (e.g., hiking group
member). Facebook’s key functions, identity and reputation, and even the close auxiliary
functions, presence and conversation, are the result of the site’s aim to establish social
connections centered on personal profiles.

On the other hand, YouTube’s primary function is sharing. As a content community, the
primary function is the exchange and distribution of shared objects, which sustains YouTube’s
other functions: conversations, groups and reputation (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Conversation is a
natural progression of the function of sharing. People write and respond to comments about
shared cultural objects to obtain or display social and cultural clout (i.e., to be in the know).
Groups develop as members recognize commonalities in perspective or admiration for one
another. Reputation is the bridge between conversation and groups. To be heard in social
discourse—even in seemingly entertainment-driven online spaces like YouTube—and be
admitted to group membership, one needs to establish a level of trust. With YouTube, trust is
based on consistency (i.e., within a thread of comments but potentially as compared to the profile
and presence elsewhere on the site) and sound arguments (i.e., constructively contributing to
conversation). Trolls—individuals who maliciously disrupt communities by goading others into
inflammatory responses (Cambria, Chandra, Sharma, & Hussain, 2010)—have poor reputations
because they undermine the potential for a healthy exchange of ideas.

a. **YouTube and identity**

If Kietzmann et al.’s (2011) assessment of YouTube is correct—identity is
not a function of YouTube—why look at YouTube to talk about German and Jewish identity
construction? First, Kietzmann et al. are concerned with the primary functions of each form of
social media; however, this does not mean that other functions do not exist on these sites.
Second, their business and marketing-oriented definition of identity—easily accessible and
classifiable personal data—is far narrower in scope than the humanistic definition this thesis assumes. Identity is part and parcel to self-expression, an activity core to all social media. Furthermore, the concern is collective rather than personal identity. True, YouTube does not emphasize the personal profile and those that do exist are not held to the same level of authenticity as social networking profiles that are linked to offline identities. This thesis does not examine the peculiarities of individuals but rather how collectives construct more general, collective German and Jewish identities through the natural discourse that arises from a Holocaust artifact.

3. **Offenses of Internet users, limits of netizens, and the netmensch**

Though practical and often implemented, herein, Internet users will not identify social media participants. Distinctions between the Internet and the Web aside, the term user unjustly disempowers and obscures the human qualities underpinning online activities. As acceptable as the term may have been for Web 1.0, which supported a unidirectional content producer to consumer relationship, Web 2.0 participants do more than merely use the Internet and its many Web applications. They create and construct (often collaboratively) mediated objects, texts and ultimately selves. Social media are particularly interactive and participatory in this regard, as technology has removed the burdensome fiscal obligations and professional training required even just a decade ago.

Netizen recaptures the agency of online participants, but its political connotation limits its application in a deeper discussion of identity online. Netizen, a portmanteau of Internet and citizen, describes the inhabitants of online communities as full public participants. In terms of identity, the netizen’s political baggage limits the discussion to identity politics—the public activities of a (typically disenfranchised) social group to “assert or reclaim ways of
understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant oppressive characterizations, with
the goal of greater self-determination” in the social institution of government (Heyes, 2012, ¶1).
Though important, the political struggles of identity are the pragmatic manifestation of a much
larger cultural identity struggle. This thesis seeks to explicate the cultural self-perception beneath
the tangible policy matters and negotiation of identity politics. In other words, how do Germans
and Jews think about themselves? How do others think about them? And most importantly, how
do the answers to these questions relate to the dignity of contemporary Germans and Jews as
autonomous human beings? These questions demand a term that evokes identity’s greater import
as it relates to basic human dignity and a greater sense of humanity.

Netmensch (or netmenschen, plural), a portmanteau of Internet and Mensch, captures the
individual’s experience of identity construction online in a way that the existing terms in the
literature cannot. Mensch, the German word for “human being,” is related to the Yiddish
מנסך or mensh and has entered the American vernacular to indicate a good person. The gender-neutral
term is deeply tied to human dignity (Pies, 2011). Among its characteristics, of particular
relevance here is the “respect of self and others” (Pies, 2011, vii), the foundation of constructive
identity formation. Unlike the politically focused citizen, Mensch captures the deeper humanity
of people online, making their relationship to the peculiarly human activity of identity
construction easier to establish. The terms social and media both fail to capture the online aspect
as they can refer to any number of experiences with identity construction; every form of self-
expression, the foundation of identity, is both social and mediated. The term Web evokes such a
striking visual that it encourages more emphasis on the ties among individuals than on the
individuals themselves. Thus, netmenschen conveys the gravitas of humanistic identity while still
expressing the context of the online environment.
B. **Identity**

To explore remembrance’s ability to fundamentally shape identity, a working definition of self is needed. Identity is only one part of self; however, self, an object of reflexive action, and identity, the most visible and outward display of self, are often used interchangeably (Addis & Tippett, 2004) and will be used as such here. Identity is *an* answer to the driving question, “Who am I?”, a relational question that guides our social experience (Goffman, 1963) and is perpetually bound to human dignity (Arendt, 1958). Identity has considerable impact on our ability to partake in community, the means by which we fulfill our humanity (Phillips & Taylor, 2009). It is an intricate expression of our self-recognition (*i.e.*, who we were, believe ourselves to be, and wish to become) as well as the recognition of the Other (*i.e.*, who others believe us to be) (Calhoun, 1994). As the constructionist position posits, the self is a fluid, social construct formed through social interaction as communities give meaning and significance to certain types of difference.4 This section will define the self as a social construct, identify the two identities that developed in response to the stigma of a spoiled German identity—part of a historical struggle with collective self—and explore the evolution and possibilities of a digital self—defined by disembodiment, anonymity and community.

1. **The self as social construct**

The self is social and not predetermined by one’s biological makeup; therefore we can only answer who we are by understanding who others are. As Peter Redman (in du Gay, Evans, & Redman, 2001) contends, there is no truly pre-social self as identities are “constituted or ‘performatively’ enacted in and through the subject positions made available in language and

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4 Some scholars, such as Hall (1996), argue that identity does not best capture the fluidity of a self “always ‘in process’,” (p. 2) and favor the term *identification*. For the purposes of this thesis, a distinction will not be made—both identity and identification should be considered equally dynamic.
wider cultural codes” (p. 10). Though there are certain bodily limitations, identity is considered its own entity separate from the corporeal form (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). Neither is identity to be equated to personality, which is fairly fixed. Identity is based on a degree of human agency; we actively choose identity constructions—based on the response of the Other—in a way that we cannot choose our personalities (Woodward, 2000). Berger and Luckmann (1966) address certain biological or “organismic” (p. 180) limitations to this agency arguing, “man’s animality is transformed in socialization, but it is not abolished” (p. 180); the social possibilities are limited in some ways by the body (e.g., identities based on race, sex, etc.). Therefore the body cannot be altogether ignored, particularly when speaking of national identities, which have a long history of essentialist rhetoric (Calhoun, 1994) (e.g., Nazis purporting a “pure” Aryan race). Yet, the contemporary German body, marked by multiculturalism, fervently resists such classification. Unlike the essentialist position which places biology at the center of the existence and appearance of self (Grossberg, Wartella, Whitney & Wise, 2006; Calhoun, 1994), this thesis considers it only in addition to a host of social and cultural forces acting on the self.

a. **Symbolic**

The self is symbolic and therefore a product of language. We construct the self by interpreting and categorizing the symbols of others and conveying our own symbols within or outside the interpreted categories through self-expression. Symbolic interactionism is this uniquely human process of interpreting and acting on the basis of symbols. Social interactions are more than a mere backdrop of expression; they are the basis for human conduct and by extension self. It has three premises: (1) action is based on meanings we assign; (2) meaning is constructed during social interaction; (3) humans subject meaning to an interpretive process (Blumer, 1969). As a product of symbolic interactionism, identity is a social construct
rather than a concept driven by some intrinsic makeup or psychological peculiarities of a person (Blumer, 1969), and it is the social aspect of identity formation that keeps the self fluid and subject to change based on social experiences and interactions.

b. **Reflexive**

The self is reflexive and can only be known in its object form, a quality that enables morality. Reflexivity, a “language of inwardness” (p. 130), is the only way we can even think of ourselves as selves (Taylor, 1992). Mead (1934) explores this reflexive character through the division of the self into the uncommunicated *I*, an unpredictable aspect of self with the agency to have a unique response, and the *me*, an aspect of self that embodies the conventions and/or expectations of the generalized Other. The Other therefore is not an entity that exists exclusively outside the self; it becomes an aspect of self and the only means through which we can even perceive the self. The *I* is unpredictable for it refers to the aspect of self that is not yet known because it has not been communicated. Once spoken or enacted, the *I* becomes the *me*. We can never know the self as subject; the self can only be known as object. Therefore, the *I* (*i.e.*, the self as subject) can only be known as a memory of a past self (Mead, 1934). Taylor (1992) further contends that an awareness of self enables us to make moral judgments and consider the human soul.

c. **A product of communication**

Self grows from our relationships with others as we recognize—through communication—our sameness and difference (Mead, 1934; Cooley, 1902; Elliott, 2008; du Gay et al., 2001; Woodward, 2000). As Hannah Arendt (1958) posits, equality and distinction, which are constructed through action and speech, are foundational to human plurality—“the
paradoxical plurality of unique beings” (p. 176). Both equality and distinction are necessary for speech and action because

If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. Signs and sounds to communicate immediate, identical needs and wants would be enough. (Arendt, 1958, pp. 175-6)

Arendt (1958) carefully delineates distinctness and otherness. Any and all objects including the inorganic can possess otherness. Otherness, by her definition, refers to the different characteristics held by objects as a result of multiplicity. Distinctness, variation between specimens of the same species, is unique to organic life. And of all the organic life, humans remain the only organisms with the ability to distinguish—to communicate distinctness through speech and action (Arendt, 1958). The ability to communicate ourselves rather than “merely something—thirst or hunger, affection or hostility or fear” is distinctly human (Arendt, 1958, p. 176). It is through communication, particularly that of self, that human distinctness becomes uniqueness and identity is born (Arendt, 1958). Without the significant symbols inherent in human communication there can be no self. Communication—action or speech—is the only way we become objects to ourselves (Arendt, 1958; Mead, 1934). This activity requires initiative, however, and it is “an initiative from which no human being can refrain and still be human” (Arendt, 1958, p. 176). Therefore communication accounts for the very existence of self and has a profound impact on the development and experience of it.

2. **Collective self and the nation**

If the self is the me that develops from our interaction with the Other, collective self is the we. Collective self, the object of reflexive action for a group of people, refers to the bonds we develop with those who identify as we do. An individual may be connected to a
number of collective selves based on national or regional ties, religion, racial or ethnic community, subculture, political or sexual orientation, or profession among others. These collectives mix with one another and the characteristics considered unique to the individual (e.g., memory/experience) to entail a person’s self.

The existence of individual and collective identities is universal, but the manner in which they interact with one another and the role they are given can differ significantly from one society to the next (Calhoun, 1994; Wagar & Cohen, 2003). The most basic collective is that of the nation-state, which Anderson (2006) defines as “an imagined political community” (p. 6) that engenders the “deep, horizontal comradeship” (p. 7) in even the most inequitable and exploitive nations. The people of a nation cannot directly experience one another and therefore must rely on imagined—read: socially constructed—links to solidify their bond as members of a given nation-state (Anderson, 2006). These imagined links are dialectical (i.e., they depend on a contrasting Other to define the collective) and are forged through shared events and media (White, 1997).

a. **The perpetual German struggle**

The German people, or perhaps more accurately the German peoples, were slow to establish a cohesive national identity and they continue to struggle in its maintenance. Throughout their history, Germans strained to find the communion necessary to solidify a German nation, and the epochs that succeeded in generating a budding nationalism were swept away by history or mired by destructive racial politics. Compared to other Western nations, Germany was late to establish itself as a nation. Germans did not abandon their fiefdoms and establish a German state until 1871. Even the new world had established the United States by 1776. Nationalism, being one of the foremost means of building a nation (Anderson, 2006), was first wielded by an imperial Germany led by Kaiser Wilhelm I. Post 1945 Germans, however,
were catapulted back to a pre-1871 era, as they experienced a “total bankruptcy of German nationhood” (Confino, 2006, p. 79). Through denazification, Allied occupation, and the division of East and West, a unified German people seemed to disappear. After the war, Germany became the “unfortunate fatherland” because the Nazis had tainted if not obliterated German national identity (Confino, 2006, p. 84). German identity had moved from a fusion with nationalism in imperial Germany, to racial politics in Nazi Germany, to socialism in East Germany and “dreams of victimhood, lost territories and local democratic renewal” in West Germany (Confino, 2006, p. 114).

*Heimat* became the idea to which Germans could retreat to escape these ideological shifts; it was the one constant source of Germanness not tied to a particular political epoch. Though often simply translated as “homeland,” *Heimat* is a dense and culturally rich term in German society describing a host of feelings more than a geographic place (see Morley & Robins, 1995). It became a way of turning back the clock and creating a pre-Nazi Germany in the minds of post-Nazi Germans (Confino, 2006). Conceptually, *Heimat* “was a historical mentality that gave Germans a cultural backbone, an identity through time, regarding modern changes in polity and society” (Confino, 2006, p. 114).

1) **Historical divisions**

Thus far I have used Germans to describe the people of Germany; however, the term falsely assumes a united and ideologically homogeneous population. Although Germany has experienced an increase in national pride in recent years, the expression of this pride is still largely confined to sport, specifically soccer. Soccer provided a space and the means to unify Germans and reconstruct a national identity separate from Germany’s sordid historical legacy (Tomlinson & Young, 2006). However, outside the bounds of sport, few spaces and
situations remain where Germans can display national pride. Generally speaking, Germans continue to identify more strongly with their local region than to a national Germanness. For instance, contemporary Germans still feel the pull of East and West even two decades after reunification (Dalton & Weldon, 2010; Mushaben, 2010). The different cultural experiences of living in a socialist, Soviet-inspired Germany versus a capitalistic Germany result in foundational distinctions that nuance the overall remembrance experience of contemporary Germans on both sides.

2) **Growing multiculturalism**

Like many world powers, Germany’s story is also not complete without consideration for migrant and immigrant populations. Despite recent immigration restrictions (Evans, 2010), Germany experienced a dramatic flux of immigration from 1989 to 2000. In part due to a historically permissive immigration policy, Germany hosted the third-highest number of international migrants worldwide in 2006 (United Nations Population Fund, 2006). At 16 million, persons with a *Migrationshintergrund* (migrant background) account for 19.5 percent of Germany’s total population (81.7 million), and of these, Turks account for the largest majority at 18.5 percent (Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland, 2012). With the labor shortage of the 1950s, Germany actively recruited Southern Europeans (primarily Turks) to join the German workforce through the guest worker program of the 1960s. After 50 years, these workers built a permanent life in Germany with the second and third generations being born and raised in Germany. On the one hand, these immigrants appear at an advantage, as they are able to lay claim to Germanness through their hyphen identities without inheriting the cultural baggage (Moses, 2007b). Yet, they experience their own unique form of national identity crisis, as the

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5 These figures include all individuals who have migrated to Germany as well as individuals who were born in Germany and have at least one immigrant parent.
country of their family’s birth, Turkey, disowns them through the *Almancilar* (“Germaners”) label, while their country of birth, Germany, often labels them *Migranten* (migrants)—not even *Immigranten* (immigrants), which would imply the right to stay—or *ausländische Mitbürger* (foreign citizens) (White, 1997). Such a large number of bicultural Germans laying claim to different histories and traditions, further complicates a discussion of German identity, particularly in reference to the Holocaust.

b. **Stigma and the spoiled identity**

Some individuals and groups bear spoiled identities—definitions of self that defy cultural norms thereby thwarting full social recognition and inclusion. What constitutes a spoiled identity depends on the cultural system, but generally, these identities occur when value systems clash (*e.g.*, different definitions of “rightness”). As Arendt (1958, p. 184) writes, “nobody is the [sole] author or producer of his own life story.” The way we define ourselves and the social assignment given to us by others do not always correspond (Woodward, 2000)—often negatively—and when that happens we are pressured to change our identity or experience social consequences. Goffman (1963) discusses stigma as “an undesired differentness” (p. 5). The Greek term *stigma* refers to strangeness, inferiority or defectiveness of the signifier’s moral status as observed on the body, but stigma has increasingly become a cultural rather than physically grounded concept (Goffman, 1963). Goffman (1963) outlines three types of stigma: 1) corporeal revulsion, 2) deficiency of character, and 3) “tribal stigma of race, nation and religion” (p. 4), the German case coinciding with the latter type. Stigma encourages social discrimination that reduces both current quality of life and future opportunities and stifles the individual or group’s self-determination. Beyond its grossly negative forms, this discrimination often manifests itself as indifference—a lack of acknowledgment that belies basic human dignity and
transforms one’s status to that of non-person. Such individuals face the burden of proving their humanity to so-called normals. Recognizing their own sordidness, the stigmatized often experience shame for their defiling attributes while their outward response oscillates between audacity and timidness (Goffman, 1963).

1) A spoiled German identity

The German story cannot be told without a chapter on stigma. Germans continue to be marked by the “pollution and stigmatization of the collective self” for which wartime Germans are to blame (Moses, 2007a, p. 57). Because contemporary Germans have inherited the Holocaust, the nationalism common to many other nations has been demonized in the German context. Signs of national pride are immediately compared to the past perversions with little expectation that German nationalism could lead to anything but militarism, extremism and ethnocentrism (Burbank, 2003). The world scrutinizes German remembrance (e.g., requiring contrition, guilt and the absence of self-pity) as well as political and cultural stances regarding minorities (Moses, 2007b). Like the individual, the nation is not sole author of its identity; Germans need the international community to affirm their German identity (Moses, 2007b).

German stigma is cultural; awareness of the stigma arises through cultural markers outside the body (e.g., language, dress, behaviors, etc.), the “evidentness” (Goffman, 1963) or visibility of which vary significantly. Despite the Nazis’ perversion of eugenics, which argued for a unique and distinguishable German race, Germans are not readily distinguishable from a number of other nationalities by physical characteristics alone. The more evident a stigmatized identity is, the more cumulative its overall impact on the individual (Goffman, 1963). Therefore, managing the revelation of their failing would theoretically allow Germans to experience
normalcy until their stigmatized identity can no longer be contained. Passing is the term used to refer to this “management of undisclosed discrediting information about self” (Goffman, 1963, p. 42). Yet, passing does not appear to offer a viable refuge for Germans in their own culture where Germanness is assumed.

Stakes are high because the moral element of stigma is amplified in the German case. Spoiled identities are moral concerns—designating an identity as less than is based on a system of ethics. German identities are linked to the secular icons of evil for our modern world. Stigma not only impacts the individual’s self image, but that broken identity reverberates through the community shaping both its collective self and the cultural and political interactions it may have with other peoples and nations. A pervasive stigma that seeps into multiple levels of the lived experience may lead to psychological dissonance—the individual’s understanding of herself as moral and socially respected conflicts with her membership in a stigmatized group (Moses, 2007b). Because of the severe consequences on individual and collective identity, stigma and its assignment deserve careful consideration.

Divisions of self-definition emerged after WWII further complicating the development of a cohesive national identity. Negativa symbiosis, a term coined by Hannah Arendt and expanded by Dan Diner (2003), refers to the post-Holocaust relationship of Germans and Jews, which divided subsequent generations by their lineage. As Arendt argues (in Diner, 2003, original source: 1946 letter to Karl Jaspers), Nazi crimes against humanity reached immeasurable proportions rendering itself unpunishable, no amount of adjudication would right the wrong committed, and so German society (pushed by international communities) split into the Opfer

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6 In this context, Jews refers specifically to Jews in German society. Not referring to them as German-Jews is itself a marker of the deep fissure. Even for later generations the Jewish identity is prime, especially in reference to the Holocaust (Moses, 2007b). For more on the complex identity of German-Jews please see Mendes-Flohr (1999).
(victim) and Täter (perpetrator), defined by forms of Unschuld (innocence) and Schuld (guilt) so pure and absolute that they scarcely exist in humanity. Yet, despite these polarizing positions, which impeded an open dialogue, Jewish and German identities were inextricably bound to one another by the shared experience of having identities forever transformed by the Holocaust—neither self could be defined without the Holocaust. Though scholars like Morris and Zipes (2002) argue that negative symbiosis no longer describes the German-Jewish relationship, many generational and regional divisions abound within the category of non-Jewish Germans. Whereas older Germans of the former East are less likely to disidentify as German and more likely to experience pride, younger West Germans experience greater shame and are more likely to disidentify as German, which indicates a trend toward cynicism in regard to national identity (Burbank, 2003).

2) **Splitting ways: Non-German and German Germans**

Unable to withstand the weight of such stigma, Germans responded in one of two ways. Either they abandoned the present identity for a new one, or they developed evasive means enabling the identity to survive. Moses (2007a) later identified these as the non-German German and German German respectively. A failure to respond leaves the stigma to bear down on the backs of a German collective thereby leaving a national identity as a constant source of guilt and shame (Burbank, 2003).

The non-German German identity, based on Isaac Deutscher’s non-Jewish Jew, disavows a national collective self (denouncing such a self claimed by other Germans) and works to forge a new collective identity. However, Germans cannot sever their connection to the past entirely; the immensity of the Holocaust is too dark and deeply ingrained (Moses, 2007a). Instead, the non-German German distinguishes itself by bringing the past to the center of identity
construction to “[provoke] critical reflection and dissolution of the national we” (Moses, 2007a, p. 65), which creates an “anamnestic memory culture” (Moses, 2007a, p. 81). Remembrance culture works as a constant stream of antibodies simply maintaining the level needed to equalize the toxins of Germany’s past. They convey a different German self by confronting and condemning the actions of past Germans.

Non-German Germans should not be conflated with anti-Germans, which loathe any aspect of German culture or nationhood. Instead, the non-German German continues the general self-antipathy that has persisted in German culture for over a thousand years (Moses, 2007a). Non-German Germans favor such strategies as abandoning a national identity for a regional, European or global identity or simply “dismiss[ing] patriotism as inherently meaningless, absurd, or even inappropriate” (Burbank, 2003, p. 9). Erecting memorials signaled the international community that a new German community was being forged, one capable (and willing) to cleanse itself of sin (Moses, 2007b). Moses (2007b, p. 156) goes so far as to argue that ritualizing the memory of Holocaust victims works as a stigmata and in turn “serves as a permanent resource for collective regeneration.”

The German German seeks more than an identity that appears to be little more than a “NON-IDENTITY” (Hajo Funke & Dietrich Neuhaus in Moses, 2007a, p. 69, emphasis in original). Instead of forging a separate identity, the German German seeks to repair the collective self primarily through strategies that make the past bearable. German Germans denounce those (i.e., non-German Germans) who continuously bring the past to the foreground. They argue twelve years of Nazi rule cannot or should not erase the thousand years of German history that came before it (e.g., adhere strongly to Heimat), and they embrace causation arguments, which inevitably shift responsibility from the German population to that of charismatic individuals or
societal forces (Moses, 2007a). They resolve the psychological dissonance of the post-war German (the result of a belief in self as moral and socially respected and group as stigmatized and culpable) by “engaging in perpetual strategies of denationalizing Nazism and the Holocaust” (Moses, 2007a, p. 58). German Germans flip the non-German German’s denationalizing strategy. Whereas the non-German German denationalizes the collective self by adopting a European identity and reinforces the national ties to the Holocaust, the German German denationalizes the crimes against humanity by drawing a distinction between Nazis and Germans (i.e., Germans should not be equated to Nazis and vice versa) while reinforcing the nationality of the collective self. The German German leads to an “amnesiac memory culture” which enables them to defend their national identity rather than abandon it (Moses, 2007a, p. 81). German Germans either reject the stereotypes outright or they reduce the scope of Germanness and take pride only in specified aspects of their cultural heritage (Burbank, 2003).

c. **Media and the collective self**

Media play a vital role in identity construction. Identities are products of culture and media, one of humankind’s most symbolic enterprises, construct and reflect that culture. Through media, we observe the similarity and difference associated with various identity portrayals. For those who live in fairly homogeneous communities, media are often the primary resource in understanding racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, religious or national others. Scholars such as Stuart Hall (1997) are concerned with mediated representation because of media’s ability to both represent and act as Other across space and through time. These images not only travel the globe, they pass from generation to generation. The symbolic endeavor of mediated representation is a negotiation of identity; it is through them that we present ourselves to ourselves as well as to the Other (see Mead, 1934).
However, issues of authenticity arise when the people whom it represents do not lead those negotiations.\(^7\) Immediately after the war, Allied forces took control of media (\textit{i.e.}, production, distribution and reception) and pummeled domestic production with restrictions through reeducation and denazification policies (Scharf, 2008). A flood of American, British, French and Soviet media content purporting “acceptable national imaginings and practices” (Scharf, 2008, p. 16) filled the void left by a hampered domestic media. Hollywood acquired much of the monopoly of these narratives and continued to drown out German (and Jewish) voices in the negotiation of post World War II identities. As Wenders (2004) argues, to some degree post-war Germans did not want to take part in these narratives and willingly embraced foreign media to escape their own narratives. After experiencing the gross abuse and bastardization of image and language in the hands of the Nazis, Germans had lost all confidence and trust in their own narratives (Wenders, 2004).

Yet, when those representations become little more than problematic perpetuations of stereotypes, instead of working as tools to help audiences understand different subject positions, they add to the group’s struggles for social equality (Grossberg et al., 2006). What it meant to be German was being negotiated without Germans and Germans were imparted with identities that did not fit their truth(s). Even today, with a viable German film industry, German representations of Germans can scarcely compete with the number and reach of Hollywood’s overwhelmingly negative representations.

Germans typically fall into three stereotypes: the foolishly inept and portly Prussian, the monomaniacal mad scientist, or the seductive but viciously brutal Nazi (Crawford & Martel, \(^7\) Authenticity refers to how genuine the representation feels to one who holds the identity in question. It should not be confused with issues of accuracy, which demand an essentialist view of identity. There can be no right answer if identities are relational and always in process.)
1997). Germans as Nazis has been the dominating stereotype since the first Nazi representation in Charlie Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator* (1940). The tone paired with each representation is largely dependent on the political and social relations of the time. For instance, the 1950s and 1960s largely avoided brutalized depictions of Nazis because of the German role in the Cold War, so American entertainers constructed a Nazi image that was the butt of every joke but largely harmless (*e.g.*, *Hogan’s Heroes*, 1965-1971 and *The Producers*, 1968). These stand in contrast to depictions before this period (*e.g.*, *Casablanca*, 1942). However, the 1970s and 1980s marked a true transformation of the Nazi fool to the dehumanized Nazi embodying pure evil (*e.g.*, *The Boys of Brazil*, 1978, *Marathon Man*, 1976, and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, 1981). In some cases, a clear Nazi link was not necessary as German portrayals outside the WWII context have been austere, severe and taciturn; German language and culture were enough to lead to a character’s villain status in action-dramas (*e.g.*, *Die Hard*, 1988, *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*, 2004) to comedies (*e.g.*, *Austin Powers*, 1997, 1999, 2002). Portrayals of good Germans were not completely absent, but good Germans were always paired with bad Germans (Crawford & Martel, 1997)—an ironic reflection of living and breathing Germans’ struggle to exist outside the shadow of the Nazis and neo-Nazis factions. Average Germans may rebel against these identifications through alternative readings; however, their opportunity to play a role in constituting these mediated identities, especially on the level and scope of media conglomerates, are limited at best.

Even after regaining some narrative ownership, particularly in the way of German film, Germans continue to be inundated by the Nazi image in foreign and domestic media. Media reinforce the non-German German identity through the manner and level at which they produce representations of the Holocaust (Walser in Moses, 2007). Media continually revisit and process
the Nazis and their crimes through journalism, mini-series, film and hundreds of memorials across the country. In a sense, media perpetuate the reeducation and denazification endeavors of the Allies in the time of occupied Germany—the goal of which was to purge all signs of Nazi ideology and militarism more generally. The non-German German continually picks at the past in a manner that demands the formation of a new identity, but one built around the constant reminder of what not to be. Some level of national identity struggle is to be expected of any country on the losing side of a war; however, Walser argues (in Moses, 2007a, original source: “Unser Auschwitz”) that the punishment has gone beyond the aim of resocialization and has entered the realm of perpetual contrition, which places an unfair burden of shame and guilt on the shoulders of contemporary Germans.

3. **Digital self: The self online**

What happens to the self—its construction and negotiation—when it develops in the recesses of online spaces? Some may argue the development of terms like “digital self” (Zhao, 2005) or “cyberself” (Robinson, 2007) imply a sufficiently different process of self construction to warrant a new concept; however, these terms should be read as a reflection of a unique context. Some scholars argue the digital self is different. Without the unifying mechanism of the physical body and a link to the body via name, people would form and negotiate multiple, often contradictory, selves (Turkle, 1995). However, as I will argue, these early arguments put too much emphasis on the role of the body and not enough on humanity’s character. The digital self is “formed and negotiated in the same manner as the offline self” (Robinson, 2007, p. 94; Kennedy, 2006). In fact, much of what we do online is not so different from what we do offline (Rheingold, 1993/2000). Three characteristics were supposed to set online social interaction apart: disembodiment, anonymity, and community.
a. **Disembodiment**

Disembodiment describes the removal or abstraction of a corporeal presence. Hopes and fears regarding technological disembodiment are not new. Media increasingly became the means of traversing space in a way that neither man nor animal could; however, doing so removed the corporeality known within the bounds of physical place. Hopes arose that these disembodied online spaces would reduce the personal risk while increasing the freedom to develop the self online and participate in an expanding community. Yet, fears also developed that without the body, the self, understood to be a unitary and cohesive construct, would cease to exist, and fractured, multiplicitous selves would abound. In addition to performance of self, the concern is how people can construct a self when they interact with bodiless others, a view that (over)emphasizes nonverbals and tone of the Other.

1) **Media and the body**

In the pursuit to focus on the medium and its impact on social life rather than its content, McLuhan (1994) argues media are extensions of our bodies in space. That he needs to make this point supports the perceived disconnect between media and the body. Because of the physical reality of the body, which is unique to only one specified and singular location in the world at any given time—known as place—the body cannot enter space—an ethereal area that exists everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. In removing the body’s physicality, media act as the body’s gateway to space. For instance, the train overcame place in transporting bodies but it also accelerated and extended man’s ability to traverse space by carrying works of the body (e.g., letters connected to the human hand). The telegraph further removed the markers of physicality as messages traveled via Morse code. The telephone, an extension of the ear, moved back to the body in that it transported voice instead of coded text.
Similarly, film and television, both extensions of the eye and ear, are centered around the portrayal of the body. The Internet in its early days was “no more than an instantaneous telegraph with a prodigious memory” (Marvin, 1988, p. 3), but the Web and the netmenschen who build online communities have ways of embodying these disembodied spaces.

2) **A return of the body**

Netmenschen continue to find ways to embody online spaces. Because of the content-centric structure of the site and the use of anonymous screen names, few netmenschen have portrait profile pictures, but some do post videos of themselves on the site. This type of content brings the body back to online spaces by putting the referent to the corporeal form at the forefront of the YouTube profile and/or channel. Other referents may be less obvious. For instance, in many ways, netmenschen embody online spaces through textual references to corporeality (e.g., text-speak and emoticons). While texting codes (e.g., ROFL for “rolling on the floor laughing”) are able to allude to bodily images in word, emoticons (e.g., 😊) allude to the body through simplified keystroke images. Even without these more overt referents to our corporeal existence, people have a history of changing a new medium to conform to their existing reality as much as they appear to be changed by it (e.g., Marvin, 1988). As with any other media, netmenschen create bodies for their disembodied online compatriots in much the same way as people imagined a body for the person on the other end of the telephone or a body for the voice on the radio. Because of the emphasis placed on traversing space, media have thus far entailed some form of disembodiment, which have left people interpersonally unsatisfied with the new medium until they develop techniques to re-envision their media experience to resemble the familiar embodied experience of their offline reality.
3) **The body as unitary self?**

As previously argued, the body is not the self, but the self is within the body and many scholars view the body as the unifying mechanism of self. The self, as an emotional or cognitive entity of the mind, may be impacted by biology because of its influence on certain social interactions (*e.g.*, a deaf individual is shaped by a different way of interacting with others), but the self is not determined by it. Regarding the self as anti-essentialist opens the possibilities for self construction, including the creation of multiple identities, which Goffman (1959) argues we exercise based on different social situations. Even so, the number of identities possible is considered limited by the body. In other words, the body acts as “a stabilizing anchor” (Donath, 1999, p. 27). A person’s identity cannot be so dissonant from one another that they cannot exist side by side in a single body, in which the body is understood as an access point to self.

If the body is left behind, as it is in online interaction, Turkle (1995) and others argue there is little to demand a cohesive identity and multiplicity—the formation and maintenance of multiple, often conflicting online identities—ensues. However, this argument does not explain the tendency of *netmensch*en to embody these online spaces. That this occurs at all may indicate that the body is seen less as a suffocating limitation—otherwise we would gladly leave it behind—and more as a tangible structure for an underlying human desire to form and maintain a unitary self. As Donath (1999) argues, the body behind the keyboard does not become irrelevant just because it is not seen. Though the literature puts great emphasis on Turkle’s (1995) notion of a social laboratory in which people experiment with identity positions and cycle through multiple selves, these multiple online selves share the same point of origin—a single individual who must reconcile those online selves for himself (Donath, 1999). The question is not what is
technologically possible, but what humanity wishes to build for itself. The existence and development of a cohesive self is not a physical limitation but a need for consistency, a sign of the humanity integral to everything we do online or off. Perhaps experimentation and identity play were the primary online activities early on; but, as the technology grew, people began forming and maintaining the digital self in much the same way, namely with an overall consistency and highlighting different aspects of self (*i.e.*, identities) for different social situations.

If the goals of self remain the same when the *netmensch* is bodiless, self construction may not be markedly different with a bodiless Other either. The absence of the Other’s body was considered a major drawback in terms of the ability to “correctly” read the other. Without nonverbals to aid interpretation, how “accurate” can one’s assessment of the other’s response be? This however is the wrong question. As Zhao (2005) argues, online or off, constructing the self is not about what others actually think; it is about what we believe they think. Given the subjectivity of this task, it is of little relevance that one does not have a body upon which to build one’s interpretation of the generalized Other, because it is not what others believe that impacts us but our perception of what they believe.

b. **Anonymity**

Anonymity, literally being without name, was long believed to be a defining characteristic of online communication. In a space already without bodies, names were assumed to be the last means by which to trace words and actions back to an offline person. As Nissenbaum (1999, p. 142) argues, the “value of anonymity lies not in the capacity to be unnamed, but in the possibility of acting or participating while remaining out of reach, remaining unreachable.” Great hopes were laid on the ability to occupy online spaces anonymously.
Anonymity was supposed to empower and encourage expression (Nissenbaum, 1999; Kennedy, 2006; Turkle, 1995). Through anonymity, the stigmatized and disenfranchised could avoid the discrimination and power struggle of their offline lives and become engaged citizens and whole beings in these bodiless and nameless online spaces. In the context of Holocaust remembrance, Germans and non-Germans alike would be able to express feelings regarding Holocaust remembrance that diverge from the culturally constructed plane of acceptable emotions and responses. In other words, without the risk and accountability of being tied to a physical body, it was assumed that online communication allowed for more honesty. As technology advances, anonymity has become little more than a technical illusion. However, it continues to be a socially constructed reality for many netmenschen on sites like YouTube.

1) Technical illusion, socially constructed reality

In the early days of the Internet (e.g., MUDs and Usenet), anonymity meant an individual could not be identified. However, anonymity failed to fulfill this expectation. Whereas a name was vital for identification for much of human history, technology has reached a point where a person’s name is no longer necessary for identification. Extensive data profiles, compiled through any number of data mining techniques, can reveal far more than a name ever could. When one is able to “gain access to a person through bits, or constellations of bits, of information,” it is no longer the name that needs protection but the seemingly extraneous bits of information (Nissenbaum, 1999, p. 142). Though technically possible to identify someone through bits of information, most netmenschen either do not have the technical proficiency or do not take the time to do so among themselves. Therefore, anonymity continues to be a socially constructed reality for most users, particularly on a site such as YouTube where despite the
recent integration with a larger Google profile still maintains the perception of cover provided by screen names.  

c. **Community**

The digital self depends just as much on the presence and feedback of an Other as the offline self; therefore talking about the digital self necessitates discussion of online communities. Online communication reinspired the desires and hopes of building—to borrow Dewey’s (1927) phrase—that “Great Community,” a deeper, more meaningful connection of sharedness than the mere aggregation and association of human life. The perceived advantages of disembodiment and anonymity were ultimately supposed to lead to inclusive, non-judgmental and little-d democratic online communities. Without an identifiable body—neither for self nor Other—would judgment hold its meaning and social consequence? Hopes abounded that the qualities of fraternity, liberty and equality in Dewey’s offline great community could be realized in the online spaces where bodies, names and social constraints could be left behind. Yet, as even Dewey yields, the great community is an ideal; no lived reality can realize it to its fullest extent. Online communities were no more able to purge the harsh incivilities of human interaction than the offline communities that came before.

1) **Judgment**

Judgment, the aim of which is to exclude, is a perversity of community, a concept built on social bonds, but communities cannot exist without judgment. In demarcating the inclusion lines of a social group, it necessarily entails exclusion lines. Just as with offline communities, *netmenschen* need to adhere to agreed parameters of social interaction.

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8 With Google’s June 2012 campaign, a move toward real names appears imminent for all but commercially oriented accounts.

9 In much the same way as the creation of a self requires the creation of an Other.
in order to obtain and maintain membership and good standing in a community (Robinson, 2007). Communities are ultimately built on a foundation of trust and shared motivations and core beliefs, so the more desired contributions made to the community the stronger one’s reputation and the more secure one’s continued participation (Donath, 1999). In the case of YouTube, the social parameters are part of the community guidelines established by the site (e.g., stances against hate speech and obscenities etc.); however, ultimately enforcing them lies on the shoulders of community members. Whether through flagging, the thumbs down control, or comments, YouTube netmenschen continuously make judgments and draw the lines of what is appropriate for their community (for either YouTube as a whole or for their subcommunity—based on content genre—specifically).

2) **Trolling ‘energy creatures’**

Some individuals mimic the patterns of social interaction in an online community in order to gain membership and disrupt community building from the inside (Dahlberg, 2001). Rheingold (1993/2000) calls such individuals “energy creatures” but they are typically known as Internet trolls, first defined in the academic setting by Donath (1999). By definition, trolls enter an online community with the malicious intent of harming (e.g., stunting community growth by inciting conflict and provoking a desired emotional response) or otherwise disturbing (e.g., posting extraneous/off-topic comments) the positive social exchange of that community (Bergstrom, 2011; Cambria et al., 2010). Trolling is an identity play, a game of deception (Donath, 1999) that exploits anonymity (Cambria et al., 2010). Though many netmenschen heed the advice, do not feed the trolls—a refusal to even engage with disruptive individuals—others label them trolls, which is the fastest way to loose standing in a community. With enough violations, YouTube will delete the account outright. However, on YouTube, a site
about content rather than creating extensive alternate identities (e.g., Second Life), trolls often return under a different account until it too is blocked. Freedom of the Web means freedom even to do less savory activities.

C. **Memory**

Memory enables the existence of self and as such is an indispensible part of our humanity. The ability and proclivity to set memory in relationship to identity is distinctly human (e.g., Plato, 360/2008; Nietzsche, 1876/1995). Through memory people gain a sense of their personal, collective and cultural past and create a meaningful, inner narrative about the self through time. Memory is defined by, shares its primary characteristics with, and is bound by a symbiotic relationship to self (Howe, 2004).

1. **Mortal fears for the self**

Memory is defined by a fear of loosing the self as seen through its supposedly adversarial relationship with forgetting. But memory and forgetting are not bitter enemies. Rather, forgetting is integral to remembering. Since Plato, forgetting has been vilified as “a signifier of loss, absence or lack” (Vivian, 2010, p. 5). Fear of our own mortality drives the negative characterization of forgetting (Plato, 360/2008; Mayer-Schönberger, 2009). Without memory, an individual’s essence dies with the body, so forgetting appears to be the adversary of human identity.

In a post-Holocaust world, countless scholars, media, and publics began to vilify forgetting with a renewed vigor for this very reason. They feared the eternal death that awaited Holocaust victims if the world forgot, and through the death of so many narratives—lessons to be learned—fears of repeating the atrocities. Campaigns of “never forget” and “never again”
echoed across the globe. Constructing a defense or making an argument for the vital role of forgetting became an all but impossible task (Blustein, 2008).

Yet, that which is forgotten is not irretrievable. As the etymology of “forget” indicates, it is merely out of grasp (Vivian, 2010). Both remembering (living historically) and forgetting (living ahistorically) are necessary for the health of the individual, community and culture—a balance of remembering and forgetting the right things at the right time (Blustein, 2008; Nietzsche, 1876/1995). “Remembering is a form of forgetting” (Milan Kundera in Blustein, 2008, p. 1). Every memory inevitably forgets some information. A life without forgetting would be debilitating as Jorge Luis Borges illustrates in “Funes, the Memorious,” a story of a boy plagued by his inability to forget (Krondorfer, 2008; Mayer-Schönberger, 2009).

2. **Mirroring the self in character**

Memory is distinctly social because we are social; therefore human memories are as fluid and subject to reconstruction as identity itself. The past is a confluence of what was, is and may be. Even the narrowest form of memory, autobiographical memory, is inevitably social even when it is not explicitly shared. As the individual’s experiences—understood to be grounded in the social—change so too do the frames and narratives of the memories s/he possesses (Assmann, 2006; J. Assmann, 2003; Hirsch, 2008). Because individuals do not exist nor thrive in spheres of isolation, their memories, regardless of how private or suppressed, undergo constant reinterpretation based on social experiences in the same manner as identity. As social constructions, memories exhibit instability, transiency, and fragility (Vivian, 2010).

This social character is most evident in collective memory, often simply social memory (Vivian, 2010; Connerton, 1989). It can be further divided into communicative—small collective (e.g., family)—and cultural—large collective (e.g., generation, nation, ethnicity)—memory
depending on the extent of the sharing (Hirsch, 2008). Maurice Halbwachs\(^{10}\) (1992) was the first to extensively implement the term, defining collective memory, like Holocaust remembrance, as more than the mere combination of individual recollections. It refers to the synthesis of multiple memories (Halbwachs, 1992). Therefore collective memory is best observed in the shared resources of a collective rather than the individual minds of its members (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994).

3. **Symbiotic relationship of self and memory**

While identity grows from social interaction, a sense of self depends greatly on being able to retain and organize those social interactions as memories (Halbwachs, 1992). Memory and self, both of which are dynamic and fluid, share a symbiotic relationship (Howe, 2004). Memory records the relationships vital to self construction and enables access to who we were in the past. In turn, the content and form of the memories we store and retrieve are shaped by the self at the time of the event, at the time of retrieval, as well as at each change to self in between (Addis & Tippett, 2004; Conway, 2005). While the self is constantly transforming, it also depends on a sense of continuity or overall coherence of past, present and future or potential selves (Addis & Tippett, 2004; Conway, 2005). Memory enables the sense of personal, collective and cultural past needed to create a meaningful, inner narrative about time.

In the words of Elie Wiesel (1997), “A person without memory is still human; but he or she is no longer a person” (p. 14). Wiesel draws a distinction between the biological and spiritual character of humanity. Biologically speaking, we are *Homo sapiens*. We were born and will die with at least most of the biological characteristics unique to our species. However, our body does not make us a person; our soul—the spiritual essence of humanity—does. Alzheimer’s serves as an apt illustration of the vital role memory and identity serve to our status of personhood. The

\(^{10}\) Incidentally, the Nazis deported Halbwachs in 1944 and murdered him on March 16, 1945 at KZ Buchenwald (J. Assmann, 2003).
great tragedy in a disease like Alzheimer’s does not occur with the biological loss of certain physical faculties; it occurs much earlier with the loss of memory and self—a loss of personhood. Memory and identity do not require such a literal loss to exert their impact. Damaging socially constructed narratives within and around memory and identity can work similarly, compromising an individual, a group, or an entire culture’s claim to personhood.

D. **Memory Reified: Remembrance and Memorials**

Communication reifies memory—memories, intangible and undefined, are given narrative form. These narratives in turn lead to ritualized action—remembrance—and/or manifest object—memorial. As an action, reification intersects with ethics (the morality of action), particularly with memories of the Holocaust, “a moral signifier of our age” (Confino, 2006, p. 9).

All collective memories are mediated (Kansteiner, 2002). To be shared, they must travel through a medium—a ritualized action, a place-based memorial (*e.g.*, physical architectures), or space-based memorials (*e.g.*, photography, film). Regardless of the memorial type, media act as the bridge between present and past (Van Dijck, 2004).

A culture fulfills its most important task of bearing witness to or legitimizing a person or group’s experience through remembrance and memorials. Often the only way for a nation to atone for a tragedy of the Holocaust’s magnitude is to “preserve the cultural lifeblood of oppressed peoples” (Vivian, 2010, p. 4). Bearing witness through ritualized actions and manifest objects strives to recognize and restore the humanity that was forcibly taken from them.

1. **Remembrance**

Remembrance defines the things of a culture by reinforcing who we are and the defining moments of our culture. It can “influence collective thought and behavior by assigning
normative meaning to signal dimensions of the communal past” (Vivian, 2010, p. 63).
Remembrance is selective. Therefore the events and people remembered as well as the details conveyed are of cultural significance. The ethical issue at hand is not whether to remember but rather how to remember (Confino, 2000; Fuchs, 2002; Hoskins, 2003). In answering the how of remembrance, fundamental decisions are (explicitly or implicitly) made regarding collective identity.

The Historikerstreit (historian’s debate) of 1986 best illustrates the relationship between the form remembrance takes and collective identity construction it encourages. Despite the misnomer, the debate was far more than a few academics quarrelling in isolated scholarly journals; it was a widespread public discussion carried by the popular press (Jarausch, 1988; LaCapra, 1998). The central question driving the debate was, Is there an expiration date for dredging up the Nazi past in the name of remembrance? During a very conservative climate established by Bundespräsident Helmut Kohl, Ernst Nolte wrote an article condemning the ever-present past of the Third Reich calling for an end to the “collectivist confrontation with National Socialism” (Jarausch, 1988, p. 285). Arguing for the “demythologizing [of the Third Reich’s] image in a less isolated, politicized, and demonized direction” (Jarausch, 1998, p. 26), Nolte stood for a rightist, neo-revisionist historical position. Standing in opposition, Jürgen Habermas led the leftist critics. Habermas, appalled by the apologetic tendencies of his colleagues, feared the impact of the normalization and relativization of the Holocaust (Blustein, 2008; Brockmann, 2002; Jarausch, 1988; LaCapra, 1998; Moses, 2007a; Wilds, 2000).

The stances taken on remembrance reflect the larger identity constructs outlined by Moses (2007a) in which Nolte and Habermas represent the German German and non-German German respectively. Debating the shape and form of remembrance is a concern of the living not
the dead. Whether to remember is driven by a concern for deceased identities, but how to remember is driven by concern for living identities (e.g., does remembrance galvanize or debilitate contemporary identity constructions?). How a society reifies the past through remembrance says far more about the identity positions of the present than it does about the past, because remembrance is constructed by the living for themselves about the dead and not constructed by the dead for the living.

2. **Memorial**

Memorials reify memory into a material thing to be experienced through the senses. They are not necessarily tied to a particular place nor do they necessitate a solemn or mournful tone; rather they are defined simply by their ability to engender remembrance (Young, 1993). While the built materials may not hold much intrinsic value, memorials are the embodiment of a nation’s memory, values, and even soul (Blustein, 2008; Young, 1993). They serve an essential function in the collective memory infrastructure often acting as a buttress for memories passing from one generation to the next (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994). Memorials prompt us to identify with the object and the narrative it represents by “invit[ing] us to enter into an empathetic relationship with the people of the past” (Morris-Suzuki, 2005, p. 22). This relationship kindles feelings of solidarity or belonging to a people, a local community, or even a nation (Morris-Suzuki, 2005). In other words, the subject matter of any memorial is ultimately that of self—the self being memorialized (e.g., World War II European Jew, communist, Pole, etc.), the self driving the material manifestation (e.g., second or third generation German, Jew, etc.) and the self engaging with the memorial (e.g., second/third/fourth generation German, Jew, etc., or as broad as global citizen and/or human being).
Germans were slow to develop their memorial culture after the war (Koonz, 1994; Young, 1993), but the reasons for this may be less calculating than the silence and repression arguments imply and can be linked to a loss of self. Germans of the late 1940s could no longer reconcile the selves they believed themselves to be (i.e., basically good people) and who the world told them they were (i.e., dirty Nazis) (after the war, it became harder to sweep away the latter as merely enemy tactics and distortions).

When a collective suffers from this kind of identity crisis, the symbiotic relationship of memory and self of which memorials are made suffers too. When people struggle to define the self, they also struggle to reify memory, because identity is the interpretive lens through which memories must travel to be externalized. Memories—their content and form—are reflections of identity at the moment of reification. Germans could not reify Holocaust memories and tell the story of the *Opfer* without making a statement about the *Täter* thereby addressing their own identity. And the German identity struggle would take time. Expectations that Germans would immediately reform after WWII are based on a logic according to which what seems immoral to us must also be viewed as such by others; as if the defeat of May 1945 were a moral revolving door that transformed literally overnight, Germans’ values and beliefs; this seems something of a magical feat. (Confino, 2000, p. 95)

These expectations ignore people’s need for a consistent self over time. Each evolution of identity has to make sense with what came before—past selves cannot be expunged from one’s history of self but merely viewed in a new light. For this reason, major identity changes occur over time through a process rather than instantaneous and dramatic shifts.

Germans were in the unique position of being charged with preserving the memory of the nation’s victims within its national physical and cultural landscape. Most nations do not face the predicament of integrating remembrance of the state’s heinous acts against others into their
memorial landscape (Koonz, 1994; Young, 1993). Despite Germany’s now vast memorial
culture, memorials continue to be “endlessly scrutinized, explicated, and debated” (Young, 1993,
p. 20). Planning and erecting objects of remembrance “remains a tortured, self-reflective even
paralyzing preoccupation” (Young, 1993, p. 20).

a. **Place-based vs. space-based memorials**

Some memorials are bound to place because of their built structures, but
many others are portable and some enter an altogether ethereal space. Remembrance is tied to
narrative and not to stone, glass or steel (Young, 1993). Space-based memorials quickly evolved
from written words to images, film, television, and the Internet (Morris-Suzuki, 2005; Zelizer,
2001). These objects turn both event and person into an object that can travel and be owned
(Morris-Suzuki, 2005; Sontag, 2003) and create a space for remembrance when a physical place
is unavailable or not yet developed (Young, 1993). As Huyssem (1999, p. 205) argues, the
“[migration] from the real into the image, from the material into the immaterial, and ultimately
into the digitized computer bank” was a reasonable outcome of our postmodern condition. The
process of mediating memory inevitably leads to the transformation of memory into information
to be stored (A. Assmann, 2003).

1) **The virtual memorial**

The quintessential space-bound memorial appears in cyberspace,
but there is debate whether technology aids memory as successfully as we believe or whether by
freeing us from the burden encourages us to forget. Digital memory combines ordered storage
and interactive presence (Haskins, 2007). For much of human history, the demands of
remembering have been higher and more costly than forgetting. Technology has balanced the
relationship providing vast storage and easy retrieval allowing remembering to become the norm
(Mayer-Schönberger, 2009). With the exponential growth of storage space, people no longer
select but compulsively collect, record and remember everything that the abundant storage
capabilities will allow (Gillis, 1994; Haskins, 2007). Haskins (2007) and Van Dijck (2004) posit
that technology may actually undermine rather than reinforce memory when it does more than
supplement but actually replaces remembering. Memory becomes little more than “a topological
skill” of locating and identifying rather than remembering (Van Dijck, 2004, p. 272). Factual
knowledge may be conducive to a topological strategy, but the collective and cultural memory of
remembrance are beyond its reach. In fact, by taking on some of the tasks required of
remembering, particularly of facts, technology has become “an artificial prosthesis [freeing] the
brain of unnecessary burdens and allow[ing] more space for creative activity” (Van Dijck, 2004,
p. 271-272). Collective and cultural memory are the creative activity—the self-expression of
identity and community so vital to our humanity—technology is freeing us to partake in.
Technology does not take away the responsibility or the desire to participate in cultural
remembrance.

Virtual memorials are dynamic in a way that emulates memory itself in that they are in a
constant state of transformation. Just as the links established between memory imprints fluctuate,
the architecture of the online environment is built on dynamic hyperlinks so the number and
variety of connections to any given artifact are in a constant ebb and flow (Morris-Suzuki, 2005).
Virtual memorials also mimic memory’s ability to capture the natural flow of discourse and
create spaces for and witness to an ongoing discourse. The ability of virtual memorials to capture
and create a dynamic experience of the same character as memory can be more satisfying
because it is closer to the lived experience.
Virtual memorials have the capacity to break down the distinction between producer and consumer and lead to a truly democratic experience of remembrance. The development of new media technologies fundamentally altered media participation resulting in what some scholars, most notably Axel Bruns (2008), have called “produsage.” Web 2.0 and social software in particular are marked by a reduction in the fiscal obligations and skill level needed for participation while traversing many of the limitations of collaboration (e.g., language, geography, social background, financial status, etc.) (Bruns, 2008). Users can now generate memorials with ease. Technology enabled a single artist from Australia to create and post a video on YouTube with wide-reaching impact on Holocaust remembrance and enabled others to remix that video and create a nuanced Holocaust remembrance experience. Of course, produsage does not guarantee that remembrance achieves this highly collaborative and self-expressive state (e.g., institutional remembrance websites limit interaction and social exchange among visitors) but merely affords the conditions for the possibility of egalitarian remembrance. However, “Dancing Auschwitz” demonstrates the potential of virtual memorials to transcend comparatively passive forms and become points of interaction offering objects, ideas and feelings to be played with. If media encourage the reshaping of the narratives we tell (De Bruyn, 2010; Morris-Suzuki, 2005), then virtual memorials encourage the transformation of cultural narratives into truly open sourced entities of the people, for the people, by the people.
III. THEMATIC QUESTIONS

Using a set of thematic questions, this thesis seeks to explore the possible role(s) virtual memorials may play in German remembrance culture. Does technology preclude or enable remembrance? Does it facilitate forgetfulness? In order to address these questions, it is necessary to first understand how netmenschen make sense of online remembrance and its relationship to self. For instance, how do participants socially construct expressive boundaries for remembrance? Cultures, or more accurately the people who build them, continually develop and shape the limits of their social experience. Some of these margins are more inclusive than others (e.g., free speech in the US versus China). Expressive boundaries refer to the temperament of the cultural artifact serving as the catalyst of remembrance as well as the talk that surrounds it. These expressive boundaries are achieved through the participants’ expression of value judgments. Does remembrance necessitate gravitas or is there room for sarcasm, humor or even joy? What factors are considered when making such an evaluation? As the literature contends, remembrance is as much about the present as it is about the past. Thus another question would be: How do netmenschen view their relationship to/with remembrance? The degree to which they internalize remembrance or the extent to which remembering is considered a natural part of daily living could form a component of this question. How does remembrance factor into participants’ personal social experience? The way they talk about responsibility in terms of who should do the remembering and to what extent could provide keen insights into remembrance culture online. Furthermore, how do inheritors of the Opfer (victim) and Täter (perpetrator) identities socially construct contemporary, collective identities in the face of such a profound and indelible mark on their collective selves? German and Jewish identities have undoubtedly been shaped by the
Holocaust and its aftermath on the world stage. As Arendt (in Diner, 2003), Diner (2003) and Morris and Zipes (2002) have argued, Germans and Jews are locked in a negative symbiosis—both identities forever changed by the Holocaust but transformed in very different ways.

Particularly because of the strong moral component, Germans and non-Germans alike seek to understand the people who in various ways were part of the atrocities. As time passes, the questions branch out from those directly involved to their descendants. In an effort to answer these questions, *netmenschen* may construct German and Jewish identities by discussing their heritage, especially if one of their ancestors has a direct link to the Holocaust, and a German and Jewish character over time, which may stem from any cultural or national background. Who is considered “German” and “Jewish” and what does that mean?

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11 The term *Opfer* refers to all victims of the Holocaust, including but not limited to Roma, the disabled, Slavic peoples (*e.g.*, Poles and Russians primarily) and a host of groups persecuted for political, ideological and behavioral grounds (*e.g.*, Communists, Socialists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and homosexuals). However, because of the aggressive campaign and scale of persecution of Jews in particular, *Opfer* has become culturally synonymous with Jews in the frame of Holocaust remembrance unless specifically specified otherwise.
IV. RESEARCH PLAN AND METHODS

Though online remembrance can be defined broadly and include a number of different artifacts (e.g., institutional remembrance sites), the artifact here focuses on the most interactive of these remembrance spaces, an area that encourages or even relies chiefly on user content and exchange. Focusing on this type of online space provides the greatest opportunity to understand how everyday netmenschen (i.e., Germans, Jews, Poles and others not affiliated with remembrance organizations or causes) partake in remembrance discourse online. Like their American counterparts, German youth are spending more time on the web generally (Graumann & Speich, 2010; Hein, 2009a, 2009b) and social media in particular (Krämer & Winter, 2008; TNS Infratest, 2007). Despite the popularity of predominantly German social media portals (e.g., StudiVZ, Wer-kennt-wen), many Germans still partake in the more global portals of American origins like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. The most recent instances of online German remembrance occur in these portals rather than in their German counterparts. Studying remembrance in these spaces answers Confino’s (2000) call to explore memory outside predictably designated spaces for Holocaust remembrance (e.g., organizational websites, etc.).

A. Artifact: Death Camp Dance

“Dancing Auschwitz,” a triptych of Holocaust-themed short films created and posted on YouTube by Australian artist Jane Korman in January 2010, exemplifies the growing possibilities of a virtual memorial—an online object of memory. Korman’s piece includes (1) three generations of the Kohn family dancing at various Holocaust sites across Europe (“I will Survive. Part1,” Korman, 2010a), (2) a film of a home video depicting the Kohn family dancing in a field in Australia (“I Will Survive: Dancing Auschwitz.Part2,” Korman, 2010b), and (3) a

12 StudiVZ specifically notes that the site is not intended for members in the United States and requires a German mailing address to join the site.
more traditional documentary on the family’s visit to these sites of remembrance (“I Will Survive: Dancing Auschwitz.Part3,” Korman, 2010c). Though it originally appeared in a Melbourne (Australia) gallery in 2009, the triptych went viral after Korman posted the videos on YouTube and grew exponentially with Spiegel’s August 2010 article (Broder, 2010). According to the artist’s website (Korman, 2010d), “Part1,” which is set to Gloria Gaynor’s 1978 disco hit “I Will Survive,” received over 700,000 hits within just two weeks. YouTube has since removed the original posting after a claim of copyright violation, but several iterations of the video have been posted by other YouTube netmensch. The version used for this analysis13 garnered another 585,594 views and 2,121 comments across the three parts and Korman’s silenced version—a response to the copyright dispute.

“Part1” anchors the project, challenging the accepted convention of remembrance, and inciting the controversy that invited media coverage worldwide—most notably Germany, Israel, Australia, Poland, Russia and the United States. The four-minute and twenty-second film depicts Korman with her father and Holocaust survivor, Adam “Adolek” Kohn, and her three teenage children to the backdrop of various Holocaust sites in Europe including Auschwitz.14 Yet, the video quickly departs from the conventional, somber tones as this Jewish family begins to dance to Gloria Gaynor’s “I Will Survive.” The backdrop transitions from one Holocaust site to the next as their attire moves from labeled t-shirts (e.g., Adolek wears “Survivor,” Jane wears “2nd Generation,” etc.), to unmarked clothing and finally to garments featuring the yellow Shield of

13 Posted on July 15, 2010 and since removed for copyright violation.
14 Locations include: Auschwitz, The Absent Synagogue, Radagast Train Station, Lodz Ghetto/Memorial in Poland; The Maisel Synagogue (Hitler’s intended ‘Museum of the Extinct Race’), Terezin Ghetto Fortress and Terezin (Theresienstadt) Concentration Camp in Czech Republic; and Dachau Concentration Camp in Germany.
David forced upon Jews during the Holocaust. The use of the Shield serves as both a visual reminder of oppression as well as a bold repossession of a holy symbol the Nazis had desacralized for their own morbid purposes. They remember Holocaust victims, specifically Jews, by sporting the iconic symbol while also unabashedly reclaiming their Jewish identity. The act shocks but also empowers the Kohn family while inspiring people more generally to take back the reigns of control over their own identity formation. The Kohn family has found a way to remember those who perished while also unapologetically—as supported visually by the eye-level medium-long frontal shot used throughout the film—celebrating their own survival (e.g., Adolek Kohn’s survival of the campus but also his descendants’ who exist only because Adolek survived). According to her website, Korman hoped to reach the younger generation, who have become desensitized to the Holocaust and its images, which she seems to have accomplished. But she also manages to challenge the expectations and proscriptions of guilt and shame in traditional remembrance as belonging to another time and generation.

“Dancing Auschwitz” represents a particularly interactive and discourse-minded virtual memorial that encourages and even chiefly relies on user content and interaction. Virtual memorials possess an additional complexity through the variety of memorialization levels they enable. “Part 1” alone presents a memorial (a witness of Adolek returning to Auschwitz 63 years later) within a memorial (Auschwitz and the other locations as Holocaust remembrance sites), which is further memorialized in the online community through the interaction of YouTube comments with the video.16

15 Those outside Jewish circles often refer to the Shield of David as the Star of David.
16 Part 2 depicts old film reels of the Kohn family dancing in a field and serves as a witness twice over. The first camera witnesses the event of dancing in the Australian field, while the second camera witnesses the event of viewing the footage on an old fashion projector screen years later.
B. **Method: Discourse Analysis**

As the thematic questions and artifacts indicate, the remembrance project lays the foundation for this project’s primary concern, how members of these online communities describe, discuss and debate the contents of Holocaust remembrance as it relates to self. Discourse analysis will be used to excavate the layers of meaning found in images and words exchanged. Adopted by a range of academic disciplines, discourse analysis refers to a group of different approaches for analyzing written and spoken text (Peräkylä, 2005; Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Discourse analysis can be split into four general approaches based on its position regarding context versus text and constructivist versus critical (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). I will adopt one of the more interpretive forms of discourse analysis, which is high on context and constructivist in form, in an attempt to create a big picture view of Holocaust remembrance online and understand how members form meaning in these spaces. Phillips and Hardy (2002) identify this form of discourse analysis as interpretive structuralism. As can be gleaned from the popularity of discourse analysis across the disciplines, documents are a key part of the social puzzle particularly in a new media world in which much of social life is mediated by either written or visual texts. With the understanding that “our talk, and what we are, are one and the same” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 2), the interpretive enterprise of discourse analysis is an ideal means of penetrating the depths of meaning, identity, and remembrance culture. As Phillips & Hardy (2002) argue, “Without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand our reality, our experiences, or ourselves” (p. 2). With discourse analysis this research endeavor will have the proper footing to achieve a cultural understanding of how German and Jewish identities and remembrance culture are socially constructed.
V. ANALYSIS

As the symbiotic relationship of memory and self suggests, identity is core to remembrance. Using “Dancing Auschwitz,” the analysis below delineates the relationship between German and Jewish identities and between those and remembrance at large, exploring the possibilities of online remembrance as a site of netmenschen-led identity construction. While the discourse was global, representing every populated continent except Africa, understandably the groups closest and most affected by the Holocaust contributed most to the discussion. Germans and Poles dominate the comments, followed by Israelis as a distant third.

To understand how historical and contemporary identities shape who may participate in and challenge the boundaries of remembrance, first requires definitions of remembrance and descriptions of the social construction of culturally acceptable online remembrance. Even factors that appear unrelated, such as place, are ultimately an extension of the identity discussion central to remembrance. Identity primarily informs the creation and evaluation of remembrance. Concerned with contemporary collective selves, netmenschen criticize offline Holocaust remembrance for being passive, stagnant and dependent upon outdated scripts that push the Opfer-Täter dichotomy. These well-worn narratives impede agency and infringe on the self-determination of identity construction for Opfer-Täter descendants. Germans are particularly affected and tend to respond in one of two unhealthy ways to the moral emotions of guilt and shame: pushing those emotions to excess or resisting them vigorously, thus stoking resentment. Virtual memorials, particularly those situated in social media such as “Dancing Auschwitz,” potentially fulfill the needs of the post-Holocaust generations by fostering self-expressive spaces in which netmenschen lead their own identity construction and remediate their collective identities through role switching, redefinition, or disassociation.
A. **Defining Online Remembrance for Contemporary Identity Construction**

As conveyed in the discussion of self and Other, we create and define communities and collective selves through socially constructed boundaries. They also serve as the contours to evaluate a community’s artifacts, products of collective self. These perimeters are clearest when violations—actions, behaviors, or identities—occur. Therefore, understanding remembrance, what it is and may be, requires focus on cases that violate a community’s designated boundaries, in this case German, Jewish and Polish communities. The controversy surrounding “Dancing Auschwitz” provides the perfect opportunity to highlight these boundaries and ask how netmenschen socially construct expressive boundaries for remembrance (i.e., limits on what can be expressed in the frame of the Holocaust).

As this section will argue, issues concerning identity are pivotal in delineating boundaries for online remembrance. However netmenschen are not exclusively—perhaps not even primarily—driven by a concern for historical identities (e.g., protecting the legacy of Opfer). Many netmenschen ultimately evaluate remembrance through its relationship to and/or representation of contemporary identities. Although the act of remembering appears to be chiefly in service to events and peoples of the past, remembrance is more about helping the living make sense of the past and define the collective self through time. Constructions of the past do more than provide meaning to historical persons’ or groups’ hardships. They carry significant implications for how others view contemporaries of those collective identities, which in turn may impact their social experience. For instance, the construction of the Vietnam Memorial arguably played a meaningful role in facilitating the recovery of Vietnam veterans from their stigmatized identities. But before exploring the impact of remembrance on identity, a close reading of YouTube posts will argue that contemporary identities are an essential consideration in defining
the boundaries (e.g., who may participate, representations of place, etc.) for remembrance, online or otherwise.

1. **The who’s who of Holocaust remembrance**

In evaluating the appropriateness of “Dancing Auschwitz” as a remembrance artifact, YouTube netmenschen’s main criteria focused on the identities of the videos’ producers and participants. Knowledge of the participants’ relationship to the Holocaust and their nationality and ethnicity influenced judgments of Korman’s project. A person’s collective identity and the role(s) (or lack thereof) associated with it during the Holocaust designates to which set of socially constructed boundaries action and speech are held. Netmenschen accord survivors, who lived through the persecution, with fairly liberal boundaries, but these boundaries become more conservative and restrained for subsequent generations. A further distinction appears in the descendants of Täter (i.e., contemporary Germans) versus descendants of Opfer (e.g., contemporary Jews).

a. **The holy and irreproachable survivor**

As one might expect, Holocaust survivors are in a special class of remembrance participants. Survivors have an almost holy status, and the way they choose to remember their and fellow Opfer’s experiences is almost beyond reproach. The quotes below represent the clear pattern of support the artifact garners on the basis of Adolek Kohn’s survivor status.

bibiously (Germany, 31) this man survived auschwitz, so please let him dance!! he has the absofuckinglutely right to!!
As seen throughout the discourse, posters who acknowledged Kohn’s survival of Auschwitz almost always came out in strong support of Kohn, as a survivor, and “Dancing Auschwitz,” as his Vergangenheitsbewältigung, a means by which someone comes to terms with
the past, which many felt only another survivor could judge. For bibiously and skirlo, no further argument is necessary to justify this video triptych’s existence. No other group of posts received as many likes as the posts that expressed support of Holocaust survivors and their ability to partake in remembrance on their own terms.

The identity of the Holocaust survivor shares the sacredness of the Holocaust itself. The scale and circumstances of the Holocaust, one of the few genocides that took place in the modern Western world, make it rare if not a singular event in modern history. Because it is so unique, the event and most aspects related to that part of history have garnered the utmost respect and reverence. Similarly, survivors are rare and take on this same respected and revered position as the historical event itself. Ljiljana274’s syntax conveys Kohn’s holy status. The construction is affectively similar to how Jews treat the name of God when reading the Torah. In Judaism, writing or speaking the Tetragrammaton, the name of God, is forbidden, so Jews use the term Adonai in its place. In using the pronoun “he” instead of referring to Kohn by name, Ljiljana274 accords Kohn gravitas and conveys the sacredness of the survivor identity. One netmensch, The Dalsky, even argues Kohn is “kind of a memorial too” for having survived Auschwitz and for serving as a living reminder of what the Nazis destroyed, namely “life, generations, joy.” A sense of awe surrounds survivors, for only they bore the weight of the grossest brutality and survived. So few can share or relate to their experience. Most netmenschen consider setting proscriptions for how survivors should process or overcome what they endured to be a flagrant violation. Denying survivors like Kohn the freedom to express themselves, particularly when they alone can fully grasp the enormity of what took place, is on par with invalidating their experience altogether. Thus, barring Kohn from expression negates his

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17 Holocaust deniers and anti-Semites aside.
experience of Auschwitz and fails to recognize his humanity. Understanding the Nazis had

denied survivors their humanity in the cruelest ways imaginable, most netmenschenn
communicated no desire to proscribe forms of remembrance, for fear of further injury.

In addition to arguing for Holocaust survivors’ ability to present authentic expressions of
self, zehevoo’s post reflects a concern that Kohn’s quality of life would suffer under a narrow
understanding of remembrance. The comment below represents the few who question the
appropriateness of Kohn’s dancing at Auschwitz.

vanillamilc
(Germany)

| das ist doch euer ernst? das ist ein gedenkstätte, man soll natürlich zu schätzen wissen dass manche wenige überlebt haben, aber viel mehr geht es doch darum, deren zu gedenken die es nicht geschafft haben, die diese Qualen durchleben mussten. Und an dieser Stelle ist ein fröhlicher Tanz nicht angemessen. | are you guys serious? this is a memorial, one should of course appreciate that some few have survived, but much more it is about commemorating those who did not make it, who had to live through this torment. And at this point a happy dance is not appropriate. |

Here, Kohn’s survival, while admirable, does not take precedence over the interests of those who
died and can no longer dance. This type of post specifically defines remembrance as an act for
the deceased Opfer, disqualifying Kohn. zehevoo’s post represents the popular response to this
critique, prioritizing the well-being of the living and embracing an emotional experience that
departs from the prevailing sorrow. Focusing on survivors, who are situated in the now, rather
than victims, who are situated in the past, emphasizes the present. zehevoo’s forward-looking
call to be “glad for the ones still living” conveys the concern so many netmenschen, especially
Germans, have for contemporary selves and highlights participants’ larger concern regarding a
remembrance culture bound by grief (further explored in section B).
1) “We have survivors too!”: A Polish perspective

Neither who constitutes a survivor nor inequality within survivor status is without debate. In one of the rare self-translated Polish comments, nicolasuj conveys the difficulty some survivors have in being recognized and validated because of their nationality or ethnicity.

nicolasuj (Poland, 22)

All is OK, but if the Polish would have an idea to do this and invite polish (not Jewish like in the video) grandpa, exprisoner for dancing in Auschwitz Death Camp, they all will go to prison for the insult the memory of this place. That’s Poland – there’s no rights equality. Thank you, good night!

By nicolasuj’s account, Polish survivors are marginalized. Their experience is not validated in the same ways or to the same extent as Jewish Opfer. Most netmenschen fail to specify Kohn’s Jewishness when referring to him as a survivor, and they exhibit a tendency to use survivor and Jew interchangeably (e.g., the assumption that a survivor is also a Jew). nicolasuj draws the distinction to point toward the injustice he perceives and by extension to indicate the existence of an implicit hierarchy, in which Jews top the pyramid and Poles are somewhere below. The question is whether most participants do not distinguish because they see no difference in stature between Jewish and Polish survivors, or whether they too conflate definitions of a survivor and a Jew.

b. Nachgeborenen: The post-Holocaust generations

The post-Holocaust generations have been charged with the responsibility of upholding and continuing remembrance. In the words of ReiseReise1000 (Germany, 47),

Holocaust remembrance “perpetually hangs on the younger generations,” because only they can

18 Full comment in section A.2.D. (page 73).
serve as the guardians of remembrance for future generations, particularly as survivors and witnesses die out. They are united by their responsibility to remembrance and their lack of first-hand experience, which distinguishes them from their historical counterparts. Neither bore nor caused the physical and psychological pains of the Holocaust. Yet, the boundaries, both Other and self-imposed, that guide their actions bifurcate depending on the association of their contemporary collective identity with the historical identities of Opfer (victim) and Täter (perpetrator). The socially constructed boundaries for remembrance are fairly strict for descendants of Täter but more tempered for the progeny of Opfer.

1) Descendants of Täter

As argued earlier, the best way to understand the cultural boundaries of remembrance is to look at what lies outside of it. Some Germans (and Austrians) approached the question of who can participate in this new form of remembrance by considering how the meaning would change had Kohn not been a survivor but an outlier, or even more telling, a German dancing.

flowerpower111
(Berlin, Germany, 28)

I visited Krakau a few days ago. Im german (not that that would make a difference) and Auschwitz really touched me. I dont appreciate people joking about these events at all. All the best Mr. Kohn!

TheVitmo
(Austria, 19)
(47 Likes)

What a wonderful middle finger to all Nazis!
Nobody else could have done this wonderful thing but a survivor (otherwise it would have been deeply distasteful). My deepest respect to him for his strength and willingness to tell fascists to go f*** themselves.

Aalata
(Germany, 34)

Wenn ich mich auf einen Friedhof stelle und mich dabei filmen lasse, wie ich zu „I will survive” tanze, dann feiert mich auch niemand
If I stood on a graveyard and let myself be filmed as I danced to “I will survive,” no one would celebrate me or find me funny [either].
oder findet das lustig. Ich übrigens finde das auch nicht lustig.

By the way, I don’t find it funny either.

A group of Germans argue, as flowerpower11 does, that their German identity is unimportant but in doing so illustrate the opposite position—the importance of one’s national identity when addressing the Holocaust. The inclusion of this parenthetical statement in her brief comment indicates the different values by which German actions and speech (*i.e.*, communication) are evaluated, especially by non-Germans. There would be little need to state its insignificance if her German identity were indeed irrelevant in the eyes of the Other. Some Germans may deny the battle regarding their own history; however, even denial confirms its existence and the possible impediments to redefining and/or constructing their collective identities anew.

Other participants, especially Germans but also Poles (see nicolasuj’s post above), focus directly on delineating who may not work to change the face of remembrance. TheVitmo represents a class of posts that lists a very broad category of people who cannot do what Kohn, as a survivor, was able to do at Auschwitz and other remembrance sites. Several responses incorporate variations of the expression “a [insert positive adjective] middle finger to the Nazis” when describing the ultimate outcome of the video. However, that interpretation, as TheVitmo explains, is possible only with the knowledge that Kohn survived Auschwitz. He broadly draws the lines of offense around any and all non-survivors implying that the basis for offense is lack of survivorship rather than nationality.

Yet others distinguish further, thereby underscoring the impact of national identity in determining a person or group’s ability to create and partake in remembrance not already preordained by precedent. As Aalata illustrates, these *netmenschen* reference their German
nationality in form if not word, thus separating contemporary Germans from the larger group of non-survivors. Although Aalata states her nationality directly in her profile, her comment relies more on form. Posting in German signals most readers of her German identification and probably indicates her intended audience as fellow Germans, who likely infer her nationality. In the absence of other evidence for her claim, one assumes her German identity, which has been culturally drawn to the Täter (e.g., you, a German, cannot dance because you are to blame), rather than non-survivor status as the reason others would not embrace similar actions.

Isolating contemporary Germans from other non-survivors casts them as Others, which because of the historical baggage locates their otherness in their forefathers’ actions. The loss of control resulting from being defined by someone else’s actions can be frustrating and induce feelings of helplessness. Aalata’s response could very well be a sign of that frustration and a wish to eschew the isolating boundaries of her German identity. The narrowed limit for she and other Germans propells Aalata to further tighten the boundary so that no one, even Holocaust survivors, be allowed to dance at sacred sites and defy the social codes of remembrance. She does not indicate a desire to dance at Auschwitz, but rather a desire to shed her otherness and be treated equally to the unaffiliated.

Some restrictions go beyond non-survivors’, especially Germans’, active participation in the creation of artifacts like “Dancing Auschwitz.” A small group of netmenschen, almost exclusively German, sets limits for contemporaries to partake in the process of boundary construction.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^\text{19}\) Some flamers, particularly anti-Germans, also set restrictions for Germans, but they were filtered out of this group because their primary aim is to impede healthy identity construction (e.g., labeling German participants as Nazis without cause).
frida1209  
(Germany, 56)  
Das hat mich sehr berührt.  
Und wer von uns allen Nicht-Betroffenen darf darüber entscheiden, ob so etwas sein darf oder nicht.  

This moved me greatly. And who of us not-affected can decide if such a thing can be done or not.

ralftolosa  
(Germany, 68)  
@Tunsler nur die betroffenen hätten hier das recht, kritik zu äußern oder nicht. als deutscher, einfach mal die klappe halten.  

@Tunsler only the affected persons would have the right here to express criticism or not. as a German, just hold your tongue.

These comments suggest that expression—speech in addition to the restrictions of action above—is limited on the basis of identity. frida1209 leaves room for interpretation as she refers to these limits in the frame of the nonaffiliated, a designation that includes far more than just Germans. However, ralftolosa narrowly applies limits to Germans, calling for self-censorship.

ralftolosa’s comment, part of a larger exchange sparked by Tunsler’s negative assessment of “Dancing Auschwitz,” is further supported by his second post, in which he argues, “there are subjects where we [Germans] should restrain ourselves.” It may seem odd that a German enforce a boundary against German expression, but as Mead’s discussion of the I and me supports, people have the capacity to judge themselves as the Other. Some participants questioned ralftolosa’s true age, believing him to be younger than he claims; however, if he is indeed 68, he may represent the first post-war generation, a generation characterized for its repression. In other words, socialization may further account for his response.

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20 Tunsler was very vocal of his disapproval throughout the discourse. Here his post simply reads: “Geschmackloser Mist,” which means tasteless crap.

21 ralftolosa’s original comment in full reads: “@Tunsler es gibt eben themen, wo wir uns zurückhalten sollten. aber um das zu begreifen, benötigt man etwas taktgefühl. wie kann ich dir denn deine äußerungen verbieten, du äußerst dich doch.”
2) **Descendants of Opfer**

In addition to contemporary Germans, *netmenschen* explicitly address the role expectations of the *Opfer* descendants. Comments pertaining to Kohn’s progeny fall into two categories. The first views Kohn’s daughter and grandchildren as the guardians of future remembrance and their participation as commendable. Their familial ties and membership in groups once affected by the Holocaust entitle them to the open-minded boundary constructions of survivors. A smaller second group limits their participation and their ability to experiment with remembrance because of their lack of first-hand experience. For these *netmenschen*, the descendants of *Opfer* are no different from the nonaffiliated, an argument that may stem from the posters’ unwanted ties to the *Täter*.

Posts conveying support for Jane Korman and her children’s involvement with “Dancing Auschwitz” are by far the more favored position. Most deem the close familial ties to a Holocaust survivor as enough to justify involvement. Others tie the descendants’ existence to Kohn’s survival, thereby identifying Korman and her children as survivors of a different kind.

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**knochenjaeger77**  
(Germany)  
(41 Likes)

Das ist die Freude am Leben und nicht am Tod…Nazis töteten über 6 Millionen Menschen, und die glücklichen die überlebt haben müssen sich jetzt der OnlineCommunity stellen oder was? Und was habt ihr für ein Recht die Tochter/Enkel dieses Mannes zu verurteilen von wegen “kein bezug” usw?! Die haben deutlich mehr Bezug als ihr Idioten >.<

**nobileist**  
(Germany, 30)  
(35 Likes)

Absolute großartig! Dieser alte Mann zeigt der Vergangenheit den “nackten

**This is the joy of life not death….Nazis murdered over 6 million people, and the lucky ones who survived must now submit to the online community or what? And what right do you all have to condemn the daughter/grandchildren of this man as if “no relation” and so on?! They certainly have more connection than you idiots >.<**

**Absolutely grand! This old man shows the past the “bare bottom”. Hopefully plenty of**
those Nazi-henchmen, and these are in the position to see this video. Why should these people not have the right to express their joy of life and their pride of their grandfather? Without him they wouldn’t even be on this world! And he says himself: “It was simply luck!!! I cried…” (from sorrow and joy).

With a history of persecution, Jews have a special relationship with the notion of survival. Yad Vashem, Israel’s national Shoah\textsuperscript{22} memorial/museum, devotes many of its resources to counting and recording the names of those who fell victim to the Nazis and to taking testimony of survivors. However, even the archiving power of Yad Vashem cannot count the number of unborn—the generations of people who never came to be because of the lives taken during HaShoah.\textsuperscript{23} As the people who the Nazis wished to annihilate, every subsequent generation of Jews becomes sacred in its own right—survivors by extension despite their lack of first-hand experience. As nobileist points out, Kohn’s family line continued only because he survived. Kohn’s progeny not only represent Adolek Kohn’s survival but the survival of a people. The visual of the Kohn family dancing in front of Hitler’s proposed “Museum of the Extinct Race”—now the Maisel Synagogue—reinforces the point that the continuation of life for a group so heavily persecuted is itself something to be revered.

\textsuperscript{22} Shoah (also HaShoah “the Shoah” or יהושע) is the term used and preferred when specifically referencing the mass murder of European Jews during World War II.

\textsuperscript{23} Yad Vashem has an exhibit dedicated to the countless numbers who might have been. The room simulates millions of stars in the sky, unknown and uncountable, to pay tribute to the unborn.
The remembrance roles open to descendents of *Opfer* are not completely without debate. Experience or the lack thereof is the defining issue for these participants. Survivors were there; their bodies bore the physical pains while their minds and souls endured the psychological and emotional hardships of the Holocaust. Each subsequent generation is one step removed from the realities of first-hand experience and as such is tied to different boundaries.

Alberich21 (Germany, 47)

Peinlich!
KZ goes Disco.

Embarrassing!
KZ goes disco.
What do the wannabe creatives! want to tell us with this? The old one I can easily picture as a triumphant survivor. “See here you Nazi dogs, I have survived it.” That would be ok, but the other young fools do not understand. It is their only accomplishment to be related to a concentration camp victim, nothing more. And now the hip young dance (and in addition badly) on the graves of those who didn’t have as much luck as their grandpa. Really sick.

Alberich21’s comment evaluates Kohn and his grandchildren differently because the main criterion is one of lived experience. He adheres to a notion that understanding demands first-hand experience. It is on the basis of experience that Alberich21 interprets Kohn’s actions, which are the same unconventional actions of his grandchildren, as a quick and deserving jab to the Nazis, whereas his grandchildren’s actions are read in relation to the *Opfer* rather than the *Täter*. As a victim of the concentration camp, Kohn represents the *Opfer* in a way his

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24 The next subsection will explore identity and its relation to participants’ definitions of place (*e.g.*, when Adolek dances, Auschwitz is a Nazi-defined concentration camp, but when his grandchildren dance, Auschwitz becomes an *Opfer*-defined graveyard).
grandchildren cannot, and this bifurcation leads to the differing interpretations, one a triumph and the other a sham.

Importantly, why is association, especially a familial one, not enough? Reversing the relationship so that it represents that of the Täter enables speculation as to why Alberich21, a self-proclaimed German, would delineate “mere” association from the Opfer or Täter identities. If association entitled Korman and her children to the same treatment as Opfer such as Kohn, then by association the stigmatization of the Täter would transfer to their descendants, resulting in similar treatment of both the Täter and their progeny.

3) Young dancing fools

The video’s creator, 55-year-old Jane Korman, aside, some netmenschen believe “Dancing Auschwitz” epitomizes the disintegration of remembrance in the hands of today’s youth. These individuals lambast the act of dancing—by anyone regardless of identity—and regard it as youth-driven folly with destructive consequences. They hold Korman’s children responsible for desacrilizing the memory of the Holocaust and question Adolek’s mental faculties for taking part in the video.

By the way, there’s no reason to dance in that place. The young people dance ‘cause they are stupid XX century people who care the fuck about nothing, and the survivor dances ‘cause he’s got mad and he’s lost! all kind of respect. TAKE NOTE THAT THERE’S THOUSANDS OF HUMAN BEING THAT DIED AND WOULD NOT LIKE THE FUCK ABOUT THIS DANCE. And for the young people: Go study a bit more and think less about party, maybe then you will think a bit more about what you do, losers!

Generally, Polish netmenschen exhibit a very negative view of “Dancing Auschwitz” as a remembrance artifact, which may indicate that Polish culture has constructed particularly
constrictive boundaries by which Poles evaluate Holocaust remembrance artifacts.\(^{25}\)

Furthermore, insearchofsunrise100 shows great passion and strong prerogative to speak for the dead. The definitiveness of his statement further emphasized with capital letters suggests insearchofsunrise100 considers dancing to be the greatest insult to those who died. However, dancing has a deep history in Jewish culture. For example, King David dances at the arrival of the Ark of Covenant, a most sacred artifact believed to hold the Tablets of Stone with the Ten Commandments. Like Adolek, King David’s choice of worship, a dance of unbridled joy, is greatly criticized by Saul’s daughter Michal who thinks David a fool and despises him for it (2 Samuel 6:16). The Holocaust, like the Ark of the Covenant, is sacred, but sacredness does not demand only the utmost sobriety and deference nor does it negate the joy of dance.\(^{26}\) Perhaps through the act of dancing Adolek and his progeny are best able to honor the dead—it shows he is not wasting the opportunity for a life of happiness by living in misery. However, insearchofsunrise100, shaped by Polish culture, demarcates a set of boundaries that are both harsh and unyielding.

2. **Issues of place: Continuing the identity discussion**

Collective identity issues do more than construct and socially reinforce the boundaries of participation in unconventional remembrances; identity remains a primary concern in constructing the boundaries for the various components of a remembrance artifact (\textit{e.g.}, message, tone, visuals, sound, \textit{etc.}). In that sense issues of place were key to the discussion. This section will (1) define place and its relationship to identity, (2) distinguish between Auschwitz

\(^{25}\) Given the unavailability of a translator, this claim only refers to self-identified Poles who wrote in English.

\(^{26}\) carolineriegel (US, 32) points to another verse serving the same point in her comment: “This is brilliant. And, it is completely Jewish, in the biblical sense. Read Genesis [actually in Exodus 15:20], people….Moses’s sister Miriam led the Israelites in dance & song after crossing the dead sea and watching their Egyptian captors perish. Sheni lo tipol, am yisrael!”
the grave, the camp, and the memorial, and (3) explore how definitions of place change in relation to the identity of the person occupying it.

a. **Defining place and its relationship to identity**

Place refers to a specified point in a physical space. Some places are defined by their natural features, or by their built architectures, or by the people who occupy and use them. Some places, as is the case of Auschwitz, serve as the grounds for actions so immense and identities so morally polarizing that they are left with an indelible mark. Oświęcim, once a little-known Polish town, became the linchpin of the Nazi’s final solution and after the regime’s collapse a sacred icon of the Holocaust. “Dancing Auschwitz” features nine distinct places of remembrance, but *netmenschen* dealt exclusively with the most infamous of the Nazi death camps. Auschwitz is a network of former concentration camps, a collective gravestone for those who died, and a memorial, the primary aim of which, depending on one’s definition, is to inspire remembrance in the living or to protect and honor the memory of the dead. All three definitions exist and are valid; however, each definition brings a different identity to the foreground. As a result, they greatly shape YouTube participants’ boundary construction and ultimate evaluation of “Dancing Auschwitz’s” message and representation of Auschwitz (the place). These *netmenschen* typically fell into three categories: (1) the *Opfer*-driven favor strict boundaries and negative evaluations viewing Auschwitz, the gravesite and the memorial, as the victim’s space, (2) the *Täter*-driven view Auschwitz, the concentration camp, as the perpetrator’s space and express high praise for Kohn’s dance, and (3) the survivor and descendant-driven gravitate toward positive evaluations and consider Auschwitz, the memorial, as a space that serves present and future generations.
b. **Auschwitz the gravesite**

Most of the *Opfer*-driven view Auschwitz as a gravesite and base their evaluations on their interpretations of how non-surviving victims would perceive “Dancing Auschwitz.” When the only voice that matters shifts to being the very people who no longer have a voice, the dead, remembrance has a far more tortuous path of evolution to follow. In other words, changing the shape and form of remembrance is slow and arduous without judges who can make their wishes known. *Netmenschen* in this group maintain a strictly conventional understanding of remembrance and expect sorrow to dominate and define the grounds forevermore. Like most graveyards, protecting the peace and paying reverence to the dead is the principal concern. Most consider Korman’s work to be an affront to Auschwitz’s victims.

**Jonodabomb**

(Australia)

@robermaxdonner

the outrage is that he is dancing on peoples graves! just because he survived it does not give him the right to go and dance on the graves of those who didn’t make it!

**aleckz2008**

(German)


*I mean, I have nothing against profound videos, but at this place MILLIONS of people were killed, thrown onto mounts and burned! Even if somehow this video is to be profound, it is so disrespectful. Moreover the whole thing doesn’t even have a message. And then talking out of it because of “ambiguity”. Totally inappropriate. Such videos should be blocked.*

*Netmenschen* who define Auschwitz as a grave (or at least as the site of death) consider a very narrow field of remembrance acceptable. As exemplified by Jonodabomb’s post, most who argue that absolutely no one be able to dance in Auschwitz, even survivors, are the same people
who view the concentration camp as a sacred gravesite. Whereas descendants or the nonaffiliated are criticized for not understanding and not having experienced the Holocaust, Kohn is criticized for flaunting his survival at the expense of those who died. aleckz2008’s post indicates “Dancing Auschwitz” may go beyond insulting and verge into the category of hate speech. Those calling for censorship are almost exclusively German. aleckz2008 presents a rather peculiar case as his profile features several uploaded parodies. As a parodist, aleckz2008 would likely welcome polysemic texts and be more inclined to appreciate artistic license. Artists push boundaries to teach us something about our communities and ourselves. However, aleckz2008 draws the line at Holocaust remembrance. The call for censorship greatly contrasts the defense of free speech one would expect a parodist to make and seems extreme for an artifact that may simply be in poor taste. While the U.S. and Germany have protections set in place for free speech, Germans are less tolerant of hate speech. The Basic Law enables certain provisions to limit political speech that violates the human dignity of a person or persons (Timofeeva, 2003), in this case deceased. With aleckz2008 “Dancing Auschwitz” becomes an ethical issue with potential legal consequences.

c.  

**Auschwitz the concentration camp**

Auschwitz embodies the *Täter* when defined first and foremost as a concentration camp. The Nazis constructed the space, manipulated it for their aims, and the remaining architecture stands as representative of the Nazi regime and the crimes people committed in its name. As such, these *netmenschen* commend Kohn for taking a defiant anti-Nazi stance in the very place the Nazis wielded the most power.

robertmaxdonner (US, 42)  

@Jonodabomb I think you read to much into it…I don’t see any graves.,what I see is slaughter houses…. Yes those are the sites [where] millions of people [were] slaughter, but it is not their graves….A grave is a [final] resting place…do you think that is
where those that died, consider their resting place...a place where horrific atrocities took place...Obviously everyone is going to have their own opinion...

petekeefer
(Germany, 35)
(2 Likes)

Auschwitz so zu sehen, all
diese schrecklichen Plätze –
Trauer...Hilflosigkeit…Wut.
Da hat es mich zunächst
tetst, diese Menschen
tanzen zu sehen.
Und dann erkannte ich die
Intension – und das ist
phantastisch! Da tanzt keiner
auf Gräbern, sondern dem
brutalen Irrsin trotzend!!!
Mutig! Wichtig!
Ja – ihr habt die Nazis
besiegt!

Auschwitz so zu sehen, all
diese schrecklichen Plätze –
Trauer...Hilflosigkeit…Wut.
Da hat es mich zunächst
tetst, diese Menschen
tanzen zu sehen.
Und dann erkannte ich die
Intension – und das ist
phantastisch! Da tanzt keiner
auf Gräbern, sondern dem
brutalen Irrsin trotzend!!!
Mutig! Wichtig!
Ja – ihr habt die Nazis
besiegt!

To see Auschwitz like this,
all these horrible places –
mourning...helplessness…
gerer. At first it shocked me
to see these people dance.
And then I realized the
intension – and this is
fantastic! No one is dancing
on graves there, but rather in
defiance of the brutal
insanity!
Brave! Important!
Yes – you have defeated the
Nazis!

slob212
(US)

@sangthefear You are so wrong !! he is not thumbing his nose at
the others that lost their lives, he is flipping the BIG MIDDLE
FINGER to all the those that worked in the Arbeit Lagers an
Vernichtung Camps, all those that did their best to take his life, and
he is still her[e] dancing and living his life with his beautiful
family.

@fangthefeared You are so wrong !! he is not thumbing his nose at
the others that lost their lives, he is flipping the BIG MIDDLE
FINGER to all the those that worked in the Arbeit Lagers an
Vernichtung Camps, all those that did their best to take his life, and
he is still her[e] dancing and living his life with his beautiful
family.

Some netmenschen transition to this viewpoint, as petekeefer demonstrates. Traditional
remembrance may incline people toward an Opfer perspective, in which we become extra
protective of victims to compensate—in gesture—for their stolen agency. But as
robertmaxdonner argues, a distinction lies between where someone dies and where s/he is laid to
rest. Auschwitz is the site of death but not necessarily the victim’s final resting place. Even if
one were to define graveyard loosely as a site where bodies are buried, most of the camps’
victims were burned. robermaxdonner appears to adopt a conception of graveyard that is based in
the spirit of giving the dead peace. After all, the very name of a graveyard, Friedhof, means
“peace courtyard” but robertmaxdonner argues no peace exists in Auschwitz. The place
continues to carry the mark of the perpetrators. Defining Auschwitz thusly supports a positive
evaluation in which Kohn dancing within the Täter’s space proves his survival, literally of his life but also figuratively of his spirit.

Some netmenschen note that the message would have been clearer had Korman and Kohn selected a place that belonged exclusively to the Täter. Such a place would avoid the confusion of multiple interpretations, especially for viewers who are unaware of Kohn’s identity and personal experience with the Holocaust.

numiwumi (Germany) Vielleicht hätten sie beim Bunker von Hitler tanzen sollen, da wäre es mir leichter gefallen, es lustig zu finden. Angesichts derjenigen die dort in den Lagern so gelitten haben, kann ich es nicht. Perhaps they should have danced at the bunker of Hitler, it would have been easier for me to find it funny. In view of those who have suffered in the camps there though I cannot.

Both Auschwitz and Hitler’s bunker are important places with respect to the Holocaust; however, numiwumi argues they carry a different relationship to Opfer and Täter. Auschwitz, as the posts have conveyed thus far, can be read as either the victims’ or the perpetrators’ space. For some, although the Täter reached the pinnacle of inhumanity in these camps, those places become the Opfer’s because there they experienced their last moments of life. Auschwitz becomes their place, their gravesite. Hitler’s bunker on the other hand, as a place used exclusively by the Nazis, is defined as the Täter’s space. While the Opfer are certainly impacted by the events that occurred there, they are abstracted in the frame of Hitler’s bunker. The reigning identity is that of Hitler himself, and it speaks to his madness and his demise.

Yet, others argue Kohn is able to successfully insult the Nazis with his survival solely because he dances in Auschwitz. Returning to the very place where the Nazis had tried to kill him carries far more meaning for Kohn’s story and survivors in general than dancing in a place they did not personally experience.
Furthermore, as MsTaxifahren (Germany) argues, because “Dancing Auschwitz” is shocking and controversial, the video has done more to encourage reflection and discussion than the usual clichés of consternation that accompany every anniversary.27

d. **Auschwitz the memorial**

*Netmenschen* did not present a tendency toward a generally positive or negative evaluation when defining Auschwitz as a memorial. The variation seemingly stems from different understandings of a memorial’s purpose and function. Memorials were defined either as objects with the primary aim of providing the living a collective past or as objects designed to honor the dead, in which *netmenschen* tend toward positive and negative evaluations of “Dancing Auschwitz,” respectively.

For the first group of responses the survivors and descendants’ identities are of primary concern. Like the preceding butterbluemchen1961 post, these *netmenschen* evaluate the memorial and by extension the virtual memorial of “Dancing Auschwitz” on the basis of how

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27 Excerpt from MsTaxifahren’s original post: “Und das Spannungsfeld zwischen ‘Auschwitz’ und ‘Tanzen’ bringt, das zeigt doch auch die Diskussion hier und an anderen Orten, dass das Video mehr zum Nachdenken anregt als die sonst üblichen Betroffenheitsfloskeln an Jahrestagen.”
they impact descendants. As the following two posts argue, memorials exist to serve the needs of the living rather than the dead.

hypernaut (Germany, 40) (4 Likes)

Großartig. Denen die das geschmacklos finden sei gesagt, Auschwitz ist eine Gedenkstätte, kein Friedhof. Was gib es schöneres als wenn ein Überlebender mit sein Nachfahren – Menschen also, die nicht auf dieser Welt wären (!) wenn er damals im KZ ermordet worden ware wie so viele andere- an dem Ort ihr Leben und Überleben feiern an dem beinahe alles zuende gewesen wäre? Was gibt es besseres als den toten und den lebenden Nazis zuzurufen “seht her, wir leben noch!”.

Brilliant. Those who found it tasteless should be told, Auschwitz is a memorial, not a cemetery. What is more beautiful than when a survivor with his descendants – people who wouldn’t have been on this earth (!)! if he had been murdered in the concentration camps as so many others- at this place where their lives and survival would have nearly come to an end? What’s better than shouting to the dead and the living Nazis “Look, we’re still alive!”.

hypernaut (13 Likes)

…Eine Gedenkstätte existiert nicht so sehr den Toten zu gedenken – dafür gibt es Friedhöfe- sie existiert um die Lebenden zu mahnen, zu erinnern und vielleicht dazu beizutragen das so etwas nicht wieder passiert. Den Toten hilft keine Gedenkstätte dieser Welt, den Lebenden vielleicht schon.

…A memorial exists not so much to commemorate the dead – that’s why there are cemeteries, they exist to remind the living to remember and perhaps to contribute something so that will not happen again. The dead are helped by no memorial of this world, the living maybe so.

Believing memorials exist to the benefit of the living does not mean they have no role in honoring the dead; however, it does appear to support flexible boundary construction as contemporaries are encouraged and expected to construct their own truths of their collective past. hypernaut’s definition, for instance, gives Kohn a greater level of ownership and in turn more freedom to decide for himself whether his actions are appropriate. It assumes the aim is for
remembrance to evolve, to be malleable enough to serve each generation, as the collective
efforts to understand its predecessors and itself.

Those who consider memorials’ primary aim to be protecting and honoring the memory
of the Opfer favor far more negative evaluations of Korman’s video.

ReiseReise1000
(Germany, 47)

Eine Verspottung der
Gedenkstätten, absolut
GESCHMACKLOS !
Sehr sensibles Thema der
Geschichte! was den jungen
Generationen ewig anhängt.
Sollte man lassen sowas denn
die Juden reagieren sehr sehr,
verständlicherweise, sensibel
drauf.

A mockery of the memorials,
absolutely TASTELESS !!!!!
A very sensitive subject of
history! that forever hangs on
the younger generations.
One should leave such things,
because the Jews react very
very, understandably
sensitive to it.

ReiseReise1000’s post is very similar in form and tone to vanillamilc’s earlier comment (section
A.1.A., page 55). For these netmensen, the main purpose of a memorial is to give a voice to
those who no longer have one, the Opfer who did not survive. Memorials continue their story,
give their death meaning, and convey their truth, as far as we can know it. Though Kohn is
himself an Opfer, his survival means he has less right to the space than those who died.

e. **Interpreting place through personage**

Overall, netmensen who directly address Kohn’s identity and Holocaust
experience find it difficult to define Auschwitz as a gravesite. Though some may be inclined to
define it as such in other circumstances, no scenario exists in which a Holocaust survivor could
be seen as dancing on the graves of others who shared his terrifying experience.

Papillon0966
(US)

Als! ich diese Video heute
Abend zum ersten Mal sah
war ich erschüttert. Nachdem
ich erfahren hatte, dass ein
Auschwitz Überlebender mit
seiner Familie an dieser
Aktion teilnimmt, reifte in

As! I saw this video for the
first time tonight I was
appalled. After I learned that
an Auschwitz survivor took
part in this action with his
family, matured slowly in me
another thought: “See here
mir langsam ein anderer Gedanke: "Sehr her ihr Nazischweine, ihr wollten uns komplett auslöschen. Ihr wolltet mich auslöschen. Heute stehe ich hier und tanze mit meinen Nachfahren auf euren Mordstätten. Nach eurer Planung dürfte es mich und meine Familie nicht geben. Uns gibt es! Ihr habt verloren!!" you Nazi pigs, you wanted to wipe us out completely. You wanted to erase me. Today I stand here and dance with my descendants on your murder site. By your plans, I and my family shouldn’t exist. We do exist! You lost!"

gfigizag1906 (United States, 38) I don’t see it as dancing on graves because it is a survivor that’s dancing not a former SS man, I do how ever see it as dancing on the nazi monument to the final solution. 3 generations of Jews happy and alive in a place that was supposed end them before they even begun. I don’t see the disrespect for the dead just for the executioner. Good luck to your family and the old man speaks nice fluent Polish

As the above posts demonstrate, place and identity function to define one another. Kohn’s status as a survivor guides Papillon0966’s revision of her initial impression and inhibits gfigizig1906 from reading Auschwitz as anything but the Täter’s domain. Each netmensch strengthens the ties between Auschwitz and the Täter who built it, calling it both a “murder site” and a “Nazi monument,” in light of Kohn’s identity. gfigizag1906’s comment implies the issue may be one of narrative consistency. In order to make sense in the larger Holocaust narrative, “Dancing Auschwitz,” as any other Holocaust memorial, must present the dichotomy of Opfer and Täter. Because Korman provides no other visual to represent the Täter, the visuals of Auschwitz embody that role for many. As soon as Kohn is identified as a Holocaust survivor, the interpretation of the space ultimately must change, presumably to maintain a coherent narrative. Likewise, the visual of an SS man dancing instead of Kohn would shift the interpretation of Auschwitz to represent the Opfer, thereby keeping the Opfer-Täter dichotomy intact.
Identity is key in defining and constructing the social boundaries for Holocaust remembrance. Memorials, like many forms of communication, are expressions of self, both historical and contemporary. Having looked at how identities shape remembrance, the question now is how remembrance in turn shapes identity.

B. **Situating the Self in Remembrance Culture**

In addition to shaping and evaluating the perimeter of online remembrance, *netmenschen* situate the self within that remembrance culture. In other words, what is the relationship of remembrance and his/her collective self? What is the *netmensch’s* role in creating and sustaining remembrance? This section will look at some of the issues *netmenschen* have with remembrance. First, unlike their positive evaluations of Kohn, who sets the standard for healthy remembrance, *netmenschen* express dissatisfaction with a remembrance culture that does not appear to evolve but is instead halted in perpetual grief. Second, passive traditional remembrances offer (at best) few opportunities to partake in identity construction thereby perpetuating the agency-robbed *Opfer-Täter* dichotomy and excluding participants from their own remembrance culture. Third, German netmenschen, the most vocal group, exhibited two unhealthy responses to the guilt and shame of traditional remembrance: assuming excessive amounts of shame, often muddled with guilt, or adamantly rejecting it, thus fueling resentment. Processing the criticisms *netmenschen* have with traditional remembrance will provide the necessary foundation to discuss what virtual memorials like “Dancing Auschwitz” can do for remembrance culture and the post-Holocaust generations.

1. **Halted in grief: Problems with traditional remembrance**

   Through YouTube, the latest iteration of the post-Holocaust generation seeks to finish the grieving process left incomplete by the bricks and mortar of traditional memorials and
the institutional remembrance that surrounds them. Kübler-Ross (1969) understands grief as a universal process moving through five common stages: (1) denial and isolation, (2) anger, (3) bargaining, (4) depression and (5) acceptance. Though not everyone experiences each stage nor do they necessarily work through the stages in this order, Kübler-Ross’s model elucidates the finite character of healthy grief. In Jewish communities for instance, a proscribed period of ritualized mourning decreases in intensity with each stage. After this eleven-month period, the individual must begin to move beyond grief and resume a normal life.

Remembrance and mourning are separate, albeit not entirely exclusive, processes. Remembrance, the process of recalling events and memories of people, continues long after grieving, the process of overcoming the overwhelming sadness of lives lost. Remembrance does not necessitate reliving what took place but merely the acknowledgment that it did. As seen in Jewish mourning and the Kübler-Ross model, the human psyche cannot endure perpetual grief. Therefore any remembrance culture that perpetuates grief as the singular and reigning emotional experience will precipitate struggles for continued societal interest and support (e.g., the multitude of criticisms of wreath-laying ceremonies). If remembrance can no longer move people in positive ways to access their cultural memory of an event and leads instead only to indifference, it has failed to fulfill its purpose.

Several of those who posted comments to “Dancing Auschwitz” spoke of the inadequacies of traditional remembrance and commended Jane Korman’s video for breaking the mold. The following two posts best highlight the perceived weaknesses of traditional remembrance: stagnant, routine and inauthentic performance, and misplaced aim.

joevierzig (Germany, 51)  @Lucyannik
Weisst Du es heisst ja immer wir sind nicht für die Fehler unserer Väter verantwortlich
You know it is always said we are not responsible for the mistakes of our fathers, and
und ich denke es muss hier auch niemand tun. Ich finde es einfach nur wunderschön dass es nicht wieder so eine geschmacklose Kranzniederlegung ist wie wir sie sonst immer im TV vorgesetzt bekommen, mit dem erhobenen Zeigefinger. Wir können es zwar nicht ändern aber wir sollten es auch nicht vergessen.

I think no one needs to do so here either. I think it’s simply beautiful that it is not another tasteless wreath laying that we otherwise always get set before us on TV, with raised index finger. We cannot change it but we also shouldn’t forget it.

lasourceyxcvb (Austria, 29) Genial – endlich mal Vergangenheitsbewältigung ohne dem ganzen “Kranzniederlegungs-Trauerfeier-Momumentsenthüllungs-Tam Tam” thx a lot

Brilliant! – Finally a means of coming to terms with the past without the whole “wreathlaying-remembrance service-monument unveiling-to-do” thanks a lot

Both comments highlight the languid character of traditional remembrance; to remember the Holocaust has become synonymous with stuffy speeches and insipid wreath-laying ceremonies. Neither netmensch is arguing that the Holocaust should not be remembered—quite the opposite—but the monotony of Holocaust remembrance in German society on the whole works against its very aim of inspiring remembrance. At best, remembrance of this ilk has become a performance—an ineffectual stage act with a rhetorical checklist. As indicated by lasourceyxcvb’s use of the phrase “to-do,” these traditional remembrances make a big fuss but they remain superficial activities for the sake of activity instead of sincere efforts to advance remembrance. Rather than viewed as the catalyst to remembrance, the spectacle becomes “proof” that one has already remembered.

Its disempowerment is evidenced when joevierzig uses the phrase “mit dem erhobenen Zeigefinger,” an idiom to show disapproval of something or more specifically the behavior of
someone, often a corrective measure for naughty children. The wreath-laying ceremony is depicted as patronizing, as if the speaker were the adult telling all the children (German people) how bad they have been. Further support includes remembrance as “always set before us on TV.” While he does not go so far as to say that Germans cannot escape these messages, it is clear they do not seek them out. But as joevierzig’s opening statement would attest, the very gesture equated with this form of remembrance is entirely misplaced. If we are indeed not to be held responsible for the sins of our fathers, then the current generation should not be scolded by the raised index finger for actions committed by their forefathers. In essence, joevierzig argues that German remembrance culture has mistakenly mutated a failure of action (e.g., the Germans did terrible things) into a failure of being (e.g., the Germans are terrible people). Though his ethnicity is never directly stated, it is of note that joevierzig posted his first comment in response to “Dancing Auschwitz” in Yiddish. If his use of the language indicates he is Jewish rather than merely strongly interested in Judaism, then joevierzig, like the Kohn/Korman family, may serve as yet another Jewish example of healthy grief.

*Netmenschen* expressed a desire to move beyond grief and into remembrance. This healthy grief is what the following post implies in invoking Adorno’s comments regarding Auschwitz.

Weinreporter
(Hamburg, Germany, 62)

Wenn das Adorno sehen könnte, dann wüsste er wie dumm sein Geschwätz über Auschwitz war und wie geringschätzzig seine Meinung über die Menschen und ihren Willen zu leben. Dieses Video ist ganz gross, zutiefst menschlich und mehr wert als alle pflichtschuldigen Sonntags- und Betroffenheitsreden.

If Adorno could see this, then he would know how dumb his blabber about Auschwitz was and how dismissive his opinion about the people and their will to live was. This video is grand, deeply human and worth more than any duty bound Sunday- and concernment speeches.
Weinreporter is most likely referring to the often-cited quote: “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (Adorno, 2003, p. xv). The comment, which was not without criticism, was an argument that something so terrible and horrific as the Holocaust could not be aestheticised. Yet, at those very times is when humanity needs to write poetry most. Poetry, which stems from “poesis,” meaning to create or make, is one of the fundamental ways someone struck by tragedy and grief can regain his/her humanity. So when Adorno criticizes attempts at poetry following such a tragedy, he is telling us not to continue with human activity, not to go on living and creating. Instead of completing the grieving process, which by both social scientific and Jewish cultural terms means to resume a normal life, Adorno seemingly could not see an end to grief for a tragedy of the Holocaust’s proportions.\(^{28}\) For him, there was nothing and would be nothing more to be said except in soft, mournful tones. Weinreporter commends “Dancing Auschwitz” for daring to create art (much like poetry) and in his eyes for proving Adorno wrong. In contrasting it with duty-bound remembrance, Weinreporter seems to indicate that “Dancing Auschwitz” succeeds because it is not hampered by the institutionalization of duty-bound remembrance. Because “Dancing Auschwitz” is the result of one family sharing their very real experience, it is able to accomplish remembrance that speaks to the core of our humanity.

Contemporary Germans are born into a mourning process already taking place, one that appears intractable and has taken ownership of their lives with no defined end. In expressing their gratitude to Korman for departing from more traditional remembrances, several netmenschen noted that non-German outsiders might be the only ones in a position to initiate a new form of remembrance.

\(^{28}\) To give Adorno credit, one must consider when he made these statements. Grieving the Holocaust would indeed take his entire lifetime and much beyond.
Dear Jane, thank you so much for having done this! It is such a beautiful act of changing/replacing drama and fear into joy of life! It was time for this change, You have given Germany a new perspective and shown a way to let go the old and to celebrate the joy of life instead. Life is so precious, we should laugh, dance and celebrate much much more, just to enjoy Live. Thank you for bringing more joy into this world.

Klasse Video, extrem bewegend! Gedenken muss nicht immer pathetisch sein, andere Kulturen machen uns das schon lange vor. Cool video, extremely moving! Remembrance does not always have to be solemn, other cultures have long served as such an example.

German remembrance culture has plateaued in its evolution. It explains thrust26’s dissatisfaction as he calls for Germans to learn from other cultures’ remembrances and hummingbird2267’s gratitude for Korman’s efforts. Germany’s difficulty in processing grief is not singularly unique; however, the depth and scope of this grief is noteworthy. Germans must find an end to the grieving process so that their remembrance culture can move beyond its depressive state and embrace the range of emotions healthy remembrance cultures can inspire. However, as thrust26 and hummingbird2267 imply, Germans may not be the ones to lead the way. Just as many argued (in section A) that only Kohn, as a survivor, could have pushed the boundaries of remembrance, Germans may feel limited to certain forms of remembrance because of their historical role in the Holocaust.

For these Germans, Adolek Kohn and “Dancing Auschwitz” represent the final stage of the grieving process, the stage they as part of German society have been unable to achieve.

Adolek Kohn can feel and express joy even in the spaces that had caused him so much suffering. In a moment on the subway in “Part 3,” he appears to slip back into grief as he tells his daughter how difficult it was to return to Auschwitz. But this is sadness not grief; sadness refers to the commonplace sorrow that is part of the human emotional life; grief, however, refers to an
engrossing level of sorrow, one that is natural but also exceptional in its penetrating depth. Adolek seems to experience a great sadness, but one that stops short of grief. Having more or less completed his journey of grief, Adolek has accepted the events and his losses as immutable. Though he expresses joy, thereby showing he has completed the natural cycle of grief, he has by no means forgotten the tragedy he endured. Adolek has managed something few have; he has remembered without reinitiating the grieving process. There is an implicit sense of relief on the part of these German YouTube users and a growing sense of hope. After all, if someone who has endured the tragedy first hand can move beyond grief and mourning and experience the joy of life, then German culture can complete its own grieving process and work toward supporting a new form of remembrance.

2. **Dirty inheritance: Opfer, Täter**

If remembrance does not evolve—turn the task of creating to the people—it halts grief and leaves today’s generation with few options beyond the agency-robbing roles of the Opfer (victim) and Täter (perpetrator). The roles were already constrictive for the generation for whom the Holocaust was a lived reality; the severity of this tragedy forcibly transformed everyone’s identity so that one’s action (or perceived inaction\(^{29}\)) became one’s entire being. These identities become excessively problematic as they get transferred to subsequent generations through cultural memory. Four generations later, action and being are still largely entangled; however, unlike the war generation, the being of contemporary Germans and Jews are being defined by actions that were not their own—not even their father’s actions. In their own unique ways, the Opfer and Täter identities rob the current generation of their agency.

\(^{29}\) This refers to the cultural narratives that blame the victim for not leaving, not fighting.
To be a victim is by definition to be robbed of agency. Though there were many types of Opfer during the Holocaust, Jews, a people who struggled with the Opfer identity for several centuries before the Holocaust, are the most cited and their children have inherited this identity in its full force. While one may argue that many social systems react favorably toward victims and therefore this identity is unproblematic, the Opfer role puts the bearer in a position of powerlessness that comes with victimization time and again. For the Holocaust generation, it was a means of validating their experience and rightly bears witness; however, in doing so it inhibits the individual to be anything but a victim. For the post-Holocaust generation, it is a means of validating their cultural history, but it also places on their shoulders the same constraints. Casting a group as the perpetual victim strips them of their humanity of which agency is primary. One is not fully human without the ability to act toward a particular result. The inheritors therefore are robbed of agency twice: (1) through the history of victimization associated with the Opfer and (2) through the labeling process, which inhibits their ability to define the self. There is a fine line between validating a people’s cultural experience as victim and further victimizing them by defining them by nothing else.

Today’s Germans have experienced a similar loss of agency to define the self. Yet, it is hard to recognize hidden by the remnants of the Täter image. Perpetrators exhibit the opposite of a loss of agency; they exhibit an abundance of agency, as perverted as it may be. True human agency, however, cannot be taken; it is given through validation. Global sentiment has a history of invalidating perversions of agency thereby returning balance whether it be through an embargo, war, revolution, occupation, or International Criminal Court. Because modern

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30 Poles, who were also targeted by the Nazis, have had a different experience with the Opfer identity as a whole. As a group they have not become synonymous with Opfer. In fact, sentiments indicate they have not obtained the validation of victimhood the Jews have.
Germans inherited the appearance of an abundance of agency, their definitions of self struggle against the imprint left by the *Täter* image. The Nazi image has become the icon of evil in our modern world. It is because of the severity of this image that assignment of the *Täter* identity or even association should not be taken lightly.

For much of the world, the Holocaust is the whole of German history. It pervades the social and cultural life of any contemporary German, but despite its dominant presence, as a German, one is given little to exercise the boundaries of how the Holocaust is handled. Germans are surrounded and inundated by a remembrance culture that is thrown upon them rather than constructed by them. Of course, one may argue, any loosing side in a war never really has control over the way it is perceived, recorded and memorialized; however, what other country is plagued by a history that lies entirely in someone else’s hands? The German government may play a fiscal role in remembrance (e.g., memorial construction and maintenance); however, the average German feels they have a strictly passive role.

@Ljiljana273 exactly so it is, as if we could have a say in what this man is or isn’t allowed. It is after all his memorial that we are allowed to view or let be. He dances and that is his way of saying, hey look here you didn’t get me. Period.

It appears that Germans are shaped by a memorialization that leaves them completely powerless. It is one thing for the generation responsible to suffer such disarming social codes, but quite another for subsequent generations to be found following suit. When identity construction is governed by the Other and barred from the collective selves whose identities are at stake, people
are likely to disengage from remembrance culture altogether or worse resent its existence. The next section will explore the two responses Germans have when specifically addressing issues of guilt and shame.

3. **Verantwortung, Shuld und Scham**

Any subject as ethically charged as the Holocaust inevitably requires the consideration of moral emotions. Morality and emotion are tightly bonded conceptually and in practice. Nussbaum (2001) argues emotions are deeply connected to thought and not merely the result of animalistic urges and impulses. Though many cultures set emotions in contrast to rational thought, Nussbaum establishes a rational compotent to emotion. She distinguishes moral emotions (e.g., guilt, shame, disgust, etc.) from other common emotions (e.g., happiness, sadness, etc.) because of their heightened connection to thought. Guilt—responsibility of moral wrongdoing (i.e., action)—and shame—a state of moral wrongness (i.e., being)—are the emotional expressions of moral judgments (Nussbaum, 2001). In other words, we feel moral emotions because of our consideration and evaluation of perceived rights and wrongs. Labeling emotions with language, as YouTube comments do, further solidifies the connection between emotion and thought. The emotional life we lead is largely connected to the “emotional ‘grammar’” (p. 149) constructed by society at large on the basis of physical conditions, metaphysical beliefs, practices (influenced by the previous two), language and social norms (Nussbaum, 2001). Of course, Germans do not all experience the same emotional life; some fail to learn the emotional grammar and others respond differently due to the variation in individual experience and free will. These emotions in turn “summarize the way [someone] conceives of [his/her] very identity in the world, [his/her] sense of what selfhood is and what is central to

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31 Responsibility, guilt and shame
selfhood” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 107). Addressing the question of responsibility and issues of guilt and shame for post-Holocaust Germans, two patterns emerge: an excessive assumption of shame, which tends to be muddled with guilt, and a frustrated refusal of shame, itself an indicator of the presence of those feelings.

a. *Ich schäme mich*

The *netmenschen* who convey the greatest sense of shame often conflate their shame with guilt and include some form of apology with their disclosure. These Germans accept failures in being—derived from their ethnic and national German identity—as well as failures in act—derived not of personal actions but the actions of their compatriots 70 years prior. Hirsch’s (2008) concept of postmemory appears to be at play. Third and fourth generation Germans feel the memories of the Holocaust so deeply that they claim the guilt and shame of World War II Germans as their own. These moral emotions quickly go beyond the frame of the Holocaust as a shameful historical event and appear as shame of the German self through time.

The *netmensch* below represents one of the strongest claims to shame made by Germans commenting on “Dancing Auschwitz.”

| MDietrich4711 (Münster, Germany) | Für den Hintergrund dieses Videos schäme ich mich zutiefst & habe gleichzeitig jeglich Achtung. Es tut mir sehr, sehr leid was vor vielen Jahren passiert ist. | For the background of this video, I deeply shame myself & at the same time have a great respect. I am very, very sorry for what happened many years ago. |

Due to the linguistic structures available, Germans default to a slightly stronger linguistic bond between shame and self. “*Ich schäme mich,*” which literally translates to “I shame myself,” has two references to self, *ich* (I) and *mich* (me), unlike the English construction, “I am ashamed.” Furthermore, the act of apologizing for a deed he himself did not commit, likely intended as a
means of empathy, fails to distinguish shame—a generalized failure of being or a state of moral wrongness—from guilt—responsibility for the moral wrongness of a singular and specific act (Nussbaum, 2001). Guilt and shame are closely bound in German remembrance discourse and Germans in this group often take on both simultaneously when either is addressed. Identities born in shame face an arduous struggle for self-determination, and the conflation of shame and guilt only exacerbates the problem.

Netmenschen express shame of the Holocaust but also of the German identity itself. Though under construction since 1871, the Holocaust dramatically and significantly altered the course of German identity. Some of the changes in attitude and expression of national identity are common feelings of a war-torn nation. Others could have been more directly shaped through the Allied denazification campaign, which deliberately weakened national pride because of its strong connection to Nazi ideology. Without some semblance of national unity, feelings of shame connected to collective identity are fortified and passed on to subsequent generations.

MrArmenat
(Germany, 45) wonderful this old man with his grandchildren.
sometimes i am shamed to be german

kuckkuckify
(Germany, 36) Gänsehaut und feuchte Augen !!!
War bisher nur 1 mal in Buchenwald – als Kind mit dem Vater.
Stolz auf meine Nationalität?
– Niemals!
Alle Menschen sind Geschwister – die meisten wissen es nur noch nicht oder verleugnen ihre Familie. Letztere sind arme irregleitete Wichte.

Goosebumps and moist eyes!!!
Was previously in Buchenwald only 1 time – as a child with the father.
Proud of my nationality? – Never!
All people are related – most don’t know it yet or deny their family. The latter are poor misguided wretches.

Though MrArmenat’s expression of shame is more tempered (i.e., “sometimes”), he reinforces the feelings visually by posting in English. kuckkuckify may visually support her cultural identity
by posting in German, but she presents a harsher outlook for the possibility of national pride (i.e., “Never!”). For these netmenschen, their German identity signals to others an inherent failure of being as well as a reminder of their collective’s past failures of action. Both guilt and shame function as society’s moral regulators (Nussbaum, 2001). The scale of the Holocaust, however, has dramatically extended those feelings to the extent that they are transferred from generation to generation for an entire nation. Guilt and shame are not meant to be feelings without end (Nussbaum, 2001). There must be an opportunity for individuals and collectives to recover once morality is restored.

Some netmenschen encounter feelings of shame for not being able to overcome the past for themselves. In this scenario, Kohn serves as the model of remembrance having come to terms with the past. In contrast, contemporary Germans continue to be stuck, unable to move beyond grief and achieve healthy remembrance, which leads to feelings of shame for the following netmensch.

BebbeBee (Germany, 43) “Weinen hat sein Zeit und lachen seine Zeit, klagen hat seine Zeit und tanzen seine Zeit; Steine werfen hat seine Zeit und Steine sammeln seine Zeit.” Ich spüre keine Verbitterung in diesem alten Mann, keinen Hass, keinen Hohn, nicht einmal eine Anklage; und das beschämt mich.

“A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,” I feel no bitterness in this old man, no hate, no contempt, not even an indictment, and that puts me to shame.

BebbeBee likely sees her, and by extension other Germans’, inability to stave off feelings of shame as a particularly pointed failure of being. She points to Kohn’s ability to celebrate his survival—an indication that he can live in the present—without holding the contemporary German people as responsible for his trauma as a sign for how much further Kohn is in the
process of coming to terms with the past. The quote from Ecclesiastes 3:4, commonly known as “A Time for Everything,” works in two ways. First, it provides general support for the video’s nontraditional (i.e., celebratory, joyful) approach. The first two lines are especially supportive of this message because of the unusually fitting juxtaposition of our expectations to weep and mourn versus the laughter and literal dancing embodied in the video. The third line may speak to Kohn’s ability to convey a celebration of humanity that anyone can partake in (e.g., gathering the stones as uniting people by their common humanness). Or it may function just as easily as a reference to German shame. In this case, the line could argue that the time has come for Germans to overcome their shame and once again become a whole being in the likes of Aristophanes’ myth.\footnote{Nussbaum (2001) uses Aristophanes’ creation myth (part of Plato’s \textit{Symposium}) to explain the origin of shame. The myth purports that humans were once spherical beings with two distinct faces, four arms and legs, and genitalia that was male-male, female-female or male-female. When Zeus split these beings in two as punishment, they experienced great shame because of their newly disfigured bodies and were left wanting and incomplete.} Except in the German case, shame derives not from carrying on in our existence as halves of our spherical selves, but disfigured halves marred by the Third Reich.

b. \textit{Jetzt ist aber schluss!}

The second group of responses to guilt and shame adamantly refused to accept these moral emotions. Like the previous group, these netmenschen also muddle guilt and shame. They argue that they have no reason to feel shame, because they did not commit the actions themselves (guilt). Shame, however, as a failure of being does not necessitate a failure of action. The posts in this category were written almost exclusively in German. This is in contrast to the many English comments Germans posted when taking ownership of guilt and shame. The trend may be shaped by the language skills of these particular individuals, or more likely, their
decision to post in German reflects their fear of being misunderstood or attacked by non-Germans for their refusal to bear the guilt and shame of their collective.

The following post best represents some of the feelings of resentment these Germans expressed in face of the expectation that Germans remain forever in a state of perdition. To support their case, these netmenschen often desacralize the Holocaust in the contemporary context in order to better eschew guilt and shame narratives, as FrankAusWewer does below in arguing anyone who wants to dance should.

FrankAusWewer (Germany, 38)  
@Drex10r1 also ich habe keine schuldgefühle, sollen die doch tanzen wo die wollen, es sollen alle tanzen, wenn sie wollen. aber die sollen endlich aufhören, der jetzigen generation schuldgefühle zu machen und aufhören mit den forderungen.

@Drex10r1 well, I have no feelings of guilt[.] they should dance where they want, everyone should dance if they want. but they should finally stop making the current generation feel guilty and stop with the demands.

The Opfer and Täter roles are no longer applicable; contemporary generations are equally unholy. FrankAusWewer connects a guilt free existence to a Holocaust remembrance that no longer holds the German identity as an offense within and of itself. Once a person’s Germanness is no longer an inherent violation, then guilt and shame are no longer necessary. Defining something as sacred builds impenetrable walls with the bricks of moral right and wrong, and FrankAusWewer seeks to tear those walls down. It is noteworthy that he does not identify who the source of German othering is (i.e., unidentifiable “they”). Perhaps he believes this information is already blatantly clear to Germans. Whether “they” is meant to refer to society at large, media, the descendants of Opfer, non-Germans or even non-German Germans, he clearly resents the burden of guilt and shame piled on the shoulders of contemporary Germans. This is in
marked contrast to the previous group of netmenschen, who not only made no note of the origins of these feelings but appeared more than willing to assign these feelings to themselves.

Two of the primary arguments of these netmenschen are the passage of time and the belief that each generation be responsible for or have the freedom to create its own destiny. The following post represents a subset of Germans who are ready to move beyond this chapter of history. By 2010, enough time has passed and presumably enough of the moral debt has been repaid that constant confrontations with national guilt and shame are no longer necessary or even appropriate.

Tunsler (Germany, 32) @fahrkartenservice die welt ist schön genau und dieses verbrechen war bestialisch. wir haben aber 2010!!!!! irgendwann ist mal gut!

@fahrkartenservice exactly, the world is beautiful and those crimes were beastly. but we have 2010!!!!! at some point enough is enough!

fahrkartenservice (German, 41) @Tunsler …das 1000 jährige Deutsche Reich ist weg; die NSDAP, die SA und die SS sind weg; die täter sind tot, müssen sich (inzwischen) verkriechen oder sind verurteilt. alle die Adolek Kohn umbringen wollten sind in der einen oder anderen weise nicht mehr da. aber er, seine kinder und enkel sind noch da! ja, ihr habt recht: irgendwann ist mal gut, irgendwann ist es richtig gut! ein grund zum tanzen? allemal

@Tunsler …the 1000 year German empire is gone; the NSDAP [Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei], the SA [Sturmabteilung] and the SS [Schutzstaffel] are gone; the perpetrators are dead, have had to (in the meantime) hide or have been convicted. all who wanted to kill Adolek Kohn are in one way or the other no longer here. but he, his children and grandchildren are still here! yes, you are right: at some point it is enough, some point it is really enough! a reason to dance? definitely

These Germans are providing an answer to the primary question of the late 1980s historians’ debate questioning when guilt and shame should end and forging of a new German self should
take precedence—that time is now. Germans speaking for this perspective often highlight the innocence or at the very least lack of culpability of today’s young Germans. fahrkartenservice does this by explicitly listing all of the culpable parties and noting their demise. For Tunsler, stating the year is evidence enough. fahrkartenservice appears to agree with Tunsler’s reasoning—German feelings of shame should have an end—but disagrees with Tunsler’s distaste for the video. Her original post appears to praise “Dancing Auschwitz.”33 There she makes reference to Marquis Posa’s famous speech to King Phillip of Spain in *Don Carlos*, a historical drama by Friedrich Schiller. The speech proclaims the importance of democracy and personal freedom. Referring to it suggests she believes Kohn’s actions to be the embodiment of the personal freedom about which Posa felt so passionately (*i.e.*, Kohn can dance, create this video, and post it to YouTube as he sees fit). Supporting Kohn’s personal freedom to remember and define himself does not negate contemporary Germans’ personal freedom to define a collective identity without shame; they are not mutually exclusive. Perhaps fahrkartenservice would even argue supporting one is an argument to support everyone’s (read: both descendants of victims and perpetrators) personal freedom.

C. **Opfer and Täter No More: Remediation and the Post-Holocaust Generations**

Virtual memorials in online content communities provide better opportunity for remediation by cultivating fluid, interactive and creative spaces for self-expression. What takes place online is not so different from the processes taking place in social and cultural life elsewhere. As Rheingold (2000) argues, “People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind” (p. xvii). However, the absence of bodies and rigid physical objects has impacted the vernacular used in remembering the Holocaust. As

33 Original post: Oh Gott! Die Welt ist doch schoen. (Schiller, Marquis Posa)
products of a Read/Write culture (see Lessig, 2008), today’s generation makes full use of remix technology—tools used to mix and meld cultural objects to create new ones—to remember the Holocaust in their language and on their terms. “Dancing Auschwitz” is a prime example of the globally shared, socially constructed objects of remembrance that can be produced through remix. The memorial itself represents one form of remediation, redefinition, while two other means of remediation, role switching and disassociation, appeared in the surrounding discourse.

1. **Role switching**

Role switching, used predominately by those bearing the *Täter* identity, refers to the process of denying one’s given role and making an argument for one’s membership in the opposite role. *Netmenschen* who attempt role switching fall into Moses’ (2007a) German identity construct. They seek to repair the collective self and maintain a German identity by nullifying the *Täter* label with narratives of their own *Opfer* status—often as victims of disempowering mediated representations.

Right after the war, Germans sought to shift their *Täter* (or at best *Mitoläufer*, follower) identity to that of *Opfer* through tales of victimization—accounts of fleeing, occupation and heavy rationing. Those Germans, while not necessarily denying the suffering of Holocaust victims, shifted the emphasis to their own suffering in order to regain membership into humanity. Such attempts were largely rejected and heavily criticized for their deafening silence and dangerous obfuscation of what took place in German society during the 1930s and 40s. The historical backlash pushed Germans to internalize these narratives, and may explain why contemporary Germans limit their use of role switching as a means of remediating their broken identity. The *netmenschen* who did, cast themselves as victims not of history but of the continuous retelling of history particularly through media.
Besides I see it as problematic when the grandchildren of a crime of unprecedented magnitude, but that is 70 years ago, are pulled in. One must never forget what happened, but in 2010 to run into youtube links of dancing, even if surviving, grandpas, is for my taste too much.

Traditional media subscribe to the constant confrontations asserted by the non-German German (Moses, 2007a), but in doing so contemporary Germans feel chained to the Täter with little room to define their Germanness as anything else. However, in the remembrance space afforded by “Dancing Auschwitz,” everyday Germans can safely express their feelings of being battered by the media. In taking issue with running across Holocaust narratives via social media, Tunsler implies traditional media already provide ample exposure, likely too much in his view. In drawing the line with social media, Tunsler intimates social media are, or had been until “Dancing Auschwitz,” a final refuge for Germans to experience mediated messages without fear of being forced to confront their past. In this sense, Germans take the role of victim, victims of disempowering mediated representations, thereby nullifying their inherited perpetrator role and reestablishing their own humanity.

On the whole, very few Germans even attempt to remediate their identity through role switching; it is extremely complex and difficult to execute effectively. As Tunsler’s post illustrates, successful role switching is subtle and tempered in tone. However, role switching can easily degenerate to unproductive and even harmful areas of discourse (e.g., destructive identity
forces). The danger of appearing to emulate the reticence and obfuscation of the 1950s may be too great for many.

2. **Redefinition**

Redefinition accepts the identity assignment, but seeks to change its meaning. *Opfer* and their descendants primarily use this strategy to change the perception of what it means to be a victim and reestablish their agency. The victim was not victimized because of some inherent weakness or any failure to fight back; the victim was victimized despite his/her strength. Korman’s “Dancing Auschwitz” works to free her father and his descendants from those old definitions.

**master1sa**

(Germany, 23)

ICH finde es toll das er zeigt: “fickt euch leute, ich habe diese juden opfer rolle einfach satt, auch wir können glücklich sein! ihr scheiß Nazis habt mir mein leben nicht genommen und auch meine! lebensfreude nicht!”

I think it’s great that he shows: “fuck you people, I am fed up with this Jewish victim role, even we can be happy! you shit Nazis have not taken my life and not my! zest for life either!”

**Allacaya07**

(Germany, 28)

@Himmelsholz

“So schlimm kann es da nicht gewesen sein”…Ich denke genau das Gegenteil ist der Fall, und er war mit Sicherheit traumatisiert. Aber nach 60 Jahren hat er es bewältigt, und mit dem Tanz befreit er sich! aus seiner Opferrolle. Denn wer ein Opfer zwingt, ewig Opfer zu bleiben, bestätigt das Verbrechen. Ich finde das Videoextrem lebensbejahend.

@Himmelsholz

“It could not have been so bad there [if he’s able to dance in Auschwitz]”…I think the exact opposite is the case, and he was certainly traumatized. But after 60 years, he has mastered it, and with this dance he frees himself! from his victim role. For who compels a victim to remain a victim forever confirms the crime. I find this video extremely life-affirming.
boblkg (Andorra, 45)³⁴
germans would love to join u dancing, too.
winning against the old times.
cheers!

As these netmenschen attest, Adolek Kohn is a prime example of redefinition. In approaching history through joyful dance, he successfully redefines the *Opfer*, which is given little agency, to one that emphasizes survival, which is laden with agency. Surviving is not accomplished through inaction; it requires human willpower to overcome and he continues to survive in the memory of what happened. As Allacaya07 points out, the battle continues for *Opfer* (and by implication the inheritors of the *Opfer* and *Täter* identities) to define their own identities and overcome the people who wish to push them back in an identity construct made for them not by them, itself an action that further victimizes. Kohn dances out of the *Opfer* role into his own authentic expression of self, one marked by strength, courage, and joy.

Post-Holocaust Germans, such as boblkg, may wish to follow Kohn’s dance toward a new German self, but unlike *Opfer* and their progeny, redefinition is not much use to the inheritors of the *Täter* role. Those bearing the *Opfer* and *Täter* identities share the desire to redefine what it means to be a contemporary Jew and German. Given the strong connection between the *Opfer* identity and Jewish identity, redefining the *Opfer* also functions as a means of redefining what it means to be a modern Jew, likely the primary goal of the post-Holocaust generations. Germans, however, cannot redefine their Germanness through redefinition of the *Täter* because there is little to redefine in the case of Nazis—the epitome of evil for much of

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³⁴ boblkg’s voice, speaking of the internal state of Germans, and the Köln-centric videos found on his profile seem to indicate boblkg is a German expatriate.
Western society. Those who attempt it either are or appear to be neo-Nazis or Nazis sympathizers, an impression contemporary Germans avoid at all costs. Though boblkg may want to “[win] against the old times,” redefinition is unlikely to be the path. Germans must deal with the Täter identity by other means before redefining contemporary German identity.

Redefinition is far more viable an option for the inheritors of the Opfer identity. For instance, Yasmin, Jane’s daughter, indicates her and her generation’s desire and need for redefinition. After returning to Australia, the scene in “Part3” begins with Jane asking her daughter what she thought of the whole experience. Yasmin replies, “Depression. It was just heavy and I couldn’t hear one more thing about the Holocaust or, especially about how it could happen again.” Her response may speak to a resentment she may feel at once again being pushed into an agency-robbed Opfer role in which she and her community would be powerless to prevent something like the Holocaust from happening again. Korman’s work frees itself from the old scripts of institutional remembrance and dares to redefine the tone (e.g., empowering remembrance rather than solemn grief), the message (e.g., celebrating life rather than disconcerting warnings of “never again”), and the source (e.g., user-generated rather than institutional). In doing so, it returns identity construction to the identity holders, which in Kohn and Yasmin’s case is a story of redefinition.

35 Perhaps the Täter image persists to the extent that it does because the moral specter of the Nazis is so useful; humanity wants a representation of pure evil, a standard of moral reprehensibility by which all actions are judged (e.g., Nazis remain morally isolated even in comparison to other modern genocides and dictators). Germans certainly do not benefit; their collective self suffers, but for the rest of humanity there is some value. It is far easier and for some more desirable to have pure good and evil than confront, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1978/1998) does, that “good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being” (p. 168).
3. **Disassociation**

Contemporary Germans, the inheritors of the *Täter* identity, overwhelmingly seek remediation through disassociation—a non-German German approach to identity. Disassociation describes the process of accepting the existence of the role one has been labeled with, but defining an entirely new and separate identity thereby denying ownership of the original label. Unlike simple distancing tactics, which still indicate relationship however remote, disassociation requires a clean break, a clear separation of one identity to the next. The following comment illustrates most directly the strategy of disassociation.

Kaphunk  
(Germany, 22)  

@amilora  
You don’t have any clue … comparing german people of 2010 with germans of 1939 would be the same like comparing fruits with animals – it’s nonsense. Of course, the Nazi-regime and the Holocaust is part of the german history but the current people in Germany aren’t responsible for the past and their past doesn’t define them. Of course, people should always remember this horrible and cruel time, to avoid a retake of this time – Germany as well as Russia and other peoples

Kaphunk’s analogy drives the proverbial wedge between Germans then and Germans now. Identifying WWII Germans as animals conveys an aggressively barbaric and inhumane character. Fruits on the other hand bespeak harmlessness; therefore modern Germans appear safe and noncombative. *Netmenschen* seeking disassociation typically draw a distinction between Germans and Nazis in an effort to rescue some aspects of German heritage. Kaphunk, however, is not concerned with protecting previous generations of Germans. Instead, s/he, perhaps unfairly, further solidifies past Germans’ position as *Täter*. Though it may seem tame given the arsenal of insults available in the English language, the analogy goes to the core of personhood. Referring to any person or group as animals denies them human membership and places them on a lower rung of an implicit hierarchy.
For Kaphunk, no argument can save German identity, but there is a way of regaining a sense of collective belonging—stop conflating past actions with the being of today’s generation. S/he rejects the Täter role as something belonging in the past and an identity contemporary Germans do not use to define themselves. Their ability to reject the role, according to this comment, is in part due to their understanding of responsibility. Responsibility is directly related to action. In other words, modern Germans did not commit the actions leading to and during the Holocaust; therefore they do not bear the responsibility of the Täter. The contrast to the standard understanding posited by global consensus can be explained through a difference in object. Germans hold individuals and groups responsible for the Holocaust (e.g., Adolf Hitler and the Nazis), whereas, global sentiment, as it usually does, equated these ranking individuals and groups to the whole of Germany therein holding the country at fault. Three generations of Germans have since been born and are looking to reconceptualize German identity, but they are living in a nation still repenting for its past sins. The struggles of today’s Germans are due in part to the inability to separate the nation’s past crimes from its contemporary citizenry.

In addition to the historical battle, the German situation is further complicated by the persistence of neo-Nazis and right-wing extremists within contemporary Germany. Despite heavy legislation forbidding Nazi related symbols and organizations (e.g., swastika, national socialistic phrases and songs, fashion, etc.) neo-Nazis continue to spew hate in modern Germany. These right-wing extremists use hidden codes (usually a combination of letters and numbers) to circumvent Germany’s ban. Michael Weiss (2011), an expert on right-wing extremism, has developed a list of at least 150 different codes in his latest work entitled, “Das

36 Singing the first verse of the national anthem (Das Deutschlandlied) for instance is illegal.
37 Most notably Thor Steiner has circumvented German law by using Norwegian and Nordic symbols to communicate white pride. Norway has sued in German court to keep their flag off of Steiner clothing (Nolan, 2008).
Versteckspiel” (“Hide and Seek”). The continued existence of such groups problematizes the forging of a new identity for the German collective.

Germans’ frustration with right-extremists—past and present—is clear in the derogatory, at times quite forceful, language many netmenschen use when referring to Nazis of any form. Although the following post is a tame illustration (more forceful examples follow), it illustrates the basic principle of using such language to separate and isolate Nazis and Nazi sympathizers.

_ezelrik_  (Germany, 38) One of the best ways to celebrate life and defy all the nazi a**es – now and then. Unfortunately, they are still here, amongst us, fight them by all means! Mr. Kohn, you and your family stated – imho [in my humble opinion] – the best signal. I am very touched and encouraged. a German

Holding to his German identity at the end of his post underscores the idea that today’s Germans are not Nazis. The two identities are mutually exclusive entities not to be equated with one another.

For some Germans, it is not enough to disassociate from the Nazis; they must disassociate from the whole of German culture. Netmenschen who disassociate show a strong tendency to write exclusively in English—separating themselves from the German language further underscores their disassociation from German culture and history (i.e., Germans as European or global citizens). The stains of the Täter image left on German society and culture go so deep that disassociation from national identity itself seems the only viable option for some Germans. Historically speaking, the Nazis brought national sentiment to its height. However, this nationalism served as a convenient host to their parasitic ideology. Therefore, a national German identity is irrevocably intertwined with the last regime to galvanize it, Nazism. They associate nationalism with the Nazi propaganda machine, in which love of nation became a matter of race and argument for sinister government oppression. It is only in very recent history that a new
German nationalism is being rebuilt; however, even this is still primarily in the safe arena of sport. Given the intimate relationship, some Germans cannot fully disassociate from Nazism until they also disassociate from nationalism.

In the following exchange, NEUHEITEN100 illustrates this disassociation from nationalism in response to Arthur150271, whose comments (since removed from YouTube) appear to argue a causal link between and favorable view of German nationalism and perpetratorhood.

NEUHEITEN100 (Bayern/Berlin, Germany) (7 Likes)

@Arthur150271 Mein Gott bist du eine arme geisteskrankene Seele.. Wer hat dir nur dieses hässliche Weltsbild mitgegeben? Du bist in erster Linnie ein Mensch. Das du auch Deutscher bist ist nebensächlich. – Zufällig. Eins meiner Lieblingszitate vom großen Schopenhauer:

@Arthur150271 “Die wohlfeilste Art des Stolzes hingegen ist der Nationalstolz. Denn er verrät in dem damit Behafteten den Mangel an individuellen Eigenschaften, auf die er stolz sein könnte, indem er sonst nicht zu dem greifen würde, was er mit so vielen Millionen teilt. Aber jeder erbärmlicher Tropf, der nichts in der Welt hat, auf das er stolz sein könnte, ergreift das letzte Mittel, auf die Nation, der er gerade angehört, um stolz zu sein.” – Arthur Schopenhauer

@Arthur150271 My God you are a poor, mentally ill soul. Who has given you this ugly world view? You are first and foremost a human being. That you are also German is beside the point. –Coincidence. One of my favorite quotes from the great Schopenhauer:

@Arthur150271 “The cheapest sort of pride however is national pride. Because he reveals in it thus the afflictions of a lack of individual characteristics of which he could be proud of, in which he otherwise would not reach, what he shares with so many millions. But every miserable wretch, who has nothing in the world to be proud of, takes the last resort and becomes proud of the nation to which he currently belongs.” – Arthur Schopenhauer
@Arthur150271 lol.. Er begreift nicht was am Nationalen Sozialismus so schlecht sein soll Man man man.. Bist du arm dran. Aber das Vaterland bedeutet dir viel? Und die Deutschen sollten endlich über die Wahrheit aufgeklärt werden? Dein “Vaterland” wurde durch ignorante Leute wie dich kaputt gemacht, es sch.. auf dich und ist viel besser dran ohne dich. Die Welt wächst zusammen. Deutschland war gestern, heute ist Europa und morgen sind wir Bürger einer Welt.. Wach auf Junge

[…] Sich seiner Heimat verbunden zu fühlen ist eine Sache, darauf stolz zu sein zeugt von geistiger Armut

@Arthur150271 Laugh out loud.. He does not understand what should be so bad about National Socialism[.] [Man, man, man.].. You are worse off. But the fatherland means a great deal to you? And the Germans should finally be made aware of the truth? Your “homeland” is being ruined by ignorant people like you, it shits on you and is much better off without you. The world is growing together. Germany was yesterday, today is Europe and tomorrow we are brothers of one world.. Wake up boy

[…] To feel ties to one’s homeland is one thing, to be proud of it reflects spiritual poverty

NEUHEITEN100 encapsulates the German disassociation from German nationalism and patriotism in favor of a non-German German identity. She is one netmensch, but her words represent any number of comments left by Germans on the “Dancing Auschwitz” pages. From her first comment onward, she embarks on a mission to empty nationality of its meaning and significance. She puts all of humanity on the same level and speaks of their common experience (e.g., “People experience pain and fear regardless of their nationality.”). The inclusion of the most comparatively outlandish identity, Eskimo, speaks to how far reaching the common experience is and how irrelevant she believes national identity to be. Incorporating the quote from Arthur Shopenhauer, a German philosopher of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, NEUHEITEN100 places national pride at the bottom of a hierarchy of pride and defines it as a last resort. Implementing the quote works to establish a greater intellectual reason to not feel
pride for one’s nation while also avoiding the historical catalyst for her sentiments, the Nazi era.\textsuperscript{38} It also works to discredit the nationalism felt by other countries in which national passions actually signal a lack of pride worthiness of the nation’s individuals thereby depicting national pride as empty and without foundation. Furthermore, if one’s national identity is mere coincidence with no bearing, positive or negative, on one’s humanity, then contemporary Germans cannot and should not be denied their full humanity for being born into a marred national identity.

The comment’s construction and pejorative insults (which appear to be in retaliation of Arthur150271’s demeaning remarks) convey her lack of patience with such individuals (e.g., “Kleinhirn,” “Arschlöcher,” “arme geisteskrank Seele”). NEUHEITEN100’s frustration may be heightened because the destructive behavior impacting people’s conception of German identity is coming from a self-identified, fellow German. Germans not only have to fight preconceptions on the world stage; they often have to fight the enemy within their own borders. The continued existence of neo-Nazis (and other extremist on the right wing) could further support NEUHEITEN100’s distaste for national pride, especially because people would associate her with such individuals simply because of their national membership.

The question then becomes, if one does not support nationalism, where does the collective aspect of one’s identity come from? After all, human beings are social beings and our understanding of self is fundamentally bound to the collective. As argued in her fourth comment, Germans have moved beyond the constraints of the German identity and now define the self as part of a larger European identity. A European identity, the German answer to nationalism, is a synthesis of histories, cultures, and societies that successfully disassociates from each individual

\textsuperscript{38} Schopenhauer, who died in 1860, could not refer to a history that occurred after his death. The quote was written before a German state existed (unification took place in 1871).
nation and forges a new collective. According to NEUHEITEN100, it is one step closer to what will ultimately be an investment in a global identity. The idealism of what NEUHEITEN100 believes to be the final endpoint does not negate the validity of what she depicts as the German response to their history. In this non-German German response, Germans are first and foremost citizens of Europe.

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39 The European identity necessitates a disassociation, because the multitude of perspectives from European nations’ involvement in a long history of conflicts, including WWI and WWII, would spur cognitive dissonance within the European identity. To avoid that dissonance, the European identity had to develop a new image greater than the sum of its parts, an ideal avenue for Germans who want nothing more than to separate themselves from their past.

40 Some may debate Germany’s interest in a unified EU identity in the context of the recent Euro crisis, but in most respects it holds.
V. DISCUSSION

Despite the utopian ideals held for online discourse, often related to the democratic exchange of ideas, online remembrance is not without obstacles. Identity is both subject and object to remembrance; remembrance conveys past collective selves for present and future selves. *Netmenschen* express a degree of dissatisfaction with traditional memorials and remembrances likely shaped by the persistence of the *Opfer-Täter* dichotomy. Virtual memorials within social media have the potential to fill the gap left by traditional remembrances and offer avenues for the post-Holocaust generations to participate in if not lead their own identity construction. In the case of “Dancing Auschwitz,” three obstacles could hamper virtual memorials’ ability to fulfill this potential: destructive identity forces, commercial culture and copyright, and the temporality of new media.

A. **Destructive Identity Forces**

Not everyone who contributes to online remembrance wishes to support positive identity reconstruction. Flaming is frequently an issue in online communities (see Dery, 1994), and communities centered around virtual Holocaust memorials are no different. Vitriolic speech emerges when faces and the real-world identities they represent are hidden behind screen names. Trolls maliciously goad others to post incendiary responses or they cripple the conversation by other means (*e.g.*, posting off-topic or spamming). They exist solely to undermine the potential for a healthy exchange of ideas (Cambria et al., 2010).

Beyond these generalized issues is the more specific obstacle of destructive identity forces—those who spew negative energy in a deliberate attempt to damage collective identities. Instead of embarking on a healthy debate of ideas, these individuals deliberately wield their comments to maim or otherwise tarnish the others’ humanity. Unsurprisingly, anti-Semites and
Holocaust deniers consider “Dancing Auschwitz” as an opening to discharge hate speech. Anti-Germans also made a significant showing. Hate speech is never comfortable and anti-Semitic and Holocaust-denying comments would have been immediately censored and prosecuted by German law had YouTube been German owned. But Germans have difficulty in applying their laws to the Internet, which is global and beyond their judicial reach. Existing on a U.S.-owned site, German remembrance is subject to American laws that protect hate speech under the umbrella of freedom of speech. In the landmark case Whitney v California (1927, ¶8), Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis says, “If there be time to expose through discussion the falsehood and fallacies, to avert the evil by the process of education, the remedy to be applied is more speech, not enforced silence.” In other words, the cure to bad speech is more speech, a strategy netmenschen often implemented. For particularly heinous violations, YouTube provides practical ways for netmenschen to remove destructive posts: thumbs down or reporting a post. These tools become less useful, however, when interest wains and the netmenschen needed to utilize them have moved on to other media trends (e.g., destructive identity forces tend to linger and take over artifacts when others have lost interest). Yet, in order to ensure protection of the self-expression values encoded in U.S. law, a degree of hate speech is permissible in these spaces.

B. Commercial Culture

Virtual memorials found in social media have a host of other perhaps more entertaining/amusing content (e.g., music videos, movie trailers, funny cat videos, etc.) to compete against. They also have to account for the tone of advertising that surrounds them. YouTube’s aim is financial, not moral. But even so, YouTube seems to offer better remembrance for some than other equally commercialized remembrance ventures.

AWB1960 (Germany, 51) We need more of this and less “merchants of memory” who try to institutionalize the past.
The aim of the memorial itself is not commercial and its innocent display of self-expression is apparent (to most). A small number of posters appear to misunderstand YouTube’s business model and condemn Korman for profiting from the Holocaust. However, if anyone profits from “Dancing Auschwitz” it is YouTube, through the advertising that surrounds the artifact. “Dancing Auschwitz” is regarded as a departure from commercialized Holocaust remembrance despite finding its home in the commercial world of YouTube.

1. **Copyright: Universal, the giant who slew David**

   Though commercial entities endlessly promote their product hoping that their work will become part of the popular culture lexicon, they mercilessly pursue those who attempt to speak through them. Lessig (2008) refers to remix as the process and result of mixing and layering cultural artifacts in order to enrich understanding of the original or add depth to a message that could not be communicated by any other means.\(^1\) Remix is the language of the YouTube generation, not because of the commercial entities behind the cultural artifacts but despite them. Though “Dancing Auschwitz” is on the low end of the spectrum of remixed media, it illustrates the complex relationship between culture and economics in societies touting capitalism.

   The principles underlying remix have a long history, but technological advances have enabled inexpensive, high quality digital copying thereby drastically altering the relationship between copyright holders and average citizens (Lessig, 2008). Media producers ask their

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\(^1\) Remix is not pirating. Whereas pirating requires little to no creativity as content is copied in whole or part without alterations, remixing is a deeply creative and thoughtful endeavor requiring a digital literacy that transcends the technical aspect of copying and speaks to the larger endeavor of self-expression and artistic sensibilities. When we fail to distinguish remix legally and economically as a separate and unique endeavor, self-expression and culture suffer (Lessig, 2008).
audiences to identify with characters, empathize with relationships, memorize lyrics and
dialogue, invest their imaginations (and yes, their money too), and willingly and completely
embrace the worlds they create. People then do what they have always done with cultural
artifacts—play, transform, create—only now with far better tools than ever before. With the
removal of the “economic censor” (Lessig, 2008, p. 83, Bruns, 2008), the possibilities for speech
through remix are at the highest in our history. While netmenschen fully embrace the Read/Write
(RW) culture technology has enabled, most media producers continue to adhere to a Read/Only
(RO) culture, in which cultural artifacts are defined as proprietary goods sold for a profit and
intended only for consumption (Lessig, 2008). YouTube’s policy officially supports RO culture
treating copyrighted material as a commodity that must be adamantly protected and controlled in
the name of financial gains—nevermind that remix is a matter of self-expression not a
commercial endeavor.42 Anyone can report a copyright violation regardless of whether they
legally own those rights. The system favors the accuser, and the burden of proof rest on the
shoulders of the accused to prove copyright has not been infringed. Copyright was originally
conceived to encourage creativity and enhance culture, but especially in terms of remix, it has
become an obstacle to the very values it was created to protect.

After the video went viral, Universal Music Group, the rights holder of Gloria Gaynor’s
“I Will Survive,” pursued legal action against Jane Korman, which led to the removal of the
video from YouTube. Korman tried to protect “Dancing Auschwitz” by asserting it fell under
fair use (specifically parody) and therefore not subject to the copyright claim, which did not
work. Korman replaced her work with a silenced version. Many netmenschen were incensed by
Universal Music’s actions, sympathizing with Korman, cursing media conglomerates and often

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42 I say officially because there are serious practical limitations to enforcement when dealing with
the volume of material YouTube must contend with on a daily basis.
providing tips to Korman on how to circumvent the copyright claim.\textsuperscript{43} Their reactions to the silenced version of “Dancing Auschwitz” underline the disconnect between the business of media and the culture of media. When no legal alternative (\textit{e.g.}, a market of licensing to amateur videos, Lessig, 2008) exists, how can \textit{netmensch}en be faulted, legally or morally, for partaking in an activity endemic to the human experience, creation?

Seeing no wrongdoing, additional copies of the original version have been re-posted and taken down. The last iteration, posted on November 13, 2010, has remained live for now.\textsuperscript{44} The issue is less about the video itself. Given the girth of content uploaded to YouTube every day, companies of even YouTube’s size find it difficult to control all of the content that is posted to its site. Once a video goes viral people will ensure continued access by repeatedly reposting it via different accounts. Korman may have birthed the idea but rearing it is a collective effort. Unfortunately, a record of the remembrance that occurred with each iteration (\textit{e.g.}, practical viewing data but more importantly the cultural discourse surrounding the memorial) is lost. A select few who are particularly fervent may repost their comments on the new posting but most will not. The community may rise up around the memorial again but perhaps with tempered passions.

C. \textbf{Temporality}

New media and social media in particular focus on the new, which does not seem conducive to remembrance. Newness does not negate remembrance. For example, although, “new” is one of journalism’s key tenets, the Holocaust manages perennially to become a cover story even after nearly seven decades. The temporal character of new media both is and is not an issue for remembrance online. Perhaps it does not function as a permanent fixture for

\textsuperscript{43} One netmensch, matthias0000000, goes so far as to write a stern letter to Universal on Korman’s behalf.

\textsuperscript{44} As of March 2013.
remembrance as physical memorials imply, but is constant remembrance even necessary?

Content goes viral and then it is forgotten, but the same could be said for any number of media. Remembrance is not invariable; it comes in waves. Humans cannot maintain perpetual remembrance any more than they can bear perpetual grief. Forgetting is both necessary and not as tragic as some would argue. After all, forgetting does not mean the memory is lost but merely out of reach for the time being (Vivian, 2010).
VI. CONCLUSION

By repurposing the expressive spaces of YouTube as a site of remembrance, “Dancing Auschwitz” has awakened the grand hopes and formidable fears that technology repeatedly inspires. The advancement of technology as well as its uses raise fears that some aspect of our humanity or our communities would suffer harm. For example, we fear that by remembering for us, technology will encourage the forgetfulness with which human memory already struggles, and that the past upon which the self is built will be lost. The great offense of “Dancing Auschwitz” for some netmenschen is based in this fear. For many of them, departing from the culturally accepted mournful tones of Holocaust remembrance presents the first step to forgetting (i.e., forgetting the severity of the Holocaust). While technology has the capacity to remember indefinitely, forgetting is still very much a part of the online experience. The impermanence and dynamism of social media do nothing to assuage fears that forgotten remembrance artifacts will sink into the abyss of digital archives. Social media trends come and go, accelerating an artifact’s lifespan, while obstacles of commercial culture (e.g., copyright) can bring remembrance to a halt. When construed as an irretrievable loss, forgetting shackles Opfer to their mortality (i.e., without communal memory the essence of a person dies with the body). However, the fear is not just for the Opfer’s place in our collective memory but also for the lost past and subsequent loss of self for contemporaries. The self and our very claim to personhood depend on having memories of a past. The absence of something as profound as the Holocaust would drastically alter the selves we create, particularly for the inheritors of the Opfer and Täter identities.

Yet, as this thesis argues, by using social media for remembrance, “Dancing Auschwitz” also represents the hope of technology to enhance and strengthen the bonds of community. In fortifying the fragility of human memory through boundless capacity and an enduring, accessible
and open archive, technology affords a different plane of memory interaction that is inclusive, egalitarian, enriching and expressive. Virtual memorials have the potential to engender global interaction with a single artifact and a cultural exchange of shared experience that more traditional forms of remembrance are unable to provide. As such, they can be much more inclusive cultivating genuine discussion and offering an exchange of different cultural perspectives. Remembrance becomes an egalitarian experience, as anyone with Internet access has the same opportunity to be counted and partake in the construction and development of collective memory and in turn collective selves. With virtual memorials, such as “Dancing Auschwitz,” netmenschen, not institutions, collectively create, shape and lead remembrance. By entering the spaces where modern citizens spend so much of their time, memories of the Holocaust remain alive and well. Remembrances within social media enrich the remembrance experience, offering a fresh perspective with ample opportunity for interaction. For people almost inured to traditional remembrance due to abundance and recycled scripts, the past is redefined as a malleable piece with which to construct and enhance one’s understanding of self rather than something to be endured. Furthermore, these remembrances are exceedingly expressive. In particular with YouTube, a site founded on the idea of self-expression, remembrance breaks from institutional remembrance’s clearly defined producer-consumer boundaries instead encouraging widespread expression, from Korman’s virtual memorial to response videos and comments. These expressive spaces give netmenschen, especially Germans and Jews, the opportunity and resources to remediate their identities. Remembrance online becomes the start of identity building rather than a blockade to individual self-determination. Regardless of how advanced technology becomes, humans have a deep-seated desire to
remember. People will continue to contribute to the larger human narrative using technology as an aid.

With online remembrance still inchoate, “Dancing Auschwitz” reveals the nascent possibilities of remembrance that gives way to the post-Holocaust generations striving to express their most authentic selves. Indicative of the symbiotic relationship between memory and self, identity is core to any discussion of remembrance. For contemporary Germans and Jews this is particularly true as identity construction continues to be defined in meaningful ways by the specter of the Holocaust and the Opfer-Täter dichotomy specifically. As the bridge between self and community, identity has considerable impact on our ability to partake in community, the means by which we fulfill our humanity (Phillips & Taylor, 2009). Authenticity is an important aspect of identity expressions. People strive for authenticity in themselves and evaluate it in others (Taylor, 1991). Kohn’s dance is so moving because it is a genuine expression of his truth as a Holocaust survivor. Authentic expressions of self are liberating and endemic to human happiness as they form the foundation of true human connection. When we are most ourselves, we are at our most vulnerable and it is that vulnerability that allows us to feel connected to others (Brown, 2012). This authenticity is not easily achieved for Germans and Jews who continue to struggle with the ever-present past of the Holocaust. Too often their collective selves are reduced to the historical roles of perpetrator and victim on the world stage. These collectives need remembrance to embrace and encourage self-expression so that the past becomes an opportunity for connection rather than a barrier. Virtual memorials, especially those situated in social media, have the potential to fulfill this need and provide spaces for Germans and Jews to forge their authentic expressions of self in a way traditional memorials presently cannot. Because of this potential, destructive identity forces and copyright, which directly impede self-expression, are
especially disconcerting. Destructive identity forces sabotage self-expression most directly, but burdensome copyright laws, which define self-expression as a luxury, can be just as stifling for a generation whose self-expression is so intertwined with commercial culture.

Authentic self-expression is core to our media endeavors. We continually create new media, as the media before it, in our image in order to strive to answer the unanswerable question: who are we? In its many forms, this question is both the foundation and test for remembrance’s socially constructed boundaries (e.g., Who are they? Whom does this place represent? Who does that make me?). The search for identity undergirds the dissatisfaction with traditional remembrance, as institutional remembrances offer no recourse to express an authentic self when people are labeled as something they are not. Yet, in the generative space of YouTube, where identity expressions are paramount, netmenschen have the opportunity to share a more genuine articulation of their inner selves. The potential of online remembrance is not limited to Germans, Jews and other inheritors of the Opfer and Täter identities. Artifacts in the same spirit of “Dancing Auschwitz” could be fruitful avenues for any number of groups fighting to define themselves (e.g., LGBT, Muslims, Punks, etc.). Virtual memorials may not be able to replace traditional remembrance, but they could be the best resource available to post-Holocaust generations to reclaim identity construction and cultivate their humanness.
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