War Memorials: Identity Formations of the Survivors

I

In the mid-1970s, three reports on war memorials appeared in German newspapers but apparently were hardly noticed.¹ The first concerned a memorial of World War I; the other two concerned memorials of World War II. In Hamburg, several city officials tried to have an inscription erased that the survivors of the 76th Infantry Regiment had devoted to their dead. The inscription consisted of a saying of Heinrich Lersch in 1914: “Germany must live, even if we must die.” By order of the Senate, the inscription was preserved—as a view held by a bygone epoch.²

In September 1975, a commemorative ceremony honoring the victims of Stalag 326 VI-K took place in Stukenbrock. In front of the memorial to the sixty-five thousand Soviet prisoners buried in the cemetery and before the eyes of numerous visitors from the Eastern bloc, a brawl erupted, and several people were hurt. Members of the DKP (German Communist Party) and the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) fought with each other over the true legacy of the dead, both claiming it for themselves. The German police intervened only after the “Maoists/Leninists” had been driven out of the cemetery.³

In July 1976, one of the huts in the former concentration camp of Struthof in Alsace, which had been turned into a museum, was destroyed by arson. On the camp memorial (figure 17.1)—which, according to its
sponsors in 1960, represented the crematorium flames and, in the form of a rising spiral, called to mind eternal hope—a date was painted: January 27, 1945. On this day, after the Liberation, eleven hundred new prisoners suspected of collaborating with the Germans were brought to the camp.4

All three events point to a common finding. The memorials involved in these actions evidently do more than just keep alive the memory of the dead for whose sake they were first erected. In Hamburg, survivors or succeeding generations tried to remove a saying that had been proclaimed to
those who saw the monument since the twenties. In Stukenbrock, two political parties of the present day tried to credit themselves with the memory of the past death of Russians (while denying it to each other). In Struthof, as far as an interpretation is possible, Alsatians protested against a memorial cult that excluded the victims from their own ranks, or at least passed over them in silence.

However different the reactions are, the memorial’s challenge is a shared one. As in the examples just mentioned, memorials which commemorate violent death provide a means of identification. First, the deceased, the ones killed, and the ones killed in action are identified in a particular respect: as heroes, victims, martyrs, victors, kin, possibly also as the defeated; in addition, as custodians or possessors of honor, faith, glory, loyalty, duty; and finally, as guardians and protectors of the fatherland, of humanity, of justice, of freedom, of the proletariat or of a particular form of government. The list could be expanded.

Secondly, the surviving observers are themselves put in a position where they are offered an identity: an offer to which they should or must react. The maxim mortui viventes obligant (the living are obliged to the dead) is variously applicable depending on the classifications given above. Their cause is also ours. The war memorial does not only commemorate the dead; it also compensates for lost lives so as to render survival meaningful.

Finally, there is the case contained in all the ones mentioned but which, taken in and of itself, means both more and less: that the dead are remembered—as dead.

Memorials to the dead are certainly as old as human history. They correspond to a fundamental state of being, pregiven to human beings, in which death and life intertwine in whatever ways they are referred to one another. Innocent III formulated the nearness of life and death in the following well-known words: “Morimur ergo semper dum vivimus, et tunc tantum desinimus mori cum desinimus vivere” (Therefore while we are living we are always dying, and we cease to die only then, when we cease to live). Whether consciously or not, memorials to the dead presuppose this—what Heidegger later analyzed as “Being toward death.”

But it is different with war memorials because they are supposed to recall violent death at the hands of human beings. In addition to remembrance, the question of the justification of this death is also evoked. Here, factors of arbitrariness, freedom, and voluntariness, as well as factors of co-
ercion and violence, come into play. Over and above natural death, so to speak, such deaths stand in need of legitimation and obviously are, therefore, especially worthy of remembrance. The dictum of Innocent III thus ought to be altered: human beings live so long as they are not killed, and only when they can no longer be killed have they stopped living. Or, translated into language that would have made all too much sense in the 1920s: for humans, Being toward death (Sein zum Tod) is—in addition—a question of Being toward beating to death (Sein zum Totschlagen).

Dying happens alone; killing another takes two. The capability of human beings to kill their own kind perhaps constitutes human history to an even greater extent than our fundamental destiny of having to die.

There is not only dying, but also dying for something. Here, it may remain open for now as to who decides to die for what: the one killing, or the one dying, or the community of agents within which the participants or those affected act, or all of them at the same time, albeit in different ways. There are numerous variants here with which historical anthropology may occupy itself. What is certain is that the meaning of “dying for . . .” as it is recorded on memorials is established by the survivors and not by the dead. For the sense that the deceased may have wrested from their dying eludes our experience. The sense intended earlier can coincide with the meaning established by the survivors, in which case a common identity of the dead and the living is conjured up. The saying that commemorated the battle of Thermopylae was modified by numerous succeeding political entities in accordance with their patriotic morality. But the establishing of meaning ex post facto can just as likely miss the meaning that the deceased may, if at all, have found in their death. For the death of the individual cannot be redeemed.

Thus a double process of identification is contained in the difference between the past death that is recalled and the visual interpretation that a war memorial offers. The dead are supposed to have stood for the same cause as the surviving sponsors of memorials want to stand for. But the dead have no say in whether it is the same cause or not.

Yet over the course of time, and this is what history teaches, the intended identity similarly eludes the control of those who established the memorial. More than anything else, memorials erected permanently testify to transitoriness.

This is a contradiction that will be resolved in the course of this es-
say. The thesis that I want to demonstrate from history is this: the only identity that endures clandestinely in all war memorials is the identity of the dead with themselves. All political and social identifications that try to visually capture and permanently fix the "dying for . . ." vanish in the course of time. For this reason, the message that was to have been established by a memorial changes.

II. The Transition to Modernity

As the biological causes of death have been scientifically explained and, with such explanations, life expectancies increased, the ways of dying (likewise thanks to the natural sciences) have multiplied and death rates have risen with the violent killing of human beings. That certainly holds true for the last two centuries, whose death statistics can be readily surveyed. It is also during this time that the emergence and spread of war memorials has taken place, with such memorials appearing in almost every community in Europe.

War memorials offer identifications in ways that could not have been offered before the French Revolution. For the time being, let me therefore start by giving two references to monuments to the dead in the prerevolutionary period. First, the otherworldly beyond of death was indicated figuratively, with death being interpreted not as an end but as a passageway. Secondly, in this outlook upon the world, the represented death remained differentiated by estate, even though death became increasingly individualized. Both findings, which roughly involve the period between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries, in no way stand in contradiction to one another. The late medieval danse macabre initially was not directed in a revolutionary manner against the existing estates. Each estate is judged individually in terms of its human quality that becomes visible before death, the great equalizer. The diversity of the estates is marked in this world before the equality of death swallows it up in the next.

This becomes especially clear with the gradual spread of double tombs (figure 17.2) in France, England, and Germany during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The worldly but transpersonal official position is indicated on the upper level where the ruler is represented lying down in his official dress, adorned with the insignia of power. Below, his body deteriorates so as to release the individual soul to eternal judgment. As a ruler, he rep-
represents his office which is not subject to mortality, but the ruler is also representative as a human being—for human mortality, for everyone.

Such tombs, which present the official position and the individual separately or sometimes blended together, were reserved for rulers and the rich. Until the eighteenth century, soldiers appear everywhere on victory monuments but not on war memorials. Within the society of estates, mercenaries or soldiers recruited by the state remained relegated to the lowest level, unworthy of a monument. In 1727, a German handbook for the estate of soldiers (Kriegerstand) argued against soldiers being burned like witches or counterfeitors. And “old Fritz” (Frederick the Great) counted them among the scum of the earth. Even at Königgrätz, that is, at a time when soldiers were already worthy of memorials, the dead were deposited in mine tunnels and, after Sedan, they remained where they fell, barely covered. However, in places where commemorative monuments or memorial chapels for the fallen were erected, for example those that have come down to us from the Thirty Years’ War, such monuments stood as tokens of expiation for human
crimes. Thus the Christian transcendence of death and the estate-based leveling of empirical death were connected with one another. Death was a link between this world and the next; this allowed death to be defined both in its earthly sense and in its otherworldly context. Here a tension prevailed in which great personages were monumentally transfigured, but for the masses of fallen mercenaries, buildings could be erected as tokens of expiation without the death of individuals having to be remembered.

The shift to modernity can likewise be conceptualized in two ways. First, while the transcendental sense of death fades or is lost, the innerworldly claims of representations of death grow. Notwithstanding the point that Christian images of death also always had an innerworldly function (one need only to think of the tombs of the archbishops of Mainz), the definition of commemorative monuments now begins to change. Their innerworldly function turns into an end in itself. The bourgeois memorial cult emerges, and within this cult, there originates the independent genre of the war memorial. Since the French Revolution and the Wars of Liberation (1813–14), the number of memorials dedicated to soldiers killed in action has steadily increased. Not only do they stand in churches and cemeteries, but they have also moved from the churches into open spaces and into the landscape. It is not only the death of soldiers itself that serves political purposes, but the remembrance of it is also put to political service. The war memorial is intended to fulfill this task. It shifts the memory of the death of soldiers into an innerworldly functional context that aims only at the future of the survivors. The decline of a Christian interpretation of death thus creates a space for meaning to be purely established in political and social terms.

Second, as war memorials become more widespread, they are divested more and more of the traditional differences of the society of estates. The physical memorial, previously reserved for great personages, was to include everyone and to do so in the name of all. The individual soldier killed in action becomes entitled to a memorial. Democratization is brought together with functionalization. With this, the equality of death, formerly only related to the Christian world to come, also gains an egalitarian claim on the political entity in whose service death was met. The names of all the dead become individually inscribed, or at least the number of dead noted, on memorial plaques and monuments to soldiers killed in action, so that in the future no one sinks into the past. This kind of democratization includes
all the states in the European community of culture and tradition, regardless of their particular constitutional forms.

Compulsory military service certainly furthered the general entitlement of all those killed in action to a memorial, but it was not a necessary prerequisite. This is shown in Great Britain, a land without conscription, by the numerous memorials erected to honor heroes in overseas wars and wars in the colonies, culminating in Boer War memorials, which prefigured the type of memorials of the world wars.

The process of functionalization and democratization thus characterizes the historical succession of war memorials. They are supposed to attune the political sensibility of surviving onlookers to the same cause for whose sake the death of the soldiers is supposed to be remembered. This can certainly only be described as a long-term process, which is ramified in many different ways according to national and denominational patterns and can only be shown with many Christian overtones, accoutrements, signs of renewal, or relics.

But methodologically, it is especially difficult to distinguish the Christian and the national elements from one another. The recourse to the classical and Egyptian arsenal of forms, customary since the Renaissance, and later the use of natural and geometrical signs, gains a claim to exclusiveness in the late Enlightenment, figuratively countermanding the Christian interpretation of death. If, in the nineteenth century, numerous Christian symbols surface again, this iconographic finding can nevertheless refer to a context that is to be read differently in iconological terms. The context of classical figural elements in the baroque period is usually purely Christian, while the context of Christian figural elements in the nineteenth century can point in a different direction, primarily at the safeguarding of identity for a national future.

In other words, the iconographically visible finding permits no immediate conclusion with regard to its iconological interpretation. In any case, war memorials themselves are already a visual sign of modernity (Neuzeit).

The extraordinary mausoleum of Maurice of Saxony by Pigalle (figure 17.3) may be taken as a signal of this change.13 The earthly end is accepted without reference to any otherworldly perfection. The marshal, who is marching into the grave, leaves behind pyramids as a sign of eternal virtue, trophies as a sign of his glory, and survivors as mourners. They are moved by the death of their leader, lamenting his passing without being able to draw any hope from it.
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III. The Functionalization of the Representation of Death in Favor of the Survivors

The increasing thematization of mourning on tombs is part of the visual signature of the new age, for instance, in unsurpassed fashion by Canova in Vienna or Rome. Since then, the meaning of death is forced back to the survivors; since then, non-Christian symbols rival Christian symbols, completely eclipsing them in some places. The representation of subjective mourning is only the private mode of expression for a reinterpretation of death, a reinterpretation that allows death to be placed fully in the service of particular units of action in the political world of images.

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inner-worldly finiteness. Only when the otherworldly meaning of death disappeared could the political definition of its function gain the claim to a monopoly. War memorials refer to a temporal vanishing line in the future in which the identity of the particular community of agents who had the power to commemorate the dead with monuments was supposed to be safeguarded. That goes primarily for those halls of fame, temples of honor, and supermemorials whose costs exceeded the financial resources of a community or veterans' association of soldiers.

The many large memorials of the nineteenth and twentieth century were given a theoretical justification in 1808. It came from William Wood who suggested erecting a giant pyramid near London to stimulate heroism among business-minded Englishmen. Wood maintained that only the extraordinary dimensions of a pyramid could steer the minds of the English people in the right direction, namely to support the cause of their native country. Wood's fundamental diagnosis was that "the ordinary feelings of men are not adequate to the present crisis." To extricate the population from its lethargy and egoism, the casualties of war would need to be transported into an earthly immortality so as to secure "unceasing fame, long duration" for them. The only means for doing so would be a gigantic memorial serving "to delight, astonish, elevate, or sway the minds of others through the medium of their senses." The costs incurred in constructing such a memorial would be minuscule when measured against the benefits expected: only three days of war outlay would be required to secure, by way of the memorial, a lasting motivation for heroic death.

Certainly, a war memorial's psychological task of control has seldom been formulated so openly as to obviate any decoding through critique of ideology. It was only after the war that Wood's plan found its first realization at Waterloo where a pyramid was erected, together with British lions, by the citizens of Liège. Today, it is still a tourist destination for thousands upon thousands of visitors. The bygone demand for identification—to emulate the dead—has long since disappeared. The Napoleonic cult, in the meantime, established itself in the iconographic landscape of the Belle Alliance with its numerous memorials and monuments, and all of it is commercially exploited. In other words, the political space of experience of the Napoleonic wars has already been forsaken, and the original functional context of the memorials has been broken apart.

At the same time as William Wood, August Böckh devised a formula
for Frederick William III that was to be read over and over again by Prussian subjects. It first appears on commemorative monuments of the Wars of Liberation, then much more frequently and with slight variations on memorials of the Wars of Unification: “In memory of those killed in action, in recognition of the living, for the emulation of future generations.” The obelisks, plinths, columns, spheres, cubes (figure 17.4) or the Gothic-inspired tabernacles (figure 17.5) upon which such admonitions were inscribed elude as far as the text is concerned—like Wood’s pyramids—any transcendence of death in the Christian other world. The text and the post-Christian language of architectural forms aim at the earthly future of particular nations or peoples which, by virtue of such memorials, was supposed to be set for good.

This did not change when both the classical and the romantic arsenal of forms were obscured by specifically Wilhelminian and Victorian forms in the last third of the nineteenth century. Since about 1880, figures, heroines, and heroes appear more and more frequently on memorials—in Germany, they were supposed to commemorate the Wars of Unification, and in England, they were intended to commemorate the numerous colonial wars to safeguard the future of the Reich or the empire, respectively.

Of course, sayings like those of Wood or Frederick William III could no longer be quoted unconditionally after World War I when losses numbered in the millions, “for the emulation of future generations.” Nonetheless, memorials still maintain their political function after 1918: they, too, promulgate a demand for identification. The dead embody an exemplary status; they died for a reason, and survivors are supposed to find themselves in accord with this reason so as not to allow the dead to have died in vain. This is true across the board, and, therefore, it is not surprising that the arsenal of forms can be found in all countries, apart from characteristic diachronic displacements between enemy nations. If one disregards specific signals of identity on uniforms and helmets, the memorials’ stock of motifs remains amazingly constant.

This can—in some places—even be demonstrated with respect to the separate situations in which the victors and the defeated find themselves. If the victors may eo ipso lay claim to glory and honor for themselves because they are shielded by success, the same is no less true for the losers. In Sedan, there is a memorial—one of comparatively few in France of the War of 1870–71—that stylistically resembles in its entirety the Ger-
man victory memorials of the same war (figure 17.6). A guardian spirit crowns a gallant soldier with a wreath, and on the plinth, there is the assurance: “Impavidus numero victus” (Undaunted in defeat) (figure 17.7). Theodor Mommsen could not yet have known the inscription when, in 1874, he acknowledged regarding the Romance peoples that “in the absence of victory and victors, they celebrate the anniversaries of defeats and those gloriously defeated with such frenzy.” 18 We Germans would not have been very good at this. Mommsen presumably failed to recognize the po-

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**Figure 17.4.** Memorial to the fallen in the War of Liberation, 1813, Silesia. Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e. V.
itical function that inhered at this time in the frenzy for monuments. In any case, the Sedan memorial helped make it possible to morally come to terms with defeat; it could, by virtue of an inverse logic, raise a challenge to identify, precisely out of defeat, with the fatherland for whom the fallen had given their lives.

After 1918, the creators of German memorials followed this course. Even if no more victory angels were erected, the naked youths of the ver sacer (sacred spring) and the prone or mourning soldiers in uniform were still occasionally placed under the well-known motto, “in the battlefield,
undefeated," as it was expressed at Oerlinghausen. This was certainly not an inscription that could be displayed in the cemeteries of the former enemy states. Thus, there is a characteristic dichotomy between the heroic depictions produced after 1918 at home and the memorial themes and cemetery inscriptions that were permitted to be displayed in the former enemy countries: "Here lie German soldiers." The same death was identified in different ways, and the shared space of remembrance was shattered—depending on which memorial was erected where and how it spoke. Finally, it becomes clear (something which after 1945 has become obvious) that de-

**Figure 17.6.** A. Croisy. Monument to the fallen French soldiers of 1870, Sedan. Erected in 1897 by national subscription.
feat disposes one more toward remembering death as such than toward loading it with additional meanings. This also betrays the end of a long chain of national identifications. Today, a figural memorial for war cemeteries on foreign soil is often rejected for political and moral reasons, not to mention the costs involved.

Even if, as was mentioned above, the stock of motifs of war memorials (regardless of the causes and the enemies) has remained surprisingly uniform since the French Revolution, this betrays a common visual signature of modernity. This signature is found throughout most European countries whose memorials have emerged from the pregiven requirement of forming
or preserving nation-states. Often the figural shapes of the memorials are so similar to one another that only the inscription itself permits an interpretation. For example, numerous Swiss memorials for soldiers who died during the world wars completely resemble their contemporaneous German counterparts, partly because there was no victory to be celebrated and partly because the Swiss helmets were very similar to those worn by the Germans. Only the inscription makes it possible to establish the specific meaning when the stylistic features are identical.

On the other hand, there are formal similarities that last over time but jump from country to country. The history of memorials, then, runs in diachronic phase shifts. Depending on where victory came, war memo-

rials emerged as victory monuments whose wealth of forms—regardless of their dates of origin—remains amazingly constant (figures 17.8–17.12). Stylistically, too, time seems to have almost come to a standstill. There is a diachronic series of analogous, almost identical war memorials, extending from Germany in 1871, via England in 1902 and 1918 and France in 1918, to Russia in 1945. Again and again, the same guardian spirits, heroines, eagles, cocks, or lions emerge along with palms, torches, helmets, and trophies of every sort; they not only recall the victory and the victims it cost but are at the same time supposed to establish an intuitive pattern of political education.

Evidently, the repertoire of European victory symbols is limited, leading to similar manifestations of taste from country to country that can be called upon independently of other developments in the plastic arts. Cer-
tainly, a politically sensitive receptivity, one which remained comparatively homogeneous during the preceding 150 years, must be posited as a precondition for the series of victory memorials to be effective.

Altogether, victory monuments surely facilitate the identification radiating from them. Enemies are not remembered, unless as the defeated, and then their defeat is mostly concealed behind allegorical attributes or general platitudes. Even the death of one's own relatives is swallowed in such cases: “Death is swallowed up in victory,” as it says, quoting 1 Corinthians 15:54, on victory memorials in British towns and villages after
Here, the national and the Pauline variants entered into an indissoluble connection.

Regardless of the wide-ranging formal commonalities between all war memorials, there are certainly a number of national particularities whose special identity is supposed to be evoked by most of the memorials. As slight as the distinguishing criteria in the formal language of memorials may be, they become effective through their particular deployment and statistical frequency. It is striking that not only does Joan of Arc often appear in France as a masculine-feminine symbol (something for which there is hardly a counterpart in the voluminous Germanias or Bavarias), but France went
even further after World War I. Here, the fate of whole families (figure 17.13), the stricken wife (figure 17.14), the widowed and the orphaned, those left behind, and the parents of those killed in action are often chiseled in stone or cast in bronze and put on pedestals. Similar representations (figure 17.15) that trace the effects of war back to the home are to be found less often in Germany and are erected in less obvious ways, for instance, on narrative relief plates.

To be sure—and this is true of all countries—different social and political groups make use of memorials to safely preserve their own partic-
ular tradition by laying claim for themselves to the meaning of the death which has taken place. Thus the gray ossuary at Fort Douaumont, an amalgam of crypt and bunker, expresses the hagiography of the Catholic church that figuratively assures fallen soldiers of their ascension to heaven. On the other side, the historicizing and fortification-like great monument in the city of Verdun serves the republican tradition, once again in contradistinction to the memorial built by the city, which has its soldiers represented as joined together in an impenetrable wall.

In Belgium, the demands for identification emerging from the most important memorials are completely divergent. The Walloon ensemble of
church, tower, and place of assembly at Liège—erected to commemorate World War I—is today overgrown with grass and weeds and is obviously no longer used for state rituals (figure 17.16). By contrast, the memorial at Dixmunde, razed after World War II by the Walloons, was rebuilt bigger and higher in 1965 (figure 17.17). With robust persistence, the Flemings succeeded in having their memorial not only appeal to their identity as a people but also serve as a pledge to pacifism, at once commemorating and uniting all minorities of the world. This is an offer of identification that goes beyond the boundaries of a nation-state and makes possible a further ritual development beyond the monument’s occasion, World War I.23

Conversely, in East Germany, the Russian victors of 1945 represented themselves as liberators, and, consequently, the German soldiers killed in
World War II are thought of only by negation. A double function of war memorials becomes clear, namely to continue the history of the victors in such a way that they become the protectors of the defeated, consigning their former status to oblivion. This goes so far that even the monument for the victims of the concentration camp at Buchenwald—by Cremer (figure 17.18)—thematizes survival but not mass death. Among the survivors, members of the Communist party predominate, while the other prisoners, who were far more numerous, are relegated to the background. Thus in the memorial, the inequality of the survivors dominates over the equality of the dead, something to which the entire complex testifies. The death that has

taken place becomes fully a function of the victory that is supposed to be permanently set by means of a historical screen. Thus we are dealing with a conscious exclusion of others by obfuscation or silence—a practice more or less observed in all victory memorials.

American commemorative monuments distinguish themselves foremost by their shimmering finish and use of expensive materials. In this respect, they contrast with those of other nations, and are most similar to post-1918 British memorials. In terms of their content, the memorials depict on marble plaques in crypts and memorial halls (figure 17.19) how the bygone conflict was strictly Manichaean, a struggle only between good and
evil. There are victory monuments without a visible enemy; the enemy is bathed in the nothingness of the color black, displaced and outshone by the gold of the victors.

Enough of the examples of national particularities, which, despite the limited arsenal of forms common to all, still facilitate a sufficient identification for particular peoples.

Admittedly, it cannot be denied—across all national differences and in spite of the distinction between triumphant and nontriumphant war memorials—that no monument is completely absorbed by its political function. No matter how much dying for a cause is thematized in order to de-

**Figure 17.17.** Tower of the Yser, Dixmunde. Razed in 1946, rebuilt after 1952.
rive a particular group identity, dying itself is also always a major additional theme.

Viewed generally, it is striking, however, that the process of dying is often omitted on memorials. Objections may be raised that memorials are directed precisely against a sculptural rendition of the transitional; however, for numerous memorials, it can be surmised that the memory of the "dying for . . . " of having to die, provokes stylistic self-restraints. There is always a general legitimation of the soldiers' death, which transcends the death of the individual, even though the dying itself is rarely, if at all, recorded on the memorial. For most of the time, death is transfigured but not as the death of individuals; rather, it is their death in great numbers, numbers that are placed in a politically functional context. So and so many set out into battle and so and so many did not return home again. This is how the inscription was often stylized in Germany after 1918, particularly on regimental memorials erected with the intention of preserving an additional identity that was military in nature.
But what did such constructions of continuity, whose effect on future generations cannot be underestimated, matter in regard to the spontaneous mourning for the child, son, or husband whose memory needed to be kept alive by relatives? Death still remained the death of individuals, mourned for by survivors. Therefore, memorials could emerge like the one by Käthe Kollwitz (figure 17.20), who had lost her son in Langemarck and who belonged among the losers from then on, irrespective of how the war might turn out. After nearly twenty years of meditation and work, she created a memorial\(^{26}\) whose message is capable of outliving its own raison d'être be-
cause it thematizes survival in relation to death itself, not in relation to dying for something.

IV. The Democratization of Death

When at the beginning of modernity (*Neuzeit*)—in the sense of the experience of a new time—the desire arose for war memorials that were supposed to commemorate the pioneers of the future, Goethe had already formulated the "demands on modern sculptors." He pointed out how
earlier memorials were considered to have been intelligible so long as the front lines and the viewpoints of the opponents stirred clear partisanship. For instance, to see a Christian victorious over a Turk would only reinforce justified hatred for slaveholders. However, this would become difficult in modernity (Moderne), in present-day Europe, where conflict is said to have originated in industrial and trading interests but where the equality of both sides in terms of religion and morals could hardly be denied. In cases where the two sides could barely be differentiated by their uniforms, as with the French and the Germans, the representation of the fighting opponents could not be expected to have an unambiguous sense anymore. Eventually, when represented without any clothing—it is the sculptors' right to represent their fighters in this way—both sides become "completely the same: there are handsome people murdering each other, and the fateful group of Eteocles and Polynices has to always be repeated like destiny—only becoming meaningful with the presence of the Furies."

With political detachment, Goethe refers to the moral agreement of the opponents and to their common economic situation of conflict, an interpretation that was hardly accepted by the jubilant victors and the afflicted losers after 1815. This kind of historical-structural commonality where the Furies presided was not intended by the founders of memorials who instead aimed at an inner uniformity, at a national homogeneity that excluded others. The extent to which they sounded a common tone beyond national borders, however, is shown by the numerous homologies in the memorials' stock of forms.

The equality in death of those who were killed in action became a motif received with less and less favor. During the Wars of Unification, there were still memorials—such as the one in Kissingen in 1866—that commemorated both sides together. This happened in southern Germany, a region divided between Berlin and Vienna. Even common graves for German and French soldiers can still be frequently found on the battlefields of 1870–71. The reburial of the bodies of French soldiers killed in the Metz region happened later with the help of both French and German troops. In 1915, Wilhelm II had an honorary monument erected near St. Quentin, in front of which two figures cast in bronze represented young and old. It was part of the enclosing walls of a cemetery where soldiers from both sides were buried together. After 1918, the bodies of fallen French soldiers were exchanged for German ones who since then rest under French names. From
then on, joint burial only occurred sporadically. After 1945, the separation of the dead has, in general, remained customary—to the point of exhuming all fallen Americans from German soil.28

There is thus a trend to be taken into account that increasingly demands the separation of enemies killed in action. The enmity is supposed to reach even beyond death so as not to forfeit the identity of one's own cause. Equality in death is revoked in favor of an equality safeguarding national homogeneity: it is the homogeneity of the living and the survivors, in their particular political grouping. The construction of memorials takes place through political entities that by this very act define themselves against others. Therefore, already the functionalization of war memorials tends toward a religion civile in Rousseau's sense, and helps to establish democratic legitimacy. In the memorial, such a legitimacy creates an equality of those who died for the fatherland which is directed inward but not outward. Compared to the feudal past, the position of individuals on war memorials is transformed on the basis of the nation-state.

Still in the hierarchical tradition, a long series of memorials depicting victorious generals exists without their deaths at the hands of the enemy—as in the case of Scharnhorst—necessarily being a prerequisite for a monument. Even living generals remain worthy of memorialization: for instance, in the Prussian military tradition, Blücher or Moltke; or in the hagiographic tradition, Maistre at Notre-Dame de Lorette (figure 17.21); or in the tradition of republican pathos, Kellermann; or in the monumental tradition of giving prominence to a leader, General Patton. It is well known that the egalitarian tendency does not preclude the cult of the leader that emerges from the tradition of military rank in the hierarchical series of memorials to individual heroes.29

What is really new is the long-term trend to abolish the estate-based hierarchical system in order to emphasize the equality of all soldiers' deaths, irrespective of rank. The East Prussian Senior President von Schön sneered at a memorial erected in honor of General Karl von Bülow: it would have been better to immortalize the reservist (Landsturmmann) who shouted "Kiss my . . ." at the general when he ordered the retreat to be sounded.30

In the name of the Prussian reserve forces, Schön opposed every memorial devoted to commanders. He lived off the republican pathos that fell back on revolutionary models during the Wars of Liberation. Thus as early as 1798, an antimonarchic memorial was conceived: it was to be dedicated
to the emperor and the Prussian king, and the inscription was supposed to end with the sentence: "Sorrowful thanks from the mourning Fatherland! To all those whose names do not appear on this column."31

In this satirical testimonial, the entitlement of all the hitherto unnamed to a memorial is asserted. And without doubt, the political cult of memorials for the war casualties dovetailed with a monarchical-estates tradition that is perpetuated but also recast. With this, the equal status of all war casualties is effected in terms of the layout of both their graves and their war memorials. The two are connected with one another, even if the
fallen soldiers' entitlement to a memorial preceded their right to their own
resting places. In what follows, both will be treated in juxtaposition.

The transition from a monarchical memorial to a memorial for the
people (the hybrid forms of which have been clearly established by Nip­
perdey) finds its counterpart in the increase in the politically motivated
layout of graves. Taken as a whole, the representative grave for the ruler
is first complemented by the representative war grave, then—temporally
speaking—overtaken by it. On the consecrated tombs, the identity of po­
itical protagonists—first of the dynasties and then of the nation to be cre­
ated—was supposed to find its manifest expression. Not only do the living
vouch for the dead in front of the memorial, but the dead are also sup­
posed to vouch for life. Which life is politically intended is delimited by
the layout of the grave, the memorial, and the cult attached to it.

To what extent both war graves and the soldiers' entitlement to a me­
morial owe their origin to a revolutionary impulse initially directed against
the estates-monarchic tradition can be shown by literary examples.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, a first critique is directed at
the tombs of rulers. The later cemeteries for soldiers and other places of
burial had to compete with these tombs as sites of identification, finally dis­
placing them as a symbol of national representation. For Klopstock, one of
the initiators of the bourgeois memorial cult, it was no longer birth that
counted but only merit:

Birthright to immortality
Is unjust to posterity. As soon as history does one day
What it is obliged to do: it will bury through silence and
no longer set
The kings themselves up as mummies.
After death, they are what we are.
If their name remains, only merit will save it,
Not the crown: for it, too,
Fell with the head of the dying.

Embittered and with Christian-revolutionary pathos, Schubart exclaimed:
"There they lie, the proud ruins of rulers, / Formerly the gods of this world!"
He directs his hatred and scorn at the rulers' tombs, against those places in
St. Denis that were cleared away during the revolution.

The political function of the rulers' tombs, however, was to be adopted and used in the service of democratic ends. The burial sites and
commemorative memorials for fighters killed in action during civil wars later on served new claims to legitimacy. In 1830, Bétanger demanded a holy place for the fallen barricade fighters: “Place wreaths on the graves from our days in July, / Perform, innocent children, the holy rite; / Here flowers and palms to these sarcophagi, / Memorials for the people, not just royal might.”36 In Brussels, the appeal found its fulfillment in the Place des Martyrs, while in Berlin, the “Appeal of the Central Board of the Committee on Burials” on behalf of those killed in March 1848 went unheard after the revolution’s failure.37 Instead, the government troops killed in action—just like those at Rastatt—received their own memorial.

The political cult of the dead, to the extent that it depends on the building of war memorials, remains under the victors’ control—as long as they are in a position to exercise their power. But irrespective of the changing political situation, the demand for equality for all war memorials has gained acceptance since the revolution. In addition, the same visual tone is sounded regardless of forms of government. The tombs of the “unknown soldier”—one for all—are the last step in this democratization of death. Some of the visual documents testifying to this path will be traced below.

From 1815 to 1918, the equality of all those killed in action is increasingly recognized, regardless of the military ranks and positions that led to their death. Although Hanoverian officers still erected a monument at Waterloo that only commemorated commissioned officers and not the noncommissioned officers andcommon soldiers who had lost their lives, such memorials were the exception. By and large, it becomes customary, especially after the Wars of Unification, to list commissioned officers, noncommissioned officers, and soldiers separately on regimental and municipal memorials—but on the same plinth. The use of depictions of officers to represent common soldiers is a stylistic device that comes to emphasize this equality. In Poznan after 1866, four soldiers are portrayed with the features of four generals (figure 17.22); or at Navarin, General Gouraud and Roosevelt’s nephew, a lieutenant when he was killed, are depicted as assault soldiers (figure 17.23). Thus the upper ranks participate in the glory of everyone, a glory that they at the same time represent and exemplify.

In the war cemeteries themselves, an absolute equality is certainly introduced. The rule that officers are to be buried individually is generalized for everyone. The idea that every soldier deserved his own grave and gravestone was for the first time legally instituted by the North in the American
Civil War, even though Southerners remained, at first, excluded from the commemorative ceremonies. This democratic norm, anticipated by the Peace of Frankfurt of 1871, was generally followed in World War I by the Western and Central powers. The individual "right to rest in peace" has, in the meantime, become a norm of international law; however, Russia would not endorse it for reasons whose ideological and realistic components are hard to distinguish.

But at the same time that this democratic rule was instituted to individually memorialize every soldier, it became impossible to comply with it. For the dead who were each supposed to have their own grave were often-
times not found or they could no longer be identified. In the battles of the summer of 1916, seventy-two thousand of the casualties on the German side were identifiable and eighty-six thousand were missing or their corpses were mutilated beyond recognition. Similar statistics occurred in Flanders or at Verdun on both sides of the front. The technical means of annihilation had been perfected to such an extent that it was no longer possible to find the dead or lay them to rest, as the law stipulated. Individuals were swallowed up by mass death. This fact evoked two kinds of responses, both expressed in the commemorative monuments.

The first was that the sites of death were simply transformed into memorials themselves by leaving them as they were found after the armistice took hold. Hill 60 at Ypres was a battlefield that was later declared a cemetery because approximately eight thousand combatants were physically annihilated on a few acres of land and never found. With this, a postulate of Giraud's in the French Revolution was fulfilled in an ironic reversal: Giraud
planned a cemetery operation for Paris that would mold the calcined bones of the deceased into medallions or pillars so that, as a result, the dead would be identical with their commemorative memorial. This purely inner-worldly postulate aimed at immortalizing the dead in this world by turning the corporeal remains into the gravestone. The postulate, certainly still enjoying a certain magical quality during the eighteenth century, was realized in World War I. In Fort Douaumont, about seven hundred German soldiers suffocated and were immured: the wall is their gravestone—an event that was to repeat itself in the bombing raids of 1939-45, affecting everyone regardless of age and gender.

The second response was to erect massive monuments, such as those at Ypres, Vimy (figure 17.24), Thiepval, or Navarin, to mention only a few. On these monuments, the names of all the fallen who could never have a grave but whose names were never to be forgotten were written. “Their name liveth for evermore,” as the biblical saying chosen by Kipling goes. Promising earthly immortality, the saying is engraved on monuments in all British cemeteries.

Thus the category of the monumental victory memorial from the nineteenth century turned into an unequivocal memorial to the dead. The nation, which had previously shored up its identity by way of victory monuments, now remembered all the dead individually so as to let a volonté générale—in Rousseau’s sense—arise from a volonté de tous. Additionally, the formerly Christian judgment metaphor does not allow any souls to escape and guarantees a fatefully enriched earthly eternity now.

Perhaps the following appraisal can be made. Almost all the memorials of World War I distinguish themselves by the fact that they compensate for helplessness by pathos. The death of hundreds of thousands on a few square miles of contested earth left an obligation to search for justifications that were hard to create with traditional metaphors and concepts. The desire to salvage continuities or identities that were everywhere torn apart by death all too easily fell short. In Great Britain, there are several memorials that incorporate a timepiece, the ancient symbol of death—be it a sundial or an electric clock—in order to remember, through the death of soldiers, the fact of death itself. In this move back, there is nevertheless the attempt to evoke a new identity, for instance when the maxim is added—as in Hinderwell (figure 17.11): “Pass not this stone in sorrow but in pride / And live your lives as nobly as they died.”
World War II brought with it a transformation in the iconographic landscape of memorials that also changed political sensibility. The simple expansion of memorials by the addition of plaques for those who died between 1939-45 was still a fresh and generally customary tradition. In France, it was decreed by the state in order to mark a new beginning solely through memorials of the Resistance. But the style of heroic realism, the style in which most of the monuments by the Russians or those for the Resistance in France or Belgium were erected, often barely differs in its formal features from the official art of National Socialism. Over and above that, however, there are recognizable innovations that forgo a visual appeal to political or social identification with the sense of past death.

The annihilation not only of the living but also of physical bodies during air raids and even more in the German concentration camps necessitated the renunciation of the old arsenal of forms for war and victory memorials. Victims condemned to senselessness required, if at all, a kind of negative monument.

Thus, in a Bavarian town, a dead person is symbolized as a hollow form between three basalt blocks (figure 17.25). In Rotterdam, the destruction of human bodies appears, in Zadkine’s work, as despair and accusation, even though the gestures of the dying man seeking help may, perhaps, provide a shimmer of hope. Lastly, there are numerous nonrepresentational monuments with no direct reference to the human body (figure 17.26).
Their political function boils down, if at all, to the question of their meaning, without being able to sensibly convey a visual answer. Certainly, the formal language of resurrection often remains preserved here, but in the words of Max Imdahl, it is no longer a metaphor of resurrection, but rather a metaphor of this metaphor.

Finally, during the Vietnam war, Edward Kienholz created the anti-memorial, a parody of the victory monument in Arlington. He constructed an ordinary scene within which a portable war memorial is placed. Next to it there is a plaque upon which, depending on the new beginning of a war, the dead can be recorded with chalk so that the memorial is not blamed for the oblivion of death but rather human beings who shirk the memory of the dead. Although not everywhere and not universally, a tendency has thus grown in the Western world to represent death in foreign or civil war only as a question and no longer as an answer, only as demanding meaning and no longer as establishing meaning. What remains is the identity of

**Figure 17.26.** F. Duszenko and A. Haupt. Detail of concentration camp memorial, Treblinka, 1964. Rieth, *Den Opfern der Gewalt*, fig. 2. Photo by Bommer, Strasbourg.
the dead with themselves; the capability of memorializing the dead eludes the formal language of political sensibility.

V. Concluding Remarks

The history of European war memorials testifies to a common visual signature of modernity. But it just as much attests to an optical transformation of experience. This transformation involves social and political sensibility, which has its own history and has had a productive as well as receptive effect on the language of memorials.

The connection between a demand for meaning in political and social terms and its visual expression is established by the formal language of memorials that is supposed to reach the sensibility of observers. Both the forms and the sensibility are subject to historical transformation, but they apparently change along different temporal rhythms. Hence the identities that a memorial is intended to evoke melt away—in part because sensory receptivity eludes the formal language presented and in part because the forms, once shaped, begin to speak another language than the one from which they were initially fashioned. Memorials, like all works of art, have a surplus potential to take on a life of their own. For this reason, the original meaning of countless memorials is no longer recognizable without recourse to inscriptions or other empirically comprehensible reference signals.

Since the French Revolution, the historical experience begins to emerge that war memorials lose their original emphasis with the passing of the generations responsible for their construction. Numerous memorials from the nineteenth century have not only acquired an external patina; they have fallen into oblivion, and if they are maintained and visited, then only rarely is it to reassert their original political sense. Even in the victor countries of 1918, the celebration of the armistice of November 11 draws fewer and fewer people. The political cult at the old war memorials dries up as soon as the last survivors pass away. One might trace this result back to the natural succession of generations, without having to call upon the fast pace of the modern age. Political experiences or messages can only be passed down beyond the death of a particular generation with great effort. To this end, societal institutions are required. In any case, the memorial, the supposed guarantor of sensory transmission beyond death, does not appear to be ca-
pable of achieving this task by itself. A conscious adoption of the message is always necessary.

For this reason, there are exceptions, especially where national memorials are concerned. Their maintenance is taken care of by particular political associations. In this case, it becomes possible for the cultic acts of which they are the focus to last for a longer time.

The dismantling of memorials testifies to how long the inscriptions and signatures of war memorials speak to future generations. Such dismantlings take place for the most part when the founding generation has neither entirely passed away nor can be fought as a direct political opponent. In 1918, after a half century had gone by, the French were able to afford to leave untouched the German war memorials of 1870–71 in Alsace-Lorraine—as monuments of those who were now the defeated. Memorials are taken down when they are felt to be a threat or when a tradition that is still living is intended to be suppressed. To mention a few intervals between commemorated dates and the dismantling of memorials: in Celle, a monument commemorating 1866 was already dismantled in 1869; in Düsseldorf, a 1918 monument or in Weimar, one from 1920—both dismantled in 1933; in Luxembourg and Compiègne, ones from 1918—dismantled in 1940; and monuments of 1918 in many other places in Germany—removed after World War II. In all cases, the intention was to annul political demands for identification.

Memorials long outlasting their immediate occasion may be preserved for historical or traditional reasons, but, even then, their expressive power gradually changes. All over Europe, there is a diachronic line of victory memorials whose formal similarity holds out regardless of particular countries and victors. They move together structurally. It is, then, only victory as such, no longer any particular victory, that is brought to mind. The formal language specific to war memorials is obsolete without ceasing to speak. Evidently, this language outlives its unique, politically and socially determined causes, so that the signs are no longer understood politically but remain comprehensible nonetheless. This difference, this gap, is filled, so to speak, by aesthetics; it interrogates the forms in terms of their own “statement.” In other words, the “aesthetic” possibilities for a statement, connected to the sensory receptivity of observers, outlast the political demands for identification that they were supposed to establish. If one investigates war memorials by asking which “aesthetic” signals have outlasted
their immediate occasion and which signs have endured throughout the changes in form, one is clearly referred back to symbols of death. Whether dressed in hope or cloaked in grief, symbols of death last longer than any individual case. Although the individual case of death may fade, death is nonetheless still in store for every observer.

Translated by Todd Presner