

Introduction: Photography and Twentieth-Century German History

Elizabeth Harvey and Maiken Umbach

History conjures up an image of the past and transports it into our present.

Photographs both facilitate and, at times, markedly determine this historical process, especially for the twentieth century. For better or worse, they have irrevocably shaped the way we imagine the characters and sites of modern history. From infamous dictators to mass political rallies, from radical protests to everyday leisure pursuits: photographs form powerful frames through which we historians represent the past to ourselves and to our audiences.

Photographs render the past almost deceptively legible. Much of their attraction derives from their appearance of accuracy—their “evidentiary promise” or “presumption of veracity.”¹ Photography’s potential for lifelike portraiture made it an obvious tool for forensic identification and anthropological research.² Photographs similarly assist our historical detective work of uncovering the “real face” of the past. Unlike other media of visual representation, photography is able to capture particular moments or events with greater immediacy and spontaneity than paintings or even film. The fact that photography has become such an eminently quotidian practice makes photographs seem all the more readable and accessible. As a Kodak advertisement put it in 1989, “150 years ago a language was invented that everyone understood.”³ The existence of photographic forgeries and the practice of tampering with photographs for personal or ideological reasons are widely recognized. Yet, scholars and the wider public continue to view most photos, at least from the analog era, as relatively unproblematic documents of something that—at least for an instant—“was there.”⁴ As a consequence, historians tend to use photographs more

often as illustrations of historical works than as historical sources that are themselves in need of careful critical interpretation.

This special issue is designed to explore the role of photography in modern German history. We are not setting out to identify a single “German” photographic practice, or one that was somehow distinct from those in other nation-states, but we shall argue that there are good reasons for this ‘national’ focus. At first sight it might seem paradoxical to bring a ‘national’ perspective to bear on the social and cultural practices associated with photography, which transcend national borders, given the multiplicity and ruptured quality of the German story. As David Blackbourn and James Retallack have put it, “the political entity called Germany was so protean that German-speaking Europe seemed almost to serve as a laboratory for testing out different forms of state.”⁵ The central thing to remember about German history, H. Glenn Penny has similarly cautioned, is that it had no center.⁶ What was true for German territory and politics also applies to culture: there was no singular German culture in which we can situate the practice of photography, but rather, a multiplicity of local, regional, national, and transnational practices. In this context, any search for a “typically German” approach to photography would risk using cultural history to reinscribe long-discredited narratives of national continuity or homogeneity.⁷ After all, sociopolitical circumstances—the relationship between individual German territories, the physical boundaries of the state, colonial expansion, large-scale inward and outward migrations, countless ethnically mixed regions and enclaves—frequently and dramatically disrupted narratives of national identity, throwing into disarray any unitary claim about what it meant to be German.

Yet, it is this very absence of center and lack of continuity that makes the story of German photography a particularly worthwhile case study. As a genre and practice,

photography—despite the speed in which images are produced—has adhered to slow-changing conventions that contrast greatly with the extreme instability of German political history. Studies of German photography have shed light on photographic cultures during the final years of the Kaiserreich, the Weimar Republic, the National Socialist era, World War II and the Holocaust, as well as on the distinctive cultures that took shape on both sides of the Cold War divide in postwar Germany.⁸ These studies reveal striking continuities: not only among the professional photographers whose careers spanned key divides, but also in the practice of snapshot or domestic photography and in the production and consumption of illustrated periodicals.⁹

Continuities can be deceptive, however. In the context of radical change and instability, seemingly similar pictures can take on radically different meanings. One finds such semantic shifts when they actually depict change—as many of them do—and also when, they help to naturalize “unnatural” political ruptures by adopting conventional and familiar pictorial strategies. The history of photographic practices offers a way to explore how people imagined themselves and interpreted the world around them. Yet, we need to relate such processes of “meaning-making” to the radical and repeated regime changes, war, terror, repression, and social upheaval that characterized German history in the twentieth century. The contributors to this special issue thus not only focus on different periods of German history, but also reflect on the tension between convention and rupture in photographic practice during and across period divisions, from the late Kaiserreich and Weimar Republic (Leora Auslander), through the Third Reich (Maiken Umbach, Ulrich Prehn, Andrea Löw), to the latter decades of the German Democratic Republic (Josie McLellan).

<H1>***</H1>

To make sense of the photographs that are the subject of this special issue, we draw on methods and approaches from work on photography in general, as well as from scholarship that examines the legibility of historical photographs in particular. One important methodological impulse comes from the so-called pictorial turn, whose practitioners understand visual representations as social constructs, the significance of which lies not so much in the “facts” they appear to reveal than in the manner of their representation.¹⁰ Read in this way, a photograph’s meaning derives from the way in which the motif is depicted (i.e., how the scene is composed and framed by the individual photographer), and from the multiple meanings inherent in the precedents each photo draws upon consciously or otherwise. In this interpretation, a photo, much like a text, can communicate many messages or codes beyond the immediate control or consciousness of its creator. Each time we make or look at a new image, we mobilize visual tropes, pictorial conventions, and collective memories.¹¹ Just as text is part of a wider discourse, so is photography part of a wider pictorial milieu to which it is constantly making reference. Such references reach deep into the affective, emotional, and—some have even suggested—psychoanalytical realm of human belief systems. For Slavoj Žižek, for example, images are not just “symptoms” of some objective truth or condition, as the work of Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud might suggest: rather, they constitute the “dreamwork” and “commodity-form” that constitute the real nature of ideological fantasies.¹²

If images are indeed nodal points of visual discourses that are both broad chronologically and “deep” in terms of the levels of experience they refer to and

invoke, then photographs need to be approached as substantive and complex historical sources in their own right. This important insight complicates our thinking about the role of imagery in political propaganda. In one sense, the visual turn has underscored the centrality of photography for propagandistic political communication.¹³

Photographs did not just illustrate political texts: they were communicative acts that significantly expanded the range of registers in and through which people attempted to persuade, convince, and mobilize others for political ends. Beginning in the early twentieth century, photographs in illustrated magazines and newspapers, in photobooks, and on posters found their place in the campaigning journalism and electoral propaganda of both the Left and Right.¹⁴ The use of photography as a key tool of diverse propaganda campaigns flourished most notoriously—along with official propaganda exhibitions—under the Nazi regime.¹⁵ And in postwar Germany, documentary photography, which many associated with the documentary photography of the 1920s, rose to new prominence. In what Sarah James has called its “serial form,” photography helped to naturalize both socialist and consumerist utopias in East and West Germany.¹⁶ Those who seized on the medium as a new language with which to reach and persuade the public attached much weight to the apparent immediacy and veracity of photographs.¹⁷ Photographs were sometimes presented as “speaking for themselves.” But in order to pin down the intended message of a photograph, publishers typically provided a caption that excluded the possibility of political “misreadings,” or placed photographs—singly or in series—within an explicit ideological framework or context.¹⁸

It has become virtually axiomatic for historians who use photographs as sources to emphasize the significance of the context within which they were produced and used. Much recent research investigates the way in which the deployment (or

redployment) of each photograph produces its meaning. That entails considering factors such as the location of a photograph on a printed page (i.e., the surrounding text, the caption, and the relationship to other photographs on the same page); the narrative structure of a photo essay or album; and the multisensory “framing” of a photograph in an exhibition or other form of display. It is clear that the study of photography has moved irrevocably away from the traditional conventions of art history, whose practitioners tended to locate meaning within an image itself, without consideration of text and context.

Emphasizing context above all else entails its own pitfalls, however. Whereas some claim that a photograph gains meaning only through the context in which it is placed, those who have embraced the pictorial turn insist that each image is inherently complex and cannot be reduced to a singular intention—whether that of the person producing it or that of the person, agency, or institution deploying it. If photographs typically refer to existing pictorial conventions and thus have certain inherent but unstable meanings, we cannot regard them then as simple “chameleon-like” containers whose meaning is derived entirely from the political context of their deployment.¹⁹

This brings us to the question of agency. Taking her cue from Arjun Appadurai’s *Social Life of Things*, Elizabeth Edwards has made a powerful case for treating photographs as objects that possess a degree of agency. This argument builds on Bruno Latour’s notion of objects as *actants*.²⁰ Latour’s approach, which has informed not just science and technology studies, but also the study of material infrastructures of the city and the state, does not deny that *actants* such as photographs are made by humans. But rather than interpreting them as expressions of a photographer’s intentions, the Latour approach focuses on their effects within so-called actor-networks, i.e., those contingent assemblages of people and objects that

constitute the sphere of “the social.”²¹ Here, humans and material objects constantly influence and condition one another in ways that binary distinctions—between the material and the semiotic, the active and the passive, the human and the nonhuman—obscure.

Drawing on this approach, we can explore the agency of objects such as photographs, as well as their power to condition human behavior, without denying that their creators initially produced them for a particular purpose and context. Edwards takes up this theme, but locates the agency of photographs in more affective realms. Photographs, she suggests, embody rhetorical patterns of meaning that shape particular responses to them. Photographs thus provide “prompts” for particular readings and the associated reactions in those who view them.²² In making this claim, Edwards applies more general methodological insights from art history and anthropology. Michael Ann Holly makes a related methodological point in her attempt to emancipate the interpretation of images from the search for “meaning” associated with art history. To her, representational images actively prefigure the kinds of histories that can be written about them.²³ From an anthropological perspective, Alfred Gell has argued that visual artifacts constitute an “enchanted technology” that acts on its users, prompting people to respond to images as if the latter were living beings and to enter into a personal relationship with the images they view. It is important, in this view, that the ability to provide such enchanted and enchanting prompts emerges not from a singular intention of the maker of an image, but rather from the long, continually evolving “biographies” of photographs.²⁴ Photographs both shed and acquire new meanings over their life span, and, as Edwards argues, their material qualities (e.g., when photographs are scuffed, faded, torn) often provide physical clues about what they have meant to people in the past..

To explore the long and variable life cycles of photographs, the analysis thus needs to extend from the moment of production to multiple moments of viewing, interpreting, archiving, exhibiting, and reproducing.²⁵

Such anthropological approaches to photography exist in dialogue with another booming body of research, namely memory culture and the role of photography within it. Research into the formation and contestation of collective memory has proven particularly dynamic in the German context because of the fragmentation and discontinuity that have shaped its culture. Research in this field, too, does not restrict the meaning of a photograph to the instant when it was taken. Instead, the focus is on multiple “meaning-making” practices that occur when photographs are viewed by actors who are, and in contexts that are, temporally (and often spatially) removed from the moment of their initial production. As Thomas Eller put it in his introduction to a collection of the private war photographs of German soldier Willi Rose, such images are not “documents” but rather “monuments” and “vessels for our memories.”²⁶ Social historians have made much progress in recent years exploring the role of photos in creating personal memory narratives, and we need to read such photographs alongside other “ego-documents,” such as diaries, memoirs, and narratives generated by oral history interviews.²⁷ Few today would dispute the fact that photos play an essential role in twentieth-century memory cultures.

In this special issue, we draw on approaches such as these from visual anthropology and memory studies, but, at the same time, apply them as well to our understanding of the production of photographs. Specifically, we see memory as playing an important role in relation to photographs—not just during their later reception and usage, but also when they are being made. Professional and private

photographers alike often have commemorative uses in mind when making images. Such photographs thus constitute acts of preemptive commemoration: they capture what the imagined future viewer is supposed to remember about what is being depicted. In private photographs, individuals and families often present themselves as they wish to be seen by future generations, or as they themselves wish to remember their earlier lives in old age. Taking a picture is therefore an act of asserting control or authority over the moment and over how that moment will be remembered in the future.²⁸ In this sense, we regard even a seemingly private photograph as a social and political act.

In some contexts, photography's political authority is plainly evident.²⁹ It is most apparent in photographs of atrocities. Perpetrators and complicit spectators themselves took many of the photos documenting persecution and genocide. In some cases they demonstrably did so to produce records for the future, i.e., as attempts to anticipate and control what would be remembered. This poses particular difficulties for historians of Germany, who have to deal with the photographic record of atrocities in the colonial context and especially under the Nazi regime. Ironically, the very images that were designed to control and shape future memories of the events they depict have come to be widely used as historical illustrations in print and in museums, as if they were neutral records.³⁰ A particularly infamous example is the photo album commissioned to accompany the 1943 Stroop report on the clearing of the Warsaw ghetto, which was designed to document the "end of Jewish life in Eastern Europe"—and which its creator cynically dedicated to "future historians."³¹ The paradox is that this album did indeed come to provide some of the most widely reproduced photographs used in historical representations of the Holocaust, such as the infamous "child at gunpoint."

Richard Rankin rightly argues that such original intentions should not stop us from using such photographs, and a recent symposium held at the University of Nottingham on perpetrator photography came to the same conclusion.³² Bearing in mind the methodological innovations of the pictorial turn, we need not surrender the meaning of such images to the intentions of those who produced them, but can and should instead attempt to read them “against the grain.” It is equally inappropriate, however, to ignore such intentions, as well as the political system and ideology that produced such photographs—and that still affect the way we read them.”. Adopting a posture of moral outrage does not absolve us from complicity in those dynamics. Photographs, like other sources, challenge the historian to enter into a critical dialogue with the past, rather than become an agent of the past’s self-representation.

Interrogating the multiple meanings of photographic images means more than simply moving away from unifying narratives of intention or effect. It also means moving away from a focus on the singular image and towards an analysis of photographic practice, taking into account the history of photographic technology and the expansion of camera ownership. Photography spread across Europe and the United States following its establishment as a technology in the 1830s, and quickly became associated with multiple uses and applications. With the rise of studio photography, the photograph became a vehicle for self-fashioning and self-advertising. Not only celebrities and their professional agents, but also ordinary individuals have made use of it in this way, typically posing in their Sunday best for a professional photographer.³³ As technology developed that enabled people to take photographs quickly on the spot, new possibilities for reporting events and capturing historic moments gave rise to photojournalism.³⁴ By the late nineteenth century an army of serious amateur photographers had also begun to emerge alongside

professional photographers.³⁵ It was only in the twentieth century, however, that the consumption and production of photographs became an all-but-ubiquitous practice. Popular photography was supported by an industry supplying affordable cameras and film.³⁶ At the same time, improvements in printing technology made photographs a staple of illustrated magazines and photobooks.³⁷

The pioneers of photography were more strongly associated in the nineteenth century with France, Britain, and the United States than with the German lands, but by the late nineteenth century the various strands of photographic practice—from studio photography to forensic photography, journalistic photography, as well as serious amateur documentary and art photography—had become well established in the newly unified Kaiserreich.³⁸ In the twentieth century, the latest photographic technology spread particularly swiftly in Germany, with Germans becoming innovators in the development of cameras and film, in photographic practice, and in the consumption of photographic images.³⁹ As Annette Vowinckel has argued, with an eye to the fate of German professional photographers forced into exile during the Third Reich as an example, photos were a medium that crossed boundaries with much greater ease than any other genre of (self-)expression.⁴⁰

The speed with which photography invaded the spaces and moments of everyday life did not go unnoticed by Germans during the turbulent decades of the early twentieth century. Whether filled with pessimism or excitement, German cultural critics quickly became convinced of the transformative potential of photography as an increasingly prevalent technology. László Moholy famously spoke of photography as the new, universal language of the future.⁴¹ His prognosis was not free of trepidation, however, and others openly warned of the potentially detrimental effects of pictorial oversaturation.⁴² But most people simply got used to the new

technology and its products, which they produced and consumed—and reproduced. For it is also a characteristic of the photograph that it not only reproduces the world in front of the lens, but is capable of being reproduced in turn, with minimal technical effort or additional cost. It thus seemed to provide a currency of fast, effective, and democratic communication.⁴³ With the invention of small, handheld cameras, photography became a technology almost anyone could master, and photographic images could be captured in an instant. These features seemed to make photography the ideal medium of a modern society shaped by the international trend towards mass production and mass consumption.

Photography was thus in many ways an integral part of the increasingly global practice of consumerism (and associated leisure cultures) that profoundly transformed social life in the course of the twentieth century. Recent research has stressed the power of photography to entice people into adopting new lifestyles, behaviors, and aspirations, by making change viscerally imaginable and thus contributing to its realization.⁴⁷ While some commentators have seen such practices as at least partially “escapist,” others have offered a more overtly political reading of this phenomenon, arguing that even seemingly nonpolitical images of private pleasure or commercial pursuits contribute decisively to the formation of political subjectivities, imagined communities, and gendered behaviors. Taking, displaying, and circulating photos could help stabilize and transform notions of selfhood—individually, within the family, or in shared identity communities such as religious or national ones.⁴⁸

<H1>***</H1>

The contributions to this special issue focus on three particular aspects of photographic practice in twentieth-century Germany where productive tensions, ambivalent relationships, and blurred boundaries are particularly prevalent. The first has to do with the ways in which professionals, serious amateurs, and casual snapshotters have influenced each other's photographic practices. The second concerns the relationship between the photographer and the photographed, and the degree to which photographs were "coproduced" by photographers and their subjects. The third involves the sharing and circulation of photographs, and the ways in which memories were produced and the boundaries between the private and public confirmed or eroded in the process.

The relationships among professional photographers, serious amateur photographers, and casual snapshotters offered opportunities for influence, imitation, and subversion. As camera ownership spread, one of the ways in which the photographic industry built up its business was by dispensing advice to amateurs and encouraging them to use tricks and techniques to make using their cameras more effective and enjoyable.⁴⁹ Camera clubs, which first sprang up in the late nineteenth century, constituted a particular type of space for the dissemination of knowledge about photography. In these mostly masculine gatherings, serious amateurs exchanged notes and developed their expertise.⁵⁰ The casual snapshotter as well, of course, could be curious and keen to pick up tips. With the growth of mass-market illustrated periodicals, professional photojournalists wrote features giving "insider" stories and advice to a general audience eager to have a go themselves at recording events and capturing their surroundings.⁵¹ Recognizing that photography had become

a popular mass pursuit, magazines also ran features on how to get the most out of a camera, or invited readers to send in photos for comment and expert advice.⁵² Private photos and photo albums sometimes suggest a humorous staging of shots along the lines of those seen in popular magazines; conversely, as the style of illustrated periodicals evolved into slick packages of information and entertainment, photographers sought to capture scenes in a way that suggested the informality and spontaneity of a snapshot.⁵³

The following articles contain a number of examples of these processes of exchange and mutual influence. Exploring different types and genres of workplace photographs, Ulrich Prehn points to the exhortations of the German Labor Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*) calling on workers to develop photographic skills in workplace photography clubs and to make the factory or office a subject of photography. Maiken Umbach also notes how Nazi Party organizations and the photographic industry fostered popular photography and promoted the idea that taking photographs enhanced the excitement and pleasure of important individual and collective experiences. She demonstrates how private photographs of journeys made in peacetime and in war echoed published images in photobooks and magazines. Yet, she suggests, the influences also went the other way: in his staging of “informal” shots of Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Hoffmann imitated the spontaneous and “accidental” qualities of snapshot photography. Processes of borrowing and appropriation are also a theme in Josie McLellan’s contribution on photography and queer culture in the GDR: as gay and lesbian subcultures evolved in the 1980s into a diverse countercultural “urban queer” scene, there were crossovers among gay culture, alternative arts photographers, and mainstream magazines, with photographs of gay or

queer figures signaling both a new aesthetic and a new “social question” concerning sex and gender.

A second theme running through the contributions to this issue is that of agency and control in the taking or “making” of photographs. Taking pictures of human subjects was not just a creative process shaped by a given social and political context, but also an event, an intervention in private and public life.⁵⁴ It makes sense in certain cases to see photographs as “coproduced” by those who are being photographed, and to ask how subjects responded to or performed for the camera. People do not merely pose for a particular shot; consciousness of a camera’s presence can change behavior. The camera may prompt some performances and cause the disappearance of others, with consequences that far outlive the immediate moment of photographic recording.⁵⁵ Readings of photographs can usefully analyze not just the probable intention of the photographer in composing the picture, but also how those being photographed looked back or exchanged glances with the photographer, or interacted with what was going on outside of the shot.⁵⁶ The camera may have endowed the photographer with authority, but it did not bestow complete control over what went on within the frame—even when the subjects’ ability to respond was somehow constrained. Extraneous or “accidental” elements within the image often permit alternative readings that go against the grain of the photographer’s intentions.

This is not to deny that photography was a powerful instrument for the exercise of power. In analyzing how photography operated within German history, we should acknowledge what the anthropological literature on photography has highlighted with respect to the asymmetries of power involved in taking photographs in situations of colonial domination and political repression. Scholars such as Edwards have nevertheless also argued that photography contains uncertainties,

interactions, and adaptations that complicate any simple account of a totalizing and uncontested “colonizing gaze.”⁵⁷ The same point could be made with an eye to the Foucauldian idea of “governmentality,” in which throwing “webs of visibility” over behavior becomes a key mechanism of liberal rule: namely the imperative toward creating a self-disciplining citizenship, which involved less an assertion of total control than a constant battle against the chaos of ungovernability.⁵⁸

In his discussion of workplace photographs, Ulrich Prehn invites us to look closely at how photos were staged for propaganda purposes and to reflect on how the photographer’s presence affected the comportment of those involved: the grouping of workers around Hitler in front of Hoffmann’s camera, for example, or the staging of community-building scenarios for a company commemorative volume. In her contribution on photographs taken by the Jewish photographers Henryk Ross and Mendel Grosman in the Łódź (Litzmannstadt) ghetto, Andrea Löw focuses on the shared agency of photographers and the photographed. From the documented remarks of Henryk Ross and the testimony of ghetto survivors, as well as from the photographs themselves, Löw concludes that Jewish ghetto inhabitants shared in the photographers’ desire to record life in the ghetto—not only the conditions designed to humiliate and degrade the ghetto inmates, but also moments of private pleasure or collective pride.

Similar questions can be asked in very different contexts about the experience of being photographed and the way people performed for the camera—such as when photographs were taken for fun as a leisure pursuit. Could the camera disrupt and transform a social situation and thereby make the act of taking a photograph into an intervention involving shared agency? Maiken Umbach explores a range of ways in which people took and posed for snapshots during the Nazi period, and finds that

these photos sometimes echoed older traditions of German bourgeois culture that celebrated individuals communing with nature. At other times they played up to the camera in cheerful stagings of group jollity or by celebrating the pleasures of being “on the road,” activities that aligned with regime norms of communal belonging and visions of *Heimat*.

Josie McLellan also finds interactions with the camera to be an important dimension of the private photographs she analyzes from East Berlin’s gay scene at the end of the 1960s. In a number of photographs, groups of gay men gleefully display their outrageous makeup and outfits. Posing and being photographed in such transgressive garb was, for them, an essential part of the pleasure of dressing up.⁵⁹ But in some of the photos, McLellan points out, onlookers can be seen at the edges of the shot, perhaps accidentally included by a photographer who was more interested in the flamboyant figures who were the main focus of the shot. These more marginal figures look into the camera, making themselves both a part of—and apart from—the actions and interactions in the foreground. Such “looks back,” she suggests, need to be included when analyzing the content of the images: they are part of the overall picture and hint at the complexities of gay identity within the GDR’s subculture. Leora Auslander provides a further, unusual variant on the theme of interaction and “performance”—or dressing-up—for the camera by considering the ways in which a German-Jewish family from Bamberg “dressed” a room in their home to provide a record of how that space had been used to celebrate Passover and other Jewish festivals. The actors involved in this staging are invisible in these photographs, but the latter nevertheless capture for posterity the results of the behind-the-scenes actions involved in arranging the space.

The third common theme of this issue relates to the practices involved in collecting, arranging, captioning, and circulating photographs. These activities took place over an extended period of time, enabled emplotments of personal and collective experience, and thereby shaped the production of memory.⁶⁰ Photograph albums, assembled to tell a story and typically created not just for the maker, but also for others—even other generations—to look at, have provided particularly vital evidence for exploring how photographs are used in producing and reproducing memories.⁶¹ The photographs discussed in the contributions in this issue were, however heterogeneous, all taken to capture a moment and “to communicate the past in the future.”⁶² In different ways, all the contributions touch on the ways in which these processes of communication affirmed or traversed the boundaries between private and public and mediated the relationship between personal experience and wider shared identities.⁶³

In her exploration of three albums of the Wassermann family from Bamberg, one dating from 1912 and the other two from the later years of the Weimar Republic, Auslander asks how the arrangements of photographs in very differently constructed albums narrated different versions of Germanness and Jewishness within an established and successful Jewish banking family. Whereas the 1912 album represented Jewish and German private and public spaces as intertwined, the images of family life and public or business life appear more clearly distinguished from each other in the two later albums. Auslander uses the visual clues provided by the selection and juxtaposition of the photographs to suggest a possible shift in the way members of the Wassermann family came to perceive the possibility of integrating Jewishness and Germanness in their private and public lives.⁶⁴ At a more general level, Auslander explores the relationship between photography, memory, and time.

She suggests that if a single photograph taken in an instant “freezes” time, albums constitute a different type of temporal intervention, fitting disparate photos into a durable visual narrative for future audiences. Finally, she wonders whether German Jews—as a diasporic community that used two different calendars and operated in a series of spatial worlds that could include an imagined place of “return” or homeland—had an especially acute consciousness of time and space that gave them a particular affinity to photography.

Photograph albums also constitute key evidence in Maiken Umbach’s contribution, which explores how people echoed and reworked tenets of Nazi ideology by taking and sharing photos, as well as by constructing and captioning photograph albums. In such a context, it was not only photos of overtly political events or symbols that carried ideological significance: asserting “normality” in the face of radical political change was also an ideological act and could help naturalize new ways of thinking and acting politically. Umbach’s interpretation suggests that such seemingly private albums could express an ideological alignment with the Nazi appropriation of *Heimat*, now commodified as a tourist destination and—spanned by brand new motorways and modernist bridges—imagined at the heart, not the periphery, of a technologically modernized Germany.

For Ulrich Prehn, a single, private, workplace photograph discovered in a company archive offers the opportunity to reflect on memories of that workplace forty years after the end of the Nazi regime. The snapshot recorded a spontaneous initiative by a group of employees to lay out a pleasant outdoor break area in line with the Labor Front slogan, “beauty of work.” Prehn traces the relationship between private and public in the preservation and sharing of this photograph, and does so at two levels. At the moment of its making, the photo aligned neatly with Labor Front

exhortations to workers to engage in concerted efforts to improve their surroundings and to make the workplace a subject for photography. Provided with a caption in the 1980s and sent as a piece of memorabilia for the company archive, it was an attempt to connect what was, for its owner—even decades later—a positive memory of the workplace during Nazi era with a wider public narrative of the company.

Andrea Löw's analysis of Ross's and Grosman's photographs of the Łódź ghetto reveals the ways in which public functions and private uses intertwined in their pictures, both at the time and for Holocaust survivors after the war. Many of their photographs were staged official propaganda for the ghetto administration, but their work also included unofficial photographs, shot at personal risk, of raids in the ghetto, of Jews being marshalled for deportation, as well as of private moments. Löw also highlights the public uses of these photographs after the war—as evidence in war crimes trials, for instance. What was omitted from the published narratives and memoirs in the initial decades after the war were the photographs of more banal or intimate moments of private life. These were less easy to “read” straightforwardly as evidence of conditions in the ghetto. But as Löw emphasizes, such photos of private “normality” formed part of what Ross and Grosman wanted to document and, she argues, of what their subjects wanted to have recorded as testimony.

Josie McLellan's contribution begins and ends with photos from the private collection of Heino Hilger, which record life among gays in East Berlin in the late 1960s, i.e., at a time when homosexuality had just ceased to be illegal, but when the gay subculture remained hidden and stigmatized. Gay culture in the GDR, as in other places, involved gay men and lesbians playing with visibility and invisibility, with standing out or blending in. McLellan asks what role photographs played in creating

queer identity as gay and lesbian subculture gradually developed from private and illicit gatherings into more public forms of activism and countercultural activity.

Our aim in presenting this special issue on photography and modern German history is to draw on a growing body of cultural history writing on both sides of the Atlantic that is particularly sensitive to the visual. We bring together historians from Britain, Germany, and the United States to consider the power of photography for framing the history of twentieth-century Germany. Photos offer a seemingly immediate window onto familiar and unfamiliar dimensions of that history, including its ruptures and upheavals. The fascination of photographs is often matched, however, by the difficulty of reading and interpreting an image in its concrete detail together with its wider pictorial referents. Reconstructing the circumstances under which a particular photograph came to be produced, reproduced, viewed, and preserved poses an equal or sometimes even greater challenge. The contributors to this special issue tackle the demands involved in making sense of photographs—whether as individual artifacts, as a series arranged in albums, or as a genre of historical sources within larger bodies of documentary material. At the same time, their research sheds light on photography as a quotidian practice that could forge and sustain private identities, communicate and reinforce ideologies, and, last but not least, preemptively capture events and emotions for future viewers. Photography is not just considered here, then, as a window onto history: in our analysis, it produces and transforms the very practices that constitute history.

¹ Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (1986): 6; Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 6.

² John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 60–65; Susanne Regener, *Fotografische Erfassung. Zur Geschichte medialer Konstruktionen des Kriminellen* (Munich: Fink, 1999); Peter Hamilton, "Policing the Face," in *The Beautiful and the Damned: The Creation of Identity in Nineteenth-Century Photography*, ed. Peter Hamilton and Roger Hargreaves (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2001), 57–107; Elizabeth Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography, 1860–1920* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); Idem, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Christopher Pinney, *Photography and Anthropology* (London: Reaktion, 2011), 17–62.

³ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 48.

⁴ David King, *The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia* (Edinburgh: Metropolitan, 1997); Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 8.

⁵ David Blackbourn and James Retallack, eds., *Localism, Landscape, and the Ambiguities of Place: German-Speaking Central Europe, 1860–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 4.

⁶ H. Glenn Penny, "German Polycentrism and the Writing of History," *German History* 30, no. 2 (2012): 265–82.

⁷ David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984). For a critique of recent resurrections of cultural continuity in German historiography, see Geoff Eley, *Nazism as Fascism:*

Violence, Ideology, and the Ground of Consent in Germany, 1930–1945 (New York: Routledge, 2013), esp. 1–12.

⁸ See, e.g., Gerhard Paul, ed., *Visual History. Ein Studienbuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006); Annelie Ramsbrock, Annette Vowinckel, and Malte Zierenberg, eds., *Fotografien im 20. Jahrhundert. Vermittlung und Verbreitung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013); Diethart Kerbs and Walter Uka, eds., *Fotografie und Bildpublizistik in der Weimarer Republik* (Dortmund: Kettler, 2004); Rolf Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen. Photographie im NS-Staat* (Dresden: Philo, 2003); Janina Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004); Ludger Derenthal, *Bilder der Trümmer- und Aufbaujahre: Fotografie im sich teilenden Deutschland* (Marburg: Jonas, 1999); Karin Hartewig and Alf Lüdtke, eds., *Die DDR im Bild. Zum Gebrauch der Fotografie im anderen deutschen Staat* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004).

⁹ On photographers' careers spanning divides, see Klaus Honnef and Ursula Breymayer, eds., *Ende und Anfang. Photographen in Deutschland um 1945* (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 1995); Sachsse, *Erziehung zum Wegsehen*. On snapshot or domestic photography, see Timm Starl, *Knipser. Die Bildgeschichte der privaten Fotografie in Deutschland und Österreich von 1880 bis 1980* (Munich: Koehler & Amelang, 1995); Marita Krauss, "Kleine Welten. Alltagsfotografie—die Anschaulichkeit einer 'privaten Praxis,'" in Paul, *Visual History*, 57–75; Detlef Hoffmann, "Auch in der Nazizeit war zwölfmal Spargelzeit," *Fotogeschichte* 17, no. 63 (1997): 57, 61; Sandra Starke, "Fenster und Spiegel. Private Fotografie zwischen Norm und Individualität," *Historische Anthropologie* 19, no. 3 (2011): 469. On illustrated periodicals, see Habbo Knoch, "Living Pictures: Photojournalism in

Germany, 1900 to the 1930s,” in *Mass Media, Culture and Society in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. Karl Christian Führer and Corey Ross (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 217–33; Karl Christian Führer, *Medienmetropole Hamburg. Mediale Öffentlichkeiten 1930–1960* (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 2008), 161–270.

¹⁰ Modelling it on Richard Rorty’s *linguistic turn*, W.J.T. Mitchell coined the phrase *pictorial turn* in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹¹ Such readings are indebted to the iconographic method pioneered in the 1920s by art historian Aby Warburg, whose pictorial analyses crossed conventional boundaries between visual genres, periods, and “high” and “low” culture in search of “archetypal” and recurrent visual tropes. Under the auspices of the *Forschungsstelle Politische Ikonographie* in Hamburg, a new generation of scholars has not only revived and adapted this method, but also produced new editions of Warburg’s key and sometimes incomplete works. See, e.g., Manfred Warnke and Claudia Brink, eds., *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* (Berlin: Akademie, 2000).

¹² Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989).

¹³ David Welch, *Propaganda: Power and Persuasion* (London: British Library, 2013). For a critique of the traditional concept of propaganda, see Daniel Mühlentfeld, “Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man NS-Propaganda? Neuere Forschungen zur Geschichte von Medien, Kommunikation und Kultur während des Dritten Reiches,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 49 (2009): 527–59; Wolfgang Reinhard, *Die Geschichte der Staatsgewalt. Eine vergleichende Verfassungsgeschichte Europas von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Beck, 1999), 308.

¹⁴ On the workers' photography movement, the communist *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*, and photography in the social democratic press, see Martina Schneede, "Kamera als Waffe," in *Vorwärts—und nicht vergessen. Arbeiterkultur in Hamburg um 1930*, ed. Projektgruppe Arbeiterkultur Hamburg (Berlin: Fröhlich & Kaufmann, 1982), 276–96; Knoch, "Living Pictures," in Führer and Ross, *Mass Media*, 226–28. On the NSDAP's *Illustrierter Beobachter*, founded in 1926, see Bernd Weise, "Pressefotografie als Medium der Propaganda im Presselenkungssystem des Dritten Reiches," in *Die Gleichschaltung der Bilder. Zur Geschichte der Pressefotografie 1930–1936*, ed. Diethart Kerbs, Walter Uka, and Brigitte Walz-Richter (Berlin: Fröhlich & Kaufmann, 1983), 141–42.

¹⁵ For a comprehensive overview, see Sachsse, *Erziehung zum Wegsehen*. On illustrated magazines, see Karl Christian Führer, "Pleasure, Practicality and Propaganda: Popular Magazines in Nazi Germany," in *Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany*, ed. Pamela Swett, Corey Ross, and Fabrice d'Almeida (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 132–53. On exhibitions, see Ulrich Pohlmann, "'Nicht beziehungslose Kunst, sondern politische Waffe'. Fotoausstellungen als Mittel der Ästhetisierung von Politik und Ökonomie im Nationalsozialismus," *Fotogeschichte* 8, no. 88 (1988): 17–31; Elke Harten, "Der NS-Regenerationsmythos in Museen, Ausstellungen und Weihehallen," in *Formative Ästhetik im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Ulrich Herrmann and Ulrich Nassen (Basel: Beltz, 1993), 49–55. On photographic propaganda during World War II, see Daniel Uziel, "Propaganda, Kriegsberichterstattung und die Wehrmacht. Stellenwert und Funktion der Propagandatruppe im NS-Staat," in *Die Kamera als Waffe. Propagandabilder des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, ed. Rainer Rother and Judith Prokasky (Munich: Text & Kritik,

2010), 13–36; Daniel Uziel, *The Propaganda Warriors: The Wehrmacht and the Consolidation of the German Home Front* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008); Gerhard Paul, *Bilder des Krieges, Krieg der Bilder. Die Visualisierung des modernen Krieges* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), 230–32.

¹⁶ Sarah James, *Common Ground: German Photographic Cultures across the Iron Curtain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

¹⁷ Sybil Milton, “Argument oder Illustration. Die Bedeutung von Fotodokumenten als Quelle,” *Fotogeschichte* 8, no. 28 (1988): 62.

¹⁸ For an argument emphasizing the crucial role of the caption, see Winfried Ranke, “Fotografische Kriegsberichterstattung im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Wann wurde daraus Propaganda?,” *Fotogeschichte* 12, no. 43 (1992): 61–75; for comments and a response, see Detlef Hoffmann, “‘Auch in der Nazizeit war zwölfmal Spargelzeit.’ Die Vielfalt der Bilder und der Primat der Rassenpolitik,” *Fotogeschichte* 17, no. 63 (1997): 58; Miriam Y. Arani, *Fotografische Selbst- und Fremdbilder von Deutschen und Polen im Reichsgau Wartheland 1939–1945* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr Kovac, 2008), vol. I, 228–31.

¹⁹ Tagg, *Burden of Representation*, 62; Peter Geimer, *Theorien der Fotografie. Eine Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2009), 71, 80–81.

²⁰ For the neologism *actant* in reference to actors irrespective of intentions, both in the human and material world, see Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987). This notion is used in the contributions to Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce, eds., *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn* (London: Routledge, 2010).

²¹ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor–Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²² Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 13–16.

²³ Michael Ann Holly, *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

²⁴ Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²⁵ Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 13.

²⁶ See Thomas Eller, introduction to Willi Rose, *Shadows of War: A German Soldier's Lost Photographs of World War II*, ed. Thomas Eller and Petra Bopp (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004).

²⁷ Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson, eds., *Oral History and Photography* (London: Macmillan, 2011); Penny Tinkler, *Using Photographs in Social and Historical Research* (London: Sage, 2013), 61–78, 173–94. On ego-documents more generally, see Mary Fulbrook and Ulinka Rublack, “In Relation: The ‘Social Self’ and Ego-Documents,” *German History* 28, no. 3 (2010), 263–72.

²⁸ See Patricia Holland, introduction to *Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography*, ed. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland (London: Virago, 1991), 1–13; Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 5–9; Starke, “Fenster und Spiegel,” 462–65.

²⁹ Sontag, *On Photography*, 7.

³⁰ Milton, “Argument oder Illustration,” 61.

³¹ Richard Raskin, *A Child at Gunpoint: A Case Study in the Life of a Photo* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2004).

³² “‘A Perpetrator Gaze?’ The Photographic Record of National Socialism and the Modern Museum,” conference, University of Nottingham, Dec. 17, 2013. See the description at <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/history/events/events-2013/a-perpetrator-gaze.aspx>. At the event, which the editors of this issue organized, academics debated with Simone Erpel (Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin), Insa Eschebach (Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück), Suzanne Bardgett (Imperial War Museum London), Marek Jaros (Wiener Library, London), Judy Cohen (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), and James Griffiths (Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre).

³³ Roger Hargreaves, “Putting Faces to the Names: Social and Celebrity Portrait Photography,” in Hamilton and Hargreaves, *The Beautiful and the Damned*, 16–54; Starke, “Fenster und Spiegel,” 448–52.

³⁴ Knoch, “Living Pictures,” 218–22.

³⁵ Elizabeth Edwards, *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885–1918* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 5, 23–24.

³⁶ Tagg, *Burdens of Representation*, 17–18; Don Slater, “Consuming Kodak,” in Spence and Holland, *Family Snaps*, 49–59; Starl, *Knipser*, 33–36, 45–50.

³⁷ Diethart Kerbs, “Zur Geschichte der Berliner Pressefotografie im ersten Drittel des Zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts,” in Kerbs and Uka, *Fotografie und Bildpublizistik*, 29–47. Also see Malte Zierenberg, “Die Ordnung der Agenturen. Zur Verfertigung massenmediale Sichtbarkeit im Pressewesen, 1900–1940”; Annette Vowinckel, “Der Bildredakteur. Genese eines modernen Berufsbilds”; Ulrich Keller,

“Fotografie und Begehren. Der Triumph der Bildreportage im Medienwettbewerb der Zwischenkriegszeit,” in Ramsbrock, Vowinckel, and Zierenberg, *Fotografien*, 44–65, 69–89, 129–74. On the rise of photobooks, see Rolf Sachsse, “Heimat als Reiseland,” in *Ansichten der Ferne. Reisephotographie 1850 bis heute*, ed. Klaus Pohl (Darmstadt: Anabas, 1983), 128–50.

³⁸ Klaus Honnef, “Deutsche Fotografie—Spiegel deutscher Mentalität?,” in *Deutsche Fotografie. Macht eines Mediums 1870-1970*, ed. Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland et al. (Bonn: Dumont, 1997), 13.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁰ See Vowinckel, “Der Bildredakteur.”

⁴¹ Geimer, *Theorien der Fotografie*, 9. László Moholy-Nagy’s comment is cited in Vicki Goldberg, ed., *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 339. Walter Benjamin also cited and glossed this comment; see his *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, ed. Helga Tiedemann-Bartels (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 153.

⁴² On the tradition of critiques of the “Bilderflut,” see Geimer, *Theorien der Fotografie*, 154–59; Jens Ruchatz, “Bleiwüsten zur Austrocknung der Bilderflut. Susan Sontag und die Kritik an der fotografischen Reproduktion,” *Fotogeschichte* 32, no. 126 (2012), 11–22.

⁴³ Geimer, *Theorien der Fotografie*, 139–40.

⁴⁷ See Holland, introduction to Spence and Holland, *Family Snaps*, 5; Klaus Pohl, “Die Welt für Jedermann. Reisephotographie in deutschen Illustrierten der zwanziger und dreißiger Jahre,” in Pohl, *Ansichten der Ferne*, 96–127.

⁴⁸ Karen Strassler, *Refracted Visions: Popular Photography and National Modernity in Java* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Terry Dennett, “Popular Photography and Labour Albums,” in Spence and Holland, *Family Snaps*, 72–83; Hirsch, *Family Frames*.

⁴⁹ Starl, *Knipsler*, 33–36.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 42–44.

⁵¹ “‘Halt mal still!’ Martin Munkacsy und Renger-Patzsch über Amateur-Photographie” [1929], reprinted in Kerbs and Uka, *Fotografie und Bildpublizistik*, 247–54.

⁵² “Ihre Einsendungen—unser Urteil,” *Die junge Dame* 25 (1935): 22 [June 23, 1935].

⁵³ According to Holland, “The ‘naïve’ conventions of the ‘private’ snapshot, deeply embedded through participatory usage, are drawn on by ‘public’ modes—in particular advertising and publicity photography—which, unlike the snapshot, aim to be understood by as wide an audience as possible.” See her introduction to Spence and Holland, *Family Snaps*, 5.

⁵⁴ Sontag, *On Photography*, 11.

⁵⁵ Brad Prager, “Leben heißt posieren. Bilder aus dem Warschauer Ghetto—mit Susan Sontag betrachtet,” *Fotogeschichte* 32, no. 126 (2012): 46; Linda Conze, Ulrich Prehn, and Michael Wildt, “Sitzen, baden, durch die Strassen laufen. Überlegungen zu fotografischen Repräsentation von ‘Alltäglichem’ und ‘Unalltäglichem’ im Nationalsozialismus,” in Ramsbrock, Vowinckel, and Zierenberg, *Fotografien*, 296.

⁵⁶ Ulrike Pilarczyk and Ulrike Mietzner, *Das reflektierte Bild. Die seriell-ikonographische Fotoanalyse in den Erziehungs- und Sozialwissenschaften* (Bad Heilbrunn: Julius Klinkhardt, 2005), 40–41; Conze, Prehn, and Wildt, “Sitzen, baden,” in Ramsbrock, Vowinckel, and Zierenberg, *Fotografien*, 271–73.

⁵⁷ Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 12; Christopher Pinney, “The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography,” in Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography*, 74–95.

⁵⁸ On the “web of visibilities,” see Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 73. On the historical relationship between visibility and governmentality, see Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800–1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Maiken Umbach, *German Cities and Bourgeois Modernism, 1890–1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–26.

⁵⁹ On the wider topic of fancy dress and photography, see Verity Wilson, “Sartorial Artistry: Fancy Dress Recorded in Photographs, 1860–1970,” paper presented at “Professional Photography and Amateur Snapshots: Reconstructing Histories of Influence, Dialogue and Subversion,” University of Nottingham, June 2013.

⁶⁰ Marline Otte, “Freundschaft als Spiegel eines anderen Bewusstseins. Amateurfotografie und emotionale Ökonomie in der DDR”, in Ramsbrock, Vowinckel, and Zierenberg, *Fotografie*, 253–69.

⁶¹ See Holland, introduction to Spence and Holland, *Family Snaps*, 1–13. See also Jonathan Carson, Rosie Miller, and Theresa Wilkie, eds., *The Photograph and the Album: Histories, Practices, Futures* (Edinburg: MuseumsEtc, 2013).

⁶² Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 14.

⁶³ See Holland, introduction to Spence and Holland, *Family Snaps*, 3.

⁶⁴ On the shifting identities and allegiances of middle-class German Jews during and after World War I, see Martina Steer, “Nation, Religion, Gender: The Triple Challenge of Middle-Class German-Jewish Women in World War I,” *Central European History* 48 no. 2 (2015), 176-98.