

**The Pink Triangle:
The politics of forgetting and remembering the
homosexual victims of Nazi persecution**

Jason Porter

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Abstract

This thesis critically examines the history, and marginalized memory, of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, a period of propaganda, persecution and prosecution which saw many banished to concentration camps, and branded with a pink triangle. It is a past exemplified by silence and suppression, whose victims and survivors are often described as ‘hidden from history.’ Part One of the study traces the ‘decadence’ of the Weimer Republic in the 1920s, the destruction of the homosexual subculture and imprisonment of gay men by the Third Reich in the 1930s and ‘40s. It engages with the politics of memory, and with key theorists of Holocaust testimony and trauma, to critically analyze key memoirs which have been under-theorized in relation to cultural memories of the period. Most gay men who survived the liberation of the camps faced years of further intolerance and indifference, and my thesis investigates the complex relationship between suppressed memories and the continuing homophobic context in which they circulated.

Decades later, the pink triangle and the testimonies of gay survivors, were finally able to emerge from their silenced shadows. Part two of the thesis traces the mobilization of the Pink Triangle, as a symbol of resistance in the gay rights movements in 1970s United States. In addition to repurposing the pink triangle as a contemporary symbol of liberation, the history of the Nazi period was also mobilized in other ways by gay activists. Specifically, the thesis engages with the way that the Shoah was invoked by campaigners in the 1980s in response to the emerging AIDS crisis. I engage in particular with the controversial mobilization of the holocaust by Larry Kramer in his crusade against AIDS and reflect on the relative marginalization of gay victims of the Nazis in this fight. The thesis brings together both parts of the study with a critical examination of two memory sites which speak to the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, and which were conceived, designed and inaugurated at a tumultuous time for LGBTQ communities.

This is an interdisciplinary study that produces an original contribution to memory studies and to gay cultural history. It makes a significant contribution to the scholarship around the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. It is also a study of how these memories were politicized, and informed the wider gay liberation movement. These long-occluded memories provided the movement with a set of cultural narratives and symbols that were re-purposed and politically activated in support of the contemporary struggle for recognition and liberation. The thesis is both an excavation of marginalized memories and a critical engagement with uses and abuses of the past in later political struggles for gay rights.

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For mum.

Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Introduction –

Moments, movements, monuments and memory

“Ours is an empty memory.”¹

– Klaus Muller

“I was strolling through cemeteries that do not exist, the resting places of all the dead who barely ruffle the consciences of the living and I feel like screaming.”²

– Pierre Seel

“AIDS is our Holocaust and Reagan is our Hitler. New York City is our Auschwitz.”³

- Larry Kramer

In May 1928 German writer, campaigner, and co-founder of the homosexual rights organization *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen*⁴ Adolf Brand, sent all major political parties in Germany a questionnaire on sexual law reform. Brand’s aim was to canvass opinions in the hope of reforming Paragraph 175, the German law that criminalized homosexuality.⁵ The reply from the National Socialist Party was clear:

¹ Heinz Heger, *The Men With The Pink Triangle* (California: Alyson Books, 1980), 13.

² Pierre Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual: A Memoir of Nazi Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 140.

³ Larry Kramer, *Reports from the holocaust* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 173.

⁴ Transl. “Community of Self-Owners.” Hubert Kennedy, *Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany: The Youth Movement, the Gay Movement, and Male Bonding Before Hitler’s Rise* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 2.

⁵ Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle* (New York: New Republic Books, 1986), 107; Günter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust: Gay and Lesbian Persecution in Germany 1933-45* (London: Casell, 1993), 1; The scholarship around the Nazi persecution of homosexuals refers largely, though not exclusively, to homosexual men, just as Paragraph 175 was concerned with solely “male sexual acts.” This is not to infer that lesbians did not suffer at the hands of the Nazis, but that I cannot do justice to the form and meaning of that suffering by making it an appendage to this study. Johansson and Percy cite National Socialist ideologues and statutes dating between 1935 and 1938, which specify that Paragraph 175 – the clause of the German penal code relating to homosexuals – could not be extended and applied to lesbians. Furthermore, the authors argue that Nazi indifference to gay women stemmed from several motives; whilst gay men interrupted the procreative capacity of a nation, this was not true to the same extent with women. Homosexuals were considered far more “corrupting” than lesbian

It is not necessary that you and I live, but it is necessary that the German people live. And it can only live if it can fight, for life means fighting. And it can only fight if it maintains its masculinity. It can only maintain its masculinity if it exercises discipline, especially in matters of love. Free love and deviance are undisciplined... Anyone who even thinks of homosexual love is our enemy.⁶

This emphatic response was to form the basis of the Nazi's official policy towards homosexuality, and a model that would include propaganda, persecution and prosecution, and which for many homosexuals would soon see them banished to concentration camps, and branded with a pink triangle. Within these camps, those detained for "committing homosexual acts" might have experienced mental and physical torture, castration, and degradation, and many were killed.⁷ Most who survived the liberation of the camps were not emancipated; instead they faced years of further intolerance and indifference, their memories subjugated and suppressed. Decades later, the pink triangle and the testimonies of some of those who perished because of it, or survived in spite of it, were finally able to emerge from their silenced shadows, as the symbol and the history began, particularly in the 1970s United States, to inform the burgeoning gay rights movement.⁸ The pink triangle was one of the many symbols used

women. Nazi ideology held that the "natural friendships" that women developed may have led to suspicion of them, and, in turn, unnecessary investigations by authorities. Furthermore, the limited role of women, generally, in public life meant that the Nazis paid them little or no heed when considering who their enemies were, and how they would eradicate them, see Warren Johansson and William A. Percy, "Homosexuals in Nazi Germany," *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* 7, (January 1990), Not Paginated; Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 41. There are few records of lesbians being interned in concentration camps. Annette Eick was the only gay woman interviewed for the documentary film *Paragraph 175* and her testimony in terms of the persecution she encountered in Nazi Germany was largely based on being a Jew as opposed to being a lesbian. See *Paragraph 175*. Film. United States: Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, 2000.

⁶ Nicholas C Edsall, *Toward Stonewall: Homosexuality and Society in the Modern Western World* (Charlottesville London: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 210.

⁷ Around 100,000 men were arrested, and is estimated that between 50 and 63,000 men were convicted, of homosexual activity between 1933 and 1944, whilst the figures given for those imprisoned in concentration camps varies between 5 and 15,000 – "Gay men under the Nazi regime," accessed July 8, 2017, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/gay-men-under-the-nazi-regime>

⁸ It is useful to provide a rationale for the terminology that is adopted throughout this study. Part one of the thesis utilizes the term 'homosexual.' The neologism, translated into English as 'same-sex' has historically been attributed to Austro-Hungarian translator Karl Maria-Kertbeny and first appeared in print in Germany in 1869, in the context of an attempt to repeal sodomy laws in Prussia. Two years later, a unified German Empire passed the statute Paragraph 175, which criminalized sexual acts between homosexual men. See David M Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2012), 155. The term homosexual is widely used in documentation of the periods under scrutiny in part one, from Nazi records, to contemporary scholarship, as well as by witnesses and survivors who have testified and shared their memories. Part Two of this thesis shifts to largely use the term gay rather than homosexual, in line with changes to which terms were considered no longer appropriate. This development happened alongside, and as a

in camps by the Nazis as a way to denote and denigrate those they felt were an anathema to their ideology and as such is part of the wider cultural memory of the Holocaust. This systematic genocide of the Jews, as well as the persecution and murder of millions of others, was then appropriated and invoked by activists and campaigners in the 1980s as a symbolic representation and way of responding to the emerging AIDS crisis.

In June 2019, ninety years after the Nazis virulent homophobic response to Brand, American writer, campaigner and co-founder of AIDS activist group ACT UP, Larry Kramer – renowned for his rage at the response to the virus – appeared on stage at a New York *Reclaim Pride* event. Frail, but still furious, Kramer was flanked by fellow activists holding signs and adorning shirts featuring pink triangles, the symbol transformed from its roots in oppression to one of outrage.⁹ Ostensibly there, on the fiftieth anniversary of Stonewall, to remind those in attendance that AIDS remained a clear and present danger to the gay world, it was the latest – and as it would transpire, one of the last – instance(s) where Kramer would do so by invoking both the persecution of homosexuals under Nazism, and the memory of the Holocaust. That same June day, on the opposite coast of the United States in San Francisco, for the twenty-fourth year running, volunteers scaled the summit of one of the city’s Twin Peaks hills to install an almost-acre-wide cloth pink triangle.¹⁰ The installation could be seen for up to twenty miles, and served as a:

commemoration of the gay victims who were persecuted and killed in concentration camps in Nazi Germany starting in 1933 through the end of WWII ... The pink triangle symbol has since evolved into an important reminder for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community of the continuing homophobia and inhumanity against them and other repressed minorities around the world.¹¹

result of, the huge cultural, social and legal changes that were being fought for as part of the gay liberation movement in the 1970s. This was particularly the case in the United States, hence, partly, the shift of focus in part two of the thesis – “GLAAD Media Reference Guide,” accessed April 4 2019 <https://www.glaad.org/reference/offensive>, “2019 Queer Liberation Rally Speakers & Performers,” accessed September 25, 2020 <https://reclaimpridenyc.org/speakers>

¹⁰ “The Pink Triangle,” accessed August 18 2019, <http://www.thepinktriangle.com/about/why.html>
See figures four to six

¹¹ “Volunteers install giant pink triangle on San Francisco’s Twin Peaks,” accessed November 15 2020, <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2019/06/30/volunteers-giant-pink-triangle-san-franciscos-twin-peaks/>

Part One of this thesis traces the history, and marginalized memory, of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. It is a past exemplified by silence and suppression, whose victims and survivors are so often described as “hidden from history.”¹² This emphasis on being obscured is made manifest in the scholarship that emerged and demonstrates the importance of trauma being recognized and remembered.¹³ Through close reading of survivors’ testimonies, the objective is to fill in the gaps in the scholarship by identifying common elements that go some way to creating a more comprehensive homosexual narrative of the period, as well as recognizing and analyzing distinctions and differences inherent in the texts. One of the central tenets of the thesis’ argument is, as survivor Pierre Seel notes, “the terrible dearth of writing on this subject.”¹⁴ There was little research in this area for decades, even as the interest in – and demand for – recognition of other victims of National Socialist oppression began to gather momentum.¹⁵ For a multitude of reasons engaged with in this thesis – continued legal persecution, on-going social discrimination, a perceived emerging hierarchy of victims – gay survivors, and those who perished, had to wait decades until they were acknowledged as victims of Nazism.

The thesis demonstrates that following a lengthy period of “forgetting,” whereby homosexuals who survived the tyranny of Nazism continued to be persecuted, prosecuted and silenced, changing socio-political conditions meant that the survivors began to publicly “remember.” This remembering occurred decades after the war and also saw the publication of texts such as Richard Plant’s *The Pink Triangle* in 1980,

¹² See for example Martin Duberman Bauml, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey, eds., *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Meridian, 1989); Grau, *Hidden Holocaust*, 1993.

¹³ Erik N Jensen, “The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness: Gays, Lesbians, and the Memory of Nazi Persecution,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1/2, (2002): 322

¹⁴ Seel, I, Pierre Seel, *Deported Homosexual*, xxxiii

¹⁵ The Holocaust entered majorly into the American consciousness with the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961. Images, reports and testimonies from concentration camps caught the attention of the media, and much of the world, for the first time since the war had ended, see James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 118, 132; Other cultural events which brought the Holocaust to the fore, particularly in the United States include the publication of Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl* (New York: Modern Library, 1952), and the premiere of the miniseries *Holocaust*. Television. United States: Marvin J. Chomsky, 1978. In post-war Europe, despite multiple obstacles, many Jewish survivors slowly began to restore their lives and livelihoods, and forge a strengthening political presence, particularly following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, see Jonathan C. Friedman ed., *The Routledge History of the Holocaust* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 412.

and the emergence of some survivors' memoirs, as detailed below, as the victims of persecution were finally able to give voice to their experiences. The thesis is made up of two distinct, although related, parts. Part One is largely Europe-focused and Holocaust-adjacent, tracing *moments* in history and their concomitant representations, particularly through testimony. It traces both the “decadence” of the Weimer Republic, then the destruction of the Third Reich. It then moves beyond the representation and reminiscence of aspects of 1920s-40s European gay history, to engage with the subjectivity of memory, namely the key survivors' memoirs that emerged from this period. The key testimonies that inform much of the thesis are Heinz Heger's *The Men With The Pink Triangle* (1972, translated into English in 1980), Pierre Seel's *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual: A Memoir of Nazi Terror* (1995) and Gad Beck's *An Underground Life: Memoirs of a Gay Jew in Nazi Berlin* (1999).¹⁶ I engage critically with the stories that have been recounted and reclaimed, consider when and why they came into being, and what they reveal to us about those who perished, and those who survived catastrophic events. I produce original readings of the testimonies, their relationships with one another and how this complement and complicate the wider narratives that have built up over time. The recognition of the histories and memories of homosexuals persecuted under Nazism did not just happen, and certainly not in isolation. The narratives emerged and developed alongside, and as result of, key historical and cultural moments. Though the Second World War was a global conflict, post-war, the Holocaust became increasingly understood through an Americanised paradigm, and it this “Americanization of the Holocaust” which in part informs the shift of emphasis in part two.

Part two of this thesis, then, largely shifts focus to the United States in order to understand how and why the Holocaust began to resonate with Americans, and how

¹⁶ Gad Beck, *An Underground Life - Memoirs of a Gay Jew in Nazi Berlin* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999). The thesis does not attempt to provide an exhaustive account of the various memoirs and testimonies which recount the experiences of homosexuals under Nazism, some of which are untranslated into English, see for example the texts which detail the experiences of German survivor Rudolph Brazda, in the French and German language, respectively; Jean-Luc Schwab, *Rudolf Brazda, Itinerario de un triángulo rosa* (Madrid: Alianza, 2010); Alexander Zinn, *Das Glück kam immer zu mir: Rudolf Brazda—Das Überleben eines Homosexuellen im Dritten Reich* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2011). The focus on those that are available in translated form is, in part, because of the effect the cultural memory of these survivors had on the gay liberation movement, the reaction to the AIDS crisis, and how the Nazi persecution of homosexuals was later memorialized. This is critically examined in part two of this thesis, largely in terms of the United States and Germany.

this informed and influenced the emerging cultural memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. Part two charts historical *movements* such as gay liberation and the response to the AIDS crisis, both of which speak to, and are in part informed by, the cultural memory of the preceding events. These histories and memories coalesced and created space not only as a means to highlight and represent key moments in the *present*, they established an arena in which the *past* – the narratives of victims and survivors – could finally be memorialized. It then goes on to critically examine how these memories – the Jewish Shoah, and the experience of homosexual victims and survivors – were invoked and appropriated to work through and represent contemporary issues. Foremost amongst these was the AIDS crisis that devastated minority communities in the United States, and, inexorably linked with this was the ongoing fight for equality and rights being fought by gay liberationists. Both causes would look to the catastrophic events in Europe decades earlier to make sense of their current cataclysms, and would do so by means of metaphor, rhetoric and symbolism. I am extending the scholarship that has focused on the “rediscovery” and appropriation of the pink triangle by political advocates from the 1970s in order to create a relationship between the context in which the memoirs were written and the way the narrative of both the Holocaust and Nazi persecution of homosexuals was politicised/re-politicised in relation to the Aids crisis.¹⁷ I explore how activists understood both the symbols and the struggles of those hounded by Nazi ideology in relation to their own battles. Finally, I chart the memorialisation of gay victims, by critically engaging with two sites of memory – the online and physical exhibitions devoted to the *Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals 1933–1945* in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, from 1993, and the *Memorial to Homosexuals persecuted under Nazism*, which was dedicated in Berlin in 2008. Both memory sites speak to the Nazi persecution of homosexuals *specifically*, whilst their inception, creation, location and inauguration speak to, and are informed by, the wider cultural memory of the pink triangle.

The origins of this thesis trace back to Berlin almost a decade ago, in the early summer

¹⁷ See, for example, Dagmar Herzog, *Sexuality and German Fascism* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004); William N. Elwood, ed. *Power in the Blood: A Handbook on Aids, Politics, and Communication* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Douglas A. Feldman and Julia Wang Miller, *The AIDS Crisis A Documentary History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998); Erik N. Jensen, 2002

of 2012, and an excursion to explore one of the city's most well-known LGBTQ+ districts. These celebrated social spaces feature in much literature of the post WWI-period, such as those by – and about – writers including Christopher Isherwood and W.H. Auden, and by scholars and historians who have traced the significance of the German capital in terms of gay history in the period between the two World Wars.¹⁸ This trip was also the first time I had encountered first-hand, official, public recognition of the history of the persecution of homosexuals under Nazism. As one exits the Nollendorfplatz U-Bahn station there is a small triangular stone placed discreetly on a wall that reads:

The pink triangle was the sign by which homosexuals were defamatorily marked in concentration camps by the National Socialists... As from January 1933 almost all homosexual pubs around Nollendorfplatz were closed down by the Nazis or they were abused by razzias to compile 'Rosa Listen' (pink lists, i.e. indexes of homosexuals)¹⁹

The site of this memorial plaque is doubly significant – today this is one of the main areas where Berlin's LGBTQ+ community meet to socialize; home to numerous cafes, bars and clubs, just as it was ninety years ago. Those who visit are more visible now, the meeting places more prominent, yet for a while, between the two most destructive wars of the twentieth century, this small area of intertwining back streets served as a hub for gay women and men to meet, socialize, seek out sexual encounters, and perhaps even fall in love.

It is these streets that set the scene for Chapter One, which provides the historical contextualization that underpins Part One of the thesis. My approach here is to focus on

¹⁸ Christopher Isherwood and WH Auden became sometime lovers, and prolific writers, in late 1920s Berlin. Their work was often influenced by or addressed the social and political mood at the time, see, for example Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* (London: Hogarth Press, 1939); Christopher Isherwood, *Mr Norris Changes Train* (London: Hogarth Press, 1933); Christopher Isherwood, *Christopher and his Kind* (New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux, 1976); Norman, Page, *Auden and Isherwood The Berlin Years* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000); Florence Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe, Volumes I and II* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2006); Tony Sharpe, *WH Auden in Context* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); For useful overviews of the Weimar period, see Eric D Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Anthony McElligott, *Weimar Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); for works that engage with sexuality and Weimar see Robert Beachy, *Gay Berlin* (New York: Vintage Book, 2014), Laurie Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

¹⁹ "The Memorial Hall," accessed 15 March 2016, <http://andrejkoymasky.com/mem.html>; see figure one.

key moments that have impacted upon the cultural memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. Chapter One begins by situating the homosexual in 1920s Berlin, variously described as a utopia for gay activity, both socially and culturally, and increasingly a centre for serious scholarly research into sexuality, the result of which was worldwide recognition for its progressive attitudes. The narrative, and to some extent, the *scholarship* that has built up around Weimar Germany generally, and more specifically, the experiences it afforded German *homosexuals*, is notable for being a largely positive one, which emphasizes an impending sense of change.²⁰ Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman's 2000 documentary *Paragraph 175* claims that Berlin was "known throughout the world as a homosexual Eden."²¹ According to survivor Heinz Heger, there was a "flourishing gay and lesbian culture."²² This expanding and diversifying socio-cultural explosion in the nation's capital was replicated – through implicit toleration from the respective police authorities – in other "metropolitan centres" such as Hamburg, Munich and Vienna.²³ In Berlin, bars, clubs, meeting places, publishing houses, events, and homosexual rights organizations proliferated.²⁴ Contemporary fiction detailed the rich and varied homosexual subculture that had developed in Weimar Berlin.²⁵ It was, according to the characters in Friedrich Radszuweit's *Men for Sale*, a subculture constituted of one big happy family of disparate yet not dissimilar people who felt that they "could never be driven apart."²⁶ Those who were there recall "much joy and dancing."²⁷ Testimonies revealed a growing sense of emancipation, albeit often qualified with a need to remain vigilant.²⁸ Public

²⁰ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 36-45; Beachy, x-xii; 189-193.

²¹ *Paragraph 175*, 2000.

²² Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, v.

²³ "Homosexuality and the Holocaust," accessed 8 December 2017,

http://www.williamapercy.com/wiki/index.php/Homosexuality_and_the_Holocaust; Muller, in Heger, 9, estimates there to have been almost a hundred social spaces for lesbians and homosexual men in the 1920s, and this had increased to over three hundred by 1932, see Warren Johansson and William Percy, "Homosexuals in Nazi Germany," *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* 7, (1984): 225-263. (D 804.3 .S5953 1984).

²⁴ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 9.

²⁵ Christopher Isherwood, 1933; 1939; Friedrich Radszuweit, *Männer zu verkaufen: ein Wirklichkeitsroman aus der Welt der männlichen Erpresser und Prostituierten* (Berlin: Martin Radszuweit), 1931.

²⁶ David James Prickett, "Defining Identity via Homosexual Spaces: Locating the Male Homosexual in Weimar Berlin," *Women in German Yearbook*, Volume 21, 2005, p.150

²⁷ *Paragraph 175*, 2000

²⁸ *Ibid*; Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 18-19. Heger recalls "coming out" to his mother at a young age and gaining her complete support, coupled only with a warning to be careful, demonstrating that despite her acceptance, there was still an environment filled with peril for a homosexual man, not least blackmail.

demand increased for photography, literature and film, whilst openly-homosexual actors were free to perform, many of whom would ultimately avoid the fate of their non-famous and less culturally-revered counterparts when the storm clouds began to gather.²⁹ The chapter counters the idea that there was a homogeneous experience of the period – a gilded age for gays – focusing particularly on Berlin homosexuals of varying classes and professions, and the social spaces they inhabited. The images of liberal, anything-goes Berlin as the primary environment for the homosexual culture boom is somewhat countered by the testimonies of men who eschewed big *city life* to get back to *nature*, forming friendship groups that celebrated the male form and reveled in rural environs. The chapter considers the cultural shift that developed during Weimar, typified by the increased availability of homosexual media and the pioneering work of Magnus Hirschfeld and Adolf Brand who were working to try and secure the *legal and political* advancement of homosexuals and their cause. The chapter then documents the factors that conspired against this sense of a seismic shift in the possibilities for Germany’s homosexuals, allowing National Socialist ideology to flourish, which in turn led to increased persecution. The chapter demonstrates that, often – though crucially, not exclusively – this persecution led to the concentration camp. Here homosexual prisoners encountered similar forms of oppression such as those they had increasingly faced on the outside, such as segregation, isolation and stigmatization, alongside more physical forms of terrorization such as punishing work details, sexual torture and medical experimentation. The remainder of the chapter is defined by destruction – of social spaces, of cultural texts, of political advancements and of enemies of the Third Reich. The periods examined in chapter one are marked by contrasts – between emancipation and persecution, and decadence and despair – and as such the chapter constitutes the context in which the *texts* of chapter two were conceived, allowing us to understand how those who shared their memories made sense of them.

Chapter two engages with testimony and memory-work in order to analyze three key survivors’ testimonies from Heinz Heger, Pierre Seel and Gad Beck. The chapter develops a critical framework to allow us to understand more about both the persecution

Her warning provided a timely and grave portent for the horrors that were to come both for the author and countless thousands like him.

²⁹ Prickett, “Defining Identity via Homosexual Spaces,” 140; Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 116.

of homosexuals under Nazism, and how the survivors understand and recount their experiences. The chapter considers in some detail their ordeals in relation to a cultural memory methodological framework. I engage with key theorists of Holocaust testimony, particularly Lawrence Langer, whose work in analyzing testimonies of Jewish Holocaust survivors provides a schema with which to approach the testimonies of gay survivors. This frame allows us to critically examine the testimonies of those marked with the pink triangle. The testimonies are characterized by tropes that are often evident in Holocaust testimony, such as omissions, forgetting, exaggeration and hyperbole, and I consider these in terms of the specificity of the experiences recounted by gay survivors. Their recollections, and the idiosyncrasies inherent in them, are often informed as much by their post-war subjugation as they are by their experiences under Nazism. Many of the testimonies understand and articulate what happened to them in relation to other victim groups, and as such they have built up a collective narrative which alleges a hierarchy of victimhood – both within concentration camps and latterly, following their “liberation.” This purported ranking of victims informs not only how gay survivors understood themselves relative to Jews, Roma, political prisoners etc, but also what this meant in terms of how they present their experiences, and their reactions to them. In the testimonies there is an emphasis on bravery and heroism, usually in regards to what homosexuals endured, namely persecution and violence. This is considered alongside the homophobic paradigm in which they encountered such ruination, and the continued culture of homophobia in which they testified, as some survivors argue that whatever they went through, nobody would hear it or be interested. The emphasis on courageousness – or the inability to perform brave deeds – is read as part of the wider scholarship which looks at how conditions in camp disallowed “heroic acts,” yet at the same time Holocaust testimony is often preoccupied with the notion of human spirit and survival. The chapter, then, is investigating these traumatized memoirs and reflecting upon the complexity of memory frameworks. It argues that whilst the testimonies of these men and the scholarship around their experiences has often been marked by silencing and being hidden, their memoirs have in fact forged a collective memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. By bringing this particular history into public memory, the stories of those “branded with the pink triangle” have a broader legacy, as the symbol and its survivors informed a Western liberation movement and a global catastrophe.

Part two largely shifts focus to the United States, initially as a means of using the *Americanization* of the Holocaust as a framework with which to understand *how* the Jewish genocide of the 1940s became the cultural touchstone for AIDS activists in the 1980s.³⁰ Chapter three focuses on the symbol of the pink triangle in order to consider further how the cultural memory of the Holocaust, and the Nazi persecution of homosexuals became key to the identity of the gay liberation movement. This chapter traces how the pink triangle went from being a “badge of shame” to a symbol of strength and solidarity. It charts the post-war history of the pink triangle as it emerges in 1970s West Germany, as an emblem for gay youth groups, then as it traverses the Atlantic to become the symbol of choice for their American activist counterparts.³¹ During this period, Pride protests became more prevalent, and activists began to align themselves with the memories and the victimhood of those discriminated under Nazism.³² The chapter then goes on to trace how the cultural memory of the Holocaust, the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, and the pink triangle symbol, were mobilized – often in very distinct ways – as a means of speaking to the emerging AIDS crisis. It analyzes activist group ACT UP, who utilized the rhetoric of genocide, arranged symbolic death-marches, and scattered the ashes of the dead at the gates of the White House.³³ The chapter also analyzes how the pink triangle was co-opted and adapted, then critically examines one of the pivotal sources of the period – Larry Kramer’s *Reports from the Holocaust*, first published in 1989 and revised in 1994.³⁴ It illustrates and analyzes how and why Kramer invoked Holocaust tropes to draw attention to the AIDS crisis and to mobilize activists. The chapter demonstrates that Kramer did not adopt a heroic,

³⁰ For key scholarship on the Americanization of the Holocaust, see Natan Sznaider, “The Americanization of Memory: The Case of the Holocaust,” in *Global America? The Cultural Consequences of Globalization*, eds. Ulrich Beck, Natan Sznaider, Rainer Winter (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003); Hilene Flanzbaum, ed., *The Americanization of the Holocaust* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Alison Landsberg, “America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory: Towards a Radical Politics of Empathy,” *New German Critique*, Spring - Summer, No. 71 (1997).

³¹ W. Jake Newsome, “Pink Triangle Legacies: Holocaust Memory and International Gay Rights Activism,” accessed 4 July 2018, <https://nursingcliclo.org/2017/04/20/pink-triangle-legacies-holocaust-memory- and-international-gay-rights-activism/>

³² Eric Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 152-156; Arlene Stein, “Whose Memories? Whose Victimhood? Contests for the Holocaust Frame in Recent Social Movement Discourse,” *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol.41, No.3, (1998): 196.

³³ Jeff Goodwin & James M. Jasper, eds. *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts* (Oxford: Wiley, 2014), 263.

³⁴ Kramer, *Reports*.

optimistic narrative. Instead, his rhetoric was visceral, challenging, often pessimistic, and angry. Close textual analysis of *Reports* reveals how the cultural memory of the Holocaust informed Kramer's language, infusing his text with reference to gas-chambers and genocide.³⁵ Crucially, it is the *Shoah* rather than the persecution of gay men specifically that Kramer focuses on. He often side-lines or eschews completely the memory of the latter, choosing instead to maximize the metaphorical power of the former in order to make his points. For Kramer, the Holocaust and AIDS were analogous, and by inextricably intertwining the two, the (often unintentional) effect was to marginalize once again the history and memory of homosexuals persecuted under Nazism.

Chapter four brings together the threads of the thesis by considering how the memory of those persecuted under Nazism for homosexuality, for so long occluded, has been marshaled and memorialized. The chapter critically analyzes two quite distinct sites of memory - the 2008 *Denkmal für die zur NS-Zeit verfolgten Homosexuellen* (The Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted Under Nazism) in Berlin, and the exhibitions from 1993 devoted to the persecution of homosexuals under Nazism, curated by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. The choice of these two very distinct memorials is deliberate in terms of their inception, inauguration, and intent. The *Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted Under Nazism* in Berlin is read and analyzed both on its own terms and also as part of the same ideological concept that is represented by the nearby *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*. The debates and responses to the memorial, are a key component of the emerging cultural memory of this contested history. The chapter also considers how and why the United States Holocaust Memorial chose to memorialize homosexual victims as part of its commitment to represent and honour other victims of Nazism, alongside its primary focus – the Holocaust.³⁶ The museum itself opened to the general public in 1993 and, in a portentous moment of cultural alignment, two further events in the US capital were sandwiched between its dedication and opening. These included a local community ceremony held to mark the inclusion of gay victims into the permanent exhibition of

³⁵ Kramer, *Reports*, 173, 263.

³⁶ The USHMM claims that it is “the first Holocaust museum to present, in the framework of an encompassing portrayal of the Holocaust, a memorial to the victimization of homosexuals.” - Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli, *The Holocaust Museum in Washington* (New York: Rizzoli, 1995), 161.

the USHMM, and the *March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation*. These were grass-roots events that spoke, both implicitly and explicitly, to the Holocaust, the gay victims of Nazism, the pink triangle, and the AIDS crisis.

This is a study about memory; the *survivors* whose memories were marginalized post-war, and who faced hostile homelands and sustained silencing, and the *victims* for whom no memorials existed and whose remembrance was not welcomed alongside the monuments for those that did.³⁷ It is also a study of how these memories were politicized and transformed to represent contemporary challenges within LGBTQ+ communities, which was contentious to some and even threatened to partially obscure the memories of victims and survivors all over again.

³⁷ “Professor Gregory Woods speaks about Pierre Seel,” accessed 18 June 2019, <https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/professor-gregory-woods-speaks-about-pierre-seel/>; Gregory Woods, in Seel, *I Pierre Seel*, 11-13; Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 124-5.

Chapter One

“A dance on the edge of a volcano”¹

Weimar Germany and the Dawn and Destruction of a “Golden Age”

“Today it’s hard to imagine how wild it was in Berlin after the 1914-1918 war. Everything went topsy-turvy. Men danced together and so did women. In Berlin, those were the golden years.”

– Heinz F., Paragraph 175²

From the pioneering sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld to author Christopher Isherwood, via the legendary club, *Eldorado*, Berlin has been described as the gay capital of 1920’s Europe.³ Through critical engagement with the social, cultural and political climate in the city between the wars, this chapter aims to analyze the construction of, and highlight the historical complexity behind, what has been referred to as a Berlin “myth,” the notion that the city represented some sort of homosexual utopia.⁴ Contemporary oral and written accounts often emphasize the importance of the city – and the period – citing the flamboyance of the cabaret, the permissiveness of the bars, the tacit tolerance of the authorities, and the attempts to secure the legal and political emancipation of homosexuals. This chapter then moves from the bars of Berlin, if not the boys, to consider the youth movements of the period such as the *Wandervogel*. These groups often eschewed the industrialization of German’s cities and placed emphasis on nature and countryside activities. They were mostly young male, adult-free spaces, and were often nationalistic and sometimes homoerotic in nature.⁵ The significance of such movements is considered and analyzed in relation to how German homosexual men remember these histories, and how they helped shape their identities.⁶ In such groups, the male body and physicality was given prominence, and this is scrutinized within the wider framework of the increasing focus on German masculinity and “maleness” post-war. The chapter then considers the impact of homosexual media during the period,

¹ Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1969), xiv.

² Paragraph 175, 2000.

³ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 50.

⁴ Ibid, 13; Percy, “Homosexuality and the Holocaust”; Paragraph 175, 2000; Prickett, “Defining Identity via Homosexual Spaces,” 150.

⁵ Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 140-143.

⁶ Paragraph 175, 2000.

alongside the achievements of pioneering emancipators Hirschfeld and Brand. If Weimar was the era of possibility, post-1933 is emphasized here as one of despair; the progress Hirschfeld, Brand and others made was shattered, both figuratively in the Nazi's rebuttal of Brand's written pleas for reform, and literally, as Hirschfeld's unparalleled Institute – and all it represented and achieved – was destroyed. Bars were boarded-up, books were burned and there was an escalation of blackmail and denouncements. I will argue that the period was not solely about destruction. For the Nazis it would also be about cultural commutation; for every smashed window on Kristallnacht there was an ambitious Autobahn plan or blueprint for Germania, capital of the thousand-year Reich. For homosexuals, the despoiled Institute for Sexual Science and the anticipated abolition of Paragraph 175 gave way to tightened laws whilst gay social spaces were symbolically commandeered as sites of persecution and terror.

There already exists much historical scholarly work on the Weimar Republic, which looks at the epochal economic, cultural and social developments.⁷ The Republic, known formally as the German Reich, was the German state from the end of the First World War in 1918 until the seizure of power by the Nazis in 1933, effectively leading to the collapse of democracy and the dawn of a dictatorship.⁸ Economically, the Republic can be broadly delineated into three periods; bookended by the immediate post-war years of 1918-1923 and 1929-1933, which were marked by severe financial hardship and ongoing resentment, both internally between various political factions, and externally with its European neighbors.⁹ In between these tumultuous times was a period of relative calm, stability and prosperity, as well as a “cultural renaissance” – the so-called *Golden Twenties* – which saw, in terms of homosexuality, a proliferation of art, music and theatre, as well as an explosion of social spaces.¹⁰

Yet Weimar Germany was contradictory; Eberhard Kolb characterizes the period as a “sharp contrast between the gloomy political and economic conditions... and the unique wealth of artistic and intellectual achievement.”¹¹ Whilst for Peter Gay,

⁷ Weitz, *Weimar Germany*; McElligott, *Weimar Germany*; Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic*.

⁸ Ian Kershaw, *Weimar: Why Did German Democracy Fail?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); Benjamin Carter Hett, *The Death of Democracy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2018).

⁹ Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2012), 198-203.

¹⁰ Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 3-4, 41, 49.

¹¹ Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, 83.

Weimar's complex cultural and political tug-of-war resembled "a dance on the edge of a volcano."¹² All was not well in the fledgling Republic, and there were those for whom its shift to liberalism and decadence was considered a threat to "traditional" German morals and values.¹³ What is pertinent to this study is how those who experienced it understand the period in terms of their own narrative accounts, both of the cities in which they lived, and the persecution they would subsequently encounter and detail in their testimonies. What did the proliferation of city bars, clubs and meeting places mean for homosexuals? What were conditions like for homosexuals who did not reside in big cities yet fostered a sense of solidarity through youth movements and naturism? How did the pioneering work of sexologists such as Magnus Hirschfeld and campaigners such as Adolf Brand advance the homosexual emancipation cause and how conscious of this work were the German homosexual communities? These questions are central to the first part of this chapter, which critically examines the socio-cultural and physical environments for homosexuals, from meeting places to media representation, as well as examining the legal and political climate and the extent to which various bodies persecuted or even protected them. The cultural memory of the period is writ large throughout the narratives of the survivors, which are largely shaped not just by the persecution itself, or even the continuing post-war silencing, but also by the cultural recollections of the "golden era" of Weimar. This period prior to persecution is important in understanding what was lost in terms of homosexual life under the Nazis, but also demonstrates that gay life during the Weimar period was more complex than has been sometimes suggested. Examining the urban subcultures, the rural youth movements, and the scientific pioneers, allows for the contextualization of the diversity of homosexual experience and to trace the important liberation movements. Though this chapter is largely concerned with the memories and representations of *Weimar*, in the recollections of survivors, the Weimar and Nazi periods are often inexorably intertwined, and memories of the former are often punctuated by the latter. Because of this, it is neither simple nor preferable to compartmentalize the two epochs. Often a

¹² Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture*, xiv.

¹³ There is an ongoing, evolving debate between historians about whether the Republic was doomed to failure because of Germany's inherent authoritarianism, or whether its demise occurred as a backlash against progressivism. See Julia Roos, *Weimar Through the Lens of Gender: Prostitution Reform, Woman's Emancipation, and German Democracy. 1919–1933* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 213; Jochen Hung, "A Backlash against Liberalism? What the Weimar Republic Can Teach Us about Today's Politics," *International Journal of History, Culture and Modernity (HCM)* 5, no. 1, (2018): 2

fond memory of a meeting place, a social space or a brief encounter is countered by the awful realization that such joy would soon be denied and destroyed.

In relation to Germany Kathleen Canning perceives the end of the First World War as a break, and stresses the “abrupt experiences of defamiliarization, disorientation, and trauma of defeat and revolution at the beginning of the republic, which ripped open the possibility... throughout the 1920s.”¹⁴ The possibilities “ripped open” for homosexuals included increasing cultural visibility, a focused emancipation effort, and a growing sense of belonging, in various groups and social settings. However, we should exercise caution against collapsing the “homosexual experience” into a *homogeneous* experience. Factors such as education, class, age, mobility, and geographical location often dictated the extent to which homosexuals felt equal and enfranchised. In 1920s Berlin, for example, the situation for a middle-class actor was considerably different to that of a street hustler, whilst those who dwelled in the provinces rather than the cities would have a divergent experience of how they – and those around them – negotiated their sexuality.¹⁵

“Eldorado – You’ve found it”¹⁶

– Berlin, Bars and Boys

The literature that recounts the seismic shifts in Europe after the First World War often emphasizes the cultural importance of the Weimar period, in relation to the subsequent onslaught of Nazism. In her study of European homosexuality between the World Wars, Florence Tamagne argues that “the richness of the homosexual scene in those towns, the profusion of homosexual hang-outs, the exuberance of the nocturnal festivities made them symbols of pleasure and permissiveness, the memory of which lingered on for decades.”¹⁷ It is these lingering memories we often see manifested in the words, voices and the faces of those who testify, often decades later, and usually within the context of the horrors to which they were a prelude. In critically analyzing the memories of these men, we need to consider the form in which they are testifying. Part one of this

¹⁴ Kathleen Canning, Kerstin Barndt, Kristin McGuire, *Weimar Publics/Weimar Subjects: Rethinking the Political Culture of Germany in the 1920* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 5.

¹⁵ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality*, 36-38; Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 68-70; 165; 203-209.

¹⁶ Signage on the Eldorado Club, Berlin, see image two.

¹⁷ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality*, 36.

thesis, and chapter two in particular, is largely concerned with *written* memoirs of homosexual survivors of Nazism. It is a body of work which, in terms of volume, is comparatively thin. Therefore, the narratives of the periods under scrutiny are supplemented with oral testimonies, most notably through the 2000 documentary *Paragraph 175*, but also from some of the oral interviews which form part of the archive of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. These different forms of bearing witness are imbued with distinctive characteristics and are doing differing things, and these distinctions will be further developed in chapter two. Written testimony often employs literary techniques in order to try and get the reader to imagine the unimaginable. Such devices, according to Lawrence Langer, include “style, chronology, analogy, imagery, dialogue, a sense of character [and] a coherent moral vision.”¹⁸ The memories elicited in *oral* testimonies can be shaped and guided by the interviewer. They can be disruptive, unexpected, candid, raw and impromptu.¹⁹ Invariably, the oral testimonies were acquired long after the events, they were usually recounted by frail, elderly men who were hesitant to speak of the atrocities they endured under Nazism, but visibly buoyed when asked to recount their youthful endeavors. Often these men accompanied their oral narrative with photographs, eager to show pictorial evidence of their “golden days.”²⁰ It is *these* memories – of “bars and boys” – that the survivors often most want to share, if indeed they are able to remember at all.²¹ Rudolf Brazda was a homosexual German who lived “openly” with a companion until the Nazi crackdown and increase in persecution saw him arrested and eventually serve almost three years in Buchenwald concentration camp. When conducting an interview in 2011 to publicize a forthcoming book telling the life story of Brazda, the interviewer notes:

Brazda is almost completely deaf, and he has a tough time understanding questions. But he still has good eyesight, and the best way for anyone interviewing him to get the man talking is to show him pictures from the past. Snapshots from his home state of Thuringia, from the town of Meuselwitz where he lived before being arrested by the Nazis, and of the Phönix public swimming pool located next to a coal factory. It was here in the summer of 1933

¹⁸ Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 19.

¹⁹ Michael Bernard-Donals, Richard Glejzer, *Between Witness and Testimony: The Holocaust and the Limits of Representation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 53.

²⁰ *Paragraph 175*, 2000; *We Were Marked with a Big A*, Film. Netherlands: Elke Jeamond & Joseph Weishaupt, 1991.

²¹ *Paragraph 175*, 2000.

that Brazda, who was 20 years old at the time, met his first love. Looking at the old photograph seems to cheer him up -- he perks up and smiles.²²

Similarly, the elderly men who were interviewed for *Paragraph 175* recalled their carefree early days before the spectre of Nazism loomed large over them. Pierre Seel, struggled to recount the stories of his youth, his anger still consumed him decades later. The testimony of Rolf Hirschberg is peppered with difficulty in negotiating his memories; he constantly returns to the present as the past is too far removed and too painful to revisit. Heinz F., whose existence as a young Munich homosexual was shattered by almost eight years' imprisonment in Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps, reminisces fondly about Berlin clubs such as the *Schwänenburg*.²³ In a time of extremes, these oral testimonies invariably emphasize the feelings of optimism and opportunity pervading the Republic and accentuate the antithetical nature of their lives "before and after." Yet any attempt to present a synthesized "homosexual account" of the period between the end of the First World War and the ascension of Nazism is particularly problematic. There may be a temptation to amalgamate the narratives of the period into a common discourse, not least because the few testimonies we have available for scrutiny often appear to tell similar stories. Yet the situation was far more complex and heterogeneous. Tamagne notes that "the community was very fragmented; not only according to the variety of sexual demand, but also according to social and cultural origins."²⁴ Those who frequented the meeting places included actors, artists, waiters, writers, servants, soldiers and students. Some were consciously politically active, others merely revelled in the subculture.²⁵ It is imperative, therefore, to acknowledge the diversity of Weimar homosexuals and what this meant in terms of their existence before and under Nazism, and moreover, how this is manifested within their testimonies. In the three memoirs that are central to part one of this thesis, only Gad Beck's touches upon the "Berlin scene" in any detail (the other authors being French and Austrian, yet subject to Nazi-

²² "At 98, Gay Concentration Camp Survivor Shares Story," accessed 30 November 2019, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/i-had-always-been-blessed-with-good-fortune-at-98-gay-concentration-camp-survivor-shares-story-a-772667-2.html>; for detailed accounts of the life of Rudolf Brazda see Jean-Luc Schwab, Rudolf Brazda, *Itinerario de un triángulo rosa* (Madrid: Éditions Florent Massot, 2010); Alexander Zinn, *Das Glück kam immer zu mir": Rudolf Brazda—Das Überleben eines Homosexuellen im Dritten Reich* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2011).

²³ *Paragraph 175*, 2000; "Survivors of a Forgotten Holocaust," accessed 14 February 2019 http://www.petertatchell.net/lgbt_rights/history/survivors

²⁴ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 38.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 31-45; Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 43-47.

imposed restrictions and oppression). Therefore, the oral testimonies from the archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and *Paragraph 175* are especially useful here in their rendering of gay memories of both Nazi persecution and of the preceding period. These testimonies variously pertain to the social scene, youth movements, sexual and romantic encounters, and the relationship between homosexuals and the authorities. When read together, these sources offer up accounts of rich, vibrant, socially and culturally diverse homosexual communities in Weimar German cities and provinces.²⁶ When they began to be arrested and detained by the Nazis, homosexuals were invariably identified as a homogenous group defined purely by their “degeneracy.” In German prisons, they were ostracized from the more “decent” prisoners, whilst those sent to concentration camps were herded together and ostracized in single blocks.²⁷ Yet in Weimar German cities, homosexuality was not limited to this narrow, negative definition which the Nazis engendered and used as an ideological strategy. The homosexual scene in Weimar Germany’s cities was often vibrant, diverse and catered for a range of desires.²⁸ By the late 1920s in Berlin alone there were over one hundred bars, clubs or meeting places for homosexuals, a figure which Johansson and Percy claim had increased to three hundred by 1932.²⁹ City guides were available listing the extensive range of nightlife on offer, from the legendary *Eldorado* with its cabarets and big-name patrons, to the discreet smaller bars favoured by the middle-classes, to rather less salubrious establishments.³⁰ Erich recalls that “young proletarians” like him would dress up as famous silent movie stars and be wined and dined in Berlin’s bars and ballrooms by doctors and judges. He notes the irony that these same judges might next day be sentencing the young men for shoplifting.³¹

Rolf Hirschberg was a Jewish homosexual born and raised in Berlin. In an interview in 1996 recorded for the oral history collection of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Hirschberg recalls a long-term relationship he conducted with an older man.

²⁶ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 45.

²⁷ Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, 23; 34.

²⁸ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 45.

²⁹ Johansson and Percy, “Homosexuals in Nazi Germany,” (NP); Clayton J Whisnant, *Queer Identities and Politics in Germany: A History, 1880–1945* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2016), 92-94.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 38-39; Richard Dyer, “Less and More than Women and Men; Lesbian and Gay Cinema in Weimar Germany,” *New German Critique*, No. 51, Special Issue in Weimar Mass Culture, Autumn, (1990): 8; see figure 2.

³¹ Jürgen Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 17.

After experiencing first-hand the changes the Nazis brought to his beloved Berlin, and the persecution that befell homosexuals and Jews, the two fled to the United States. A substantial part of his testimony centres on the social scene for Berlin's homosexuals, as he recalls trips to the *Klaus Casino* with its marbled entrance and intimate cinema, and sojourns to Alexanderplatz where he chose "dignified places with a better class of our people."³² He concurs that there were many types of establishment in Berlin during the Weimar years that would cater for whatever one desired. Hirschberg's reminiscence reveals much about the Berlin "scene;" the bars were often very busy and there were types of establishment to suit every kind of client. Many were established decades prior and ranged from taverns for "respectable" gentlemen and piano bars for men in drag, to bars in the east of the city frequented by working-class men, some of which were respectable and modest whilst others were loud and raucous, some served a more mature clientele whilst others offered youth dances.³³ For every high-class ball organized by Magnus Hirschfeld, there were inconspicuous homosexual hangouts like Auden and Isherwood's favourite *The Cosy Corner*, which was "proletarian and considered very rough."³⁴ Certainly for Christopher Isherwood, travelling there for the first time in the late 1920s, "Berlin meant boys" and he recounts in glorious detail the excitement of visiting underground boy bars which were at odds with his provincial English existence.³⁵ He recalls:

Nothing could have looked less decadent than the Cosy Corner. It was plain, homely and unpretentious. Its only decorations were a few photographs of boxers and racing cyclists, pinned up above the bar. It was heated by a big old-fashioned iron stove. Partly because of the great heat of this stove and partly because they knew it excited their clients, the boys stripped off their sweaters or leather jackets and sat around with their shirts unbuttoned to the navel and their sleeves rolled up to the armpits³⁶

WH Auden's evocative journal of late 1920s Berlin evokes the extraordinary breadth of homosexual life in the city at the time, where an evening could be made up of such

³² "Oral history interview with Rolf Hirschberg," accessed 12 October 2017, <http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504930>; Hirschberg's complete testimony runs for over two hours and is the most detailed account of one homosexual's experience under Nazism in the USHMM's electronic archive.

³³ Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 59-60.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 208-9.

³⁵ Isherwood, *Christopher and his Kind*, 10-15.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 30.

diverse experiences as a tour of the eighteenth-century drawing rooms in Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute, a meal in a Berlin restaurant, followed by drinks and dancing in a bar renowned for male sex workers. Auden exclaimed "I've moved to a slum... 50 yards from my brothel... I spend most of my time with Juvenile Delinquents... Berlin is the buggers daydream."³⁷ Isherwood and Auden were merely two of many who travelled from various parts of the world to sample Berlin's seedy and salacious sexual scene. Beachy notes that, whether they were there to observe, record or participate in what was on offer in the city, we can consider these subcultural sojourns "sexual tourism."³⁸ Post First World War, the growth in sex tourism in the city depended in part on the relaxing of laws during the Weimar period, and, subsequently, increased freedom, which led to a flourishing homosexual press and an upsurge in homosexual films, art and venues.³⁹ This meant that Berlin became the primary location for those to come and observe those who were "the same," "different," or those with "shared difference[s]"⁴⁰ The notion of tourists coming to Berlin to engage with – in whatever form – its notorious nightlife, encompasses a broad spectrum of locations, activities, acts and actors, and as such contributes to the cultural memory that has developed. These include venues for gay men, lesbians, cross-dressers, and "transsexuals."⁴¹ Moreover, the sexual activity was not confined to bars and bath-houses, nor was it easily categorized; Beachy notes "the broad spectrum of ... sexual acts. The extremes along this spectrum ranged from committed loving relationships to the briefest of hookups in the Tiergarten Park."⁴²

These social spaces and the way they were utilized and engaged with contributed to shaping homosexual "identities."⁴³ The memory of them is writ large in the fond reminiscences of those who frequented them, from bourgeoisie "sex tourists" such as Isherwood and Auden, to "the drug crowd and gigolos ... and cabarets catering to

³⁷ Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, x.

³⁸ Ibid. 188.

³⁹ Ibid. 188-9.

⁴⁰ David James Prickett, "We will show you Berlin': space, leisure, flânerie and sexuality," *Leisure Studies*, 30:2, (2011): 159.

⁴¹ Ibid. 157.

⁴² Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 188-9.

⁴³ Norman Page, *Auden and Isherwood The Berlin Years* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), 11, 13, 16-17, 21, 32, 36; For more on social spaces and identity, see Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, Beachy, *Gay Berlin*.

soldiers.”⁴⁴ Over a three-month period, German writer Klaus Mann details his experiences in Weimar Berlin bars, baths and private clubs, with sailors and peasant boys.⁴⁵ Tamagne argues that Mann’s journal “proves that it was entirely possible to live an open and even vibrant sexual life in the 1920s.”⁴⁶ It is a position largely reiterated by those who have shared their testimonies, yet needs to be considered in the context of a country where, ultimately, such sexual encounters were often being monitored and could be subject to prosecution.

“The police are coming!”⁴⁷ - Homosexuals and the law

In *Gay Berlin* (2014) Robert Beachy traces the history of the policing of homosexuality in Berlin, from as far back as the unification of states into the German Empire in the nineteenth century, and demonstrates the development of a homosexual scene which initially coexisted uneasily with the police. There was concern in those early days of the Empire that such establishments offended public decency, and police commissioners aimed to monitor and investigate them in the hope of curbing any further expansion of a homosexual scene and culture. Ultimately this proved an impossible task and subsequent enforcement officers would largely overlook the burgeoning community, believing that consenting adults socializing in privacy was a “victimless crime”⁴⁸ Indeed, as the century wore on, this toleration of the bars, clubs and meeting places, and indeed of homosexuals themselves would serve several purposes; it prevented the scene being driven underground, it enabled close monitoring of the men who frequented the establishments, it led to a record of the city’s gay men and a subsequent founding of a Department of Homosexuals in 1885, and it even provided access to the scene for a variety of professionals such as psychiatrists in order to study the growing phenomenon.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 39.

⁴⁵ Ibid; Klaus Mann, *Journal, tome 1: Les années brunes 1931-1936* (Paris: Grasset, 1996), 32,37,42,47-8.

⁴⁶ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 39.

⁴⁷ Paragraph 175, 2000.

⁴⁸ Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 42-47.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 54-57.

Although in the pre-Nazi period there *were* many meeting places and social spaces in cities such as Berlin, homosexuality remained illegal. Since the establishment of the Second Reich in 1871 there had existed a statute – Paragraph 175 – which criminalized sexual acts between men.⁵⁰ Throughout the twelve years of Weimar, over 9,000 German homosexual men were convicted of violating Paragraph 175 and the spaces were susceptible to both police surveillance and raids.⁵¹ Moreover, the city’s social spaces had to also contend with unwanted patrons; these might range from the relatively innocuous “wrong type” of homosexual guest to the more insidious lure of the blackmailer – a constant threat during the period. In *Paragraph 175*, Rolf Hirschberg’s testimony reveals that a particular proprietor had mechanisms for keeping out those whom it was felt belonged in a different place, citing overcrowding and ensuring they knew their regular clientele. When asked if it was dangerous to be in the bars and clubs he replies “No, no, no!”⁵² Elsewhere Hirschberg insisted that Despite Paragraph 175, he says he always felt safe; indeed, he recalls that he often frequented afternoon and evening dances, which were advertised in the local press and were always very well attended.⁵³ Similarly, Heinz. F testifies that:

Then, there was much joy, and even more screaming. There was homosexual dancing. And once in a while, just to get the queens going, someone would shout, “The police are coming!” Everyone would hike up their skirts and run. But the police never came.⁵⁴

Christopher Isherwood maintains that “the Berlin police ‘tolerated’ the bars. No customer risked arrest for simply being in them. When the bars were raided, which

⁵⁰ The statute, which prohibited homosexual acts between men, was one of thirteen Paragraphs introduced by the German Empire to combat what it considered “moral offences.” Others covered bigamy, adultery, incest, rape, and various indecent acts with minors. See Edward Ross Dickinson, “Policing Sex in Germany, 1882-1982: A Preliminary Statistical Analysis,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 16, No. 2, May (2007): 204-250. The Nazis would further strengthen this law in 1935, though some historians maintain that whilst the Nazi persecution of homosexuals between 1933 and 1945 took a particular form, it could be argued that it formed part of a long lineage of criminalization dating back to the Middle Ages. See, amongst others, Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 107; 206; Grau, *Hidden Holocaust*, 1; Steven Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 513.

⁵¹ Andreas Sternweiler, ed. *Self Confidence and Persistence: Two Hundred Years of History* (Berlin: Schwules Museum, 2004), 149.

⁵² *Paragraph 175*, 2000.

⁵³ “Oral history interview with Rolf Hirschberg,” accessed 15 May 2017, <http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504930>

⁵⁴ *Paragraph 175*, 2000.

didn't happen often, it was only [the case that] the boys... were required to show their papers."⁵⁵

The relationship between homosexuals and the police – and indeed homosexuals and the law in general – is a more complex one than Heinz F and Isherwood suggest; it differed according to area and changed over time. Edward Ross Dickinson notes that, in fact, prosecutions for 'moral offenses' rose sharply in the early 1920s.⁵⁶ In the largely conservative city of Munich, police actively encouraged prosecutions for homosexuality, claiming that the practice and visibility of which had increased post-war. The Munich police force employed various tactics against its city's homosexuals, including public harassment, seizure of materials they considered explicit, and constant and resolute raiding of bars, meeting places and public toilets.⁵⁷ Even in Berlin, despite the police exercising a certain degree of leniency, the city's homosexuals could not live and love without risk. Tamagne qualifies somewhat the notion professed by testifiers such as Heinz F. that the authorities obliquely condoned homosexual social spaces. She argues that whilst "the police tolerated these gatherings... They delivered special permits... [and used] the occasion to create a register of homosexuals. This policy enabled them to monitor the groups discreetly while tolerating activities that did not disturb the law and order."⁵⁸

Despite a certain level of toleration, the statute remained, and *was* often enforced, particularly for those who engaged the services of male prostitutes. Thus, the threat of *blackmail* was a constant concern for anyone who contravened Paragraph 175, even in "Anything-Goes Weimar."⁵⁹ Laurie Marhoefer has claimed that often police actively *discouraged* blackmail of homosexuals by making those who frequented the bars and clubs of Berlin aware of the possible threat, and suggesting, informally, that they would not seek prosecution under Paragraph 175.⁶⁰ Yet, despite the turning of a number of blind-eyes, the criminalization of homosexuals and homosexual spaces remained. The

⁵⁵ Isherwood, *Christopher and his Kind*, 30.

⁵⁶ Dickinson, "Policing Sex in Germany," 215.

⁵⁷ Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic*, 49-50.

⁵⁸ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 42.

⁵⁹ Claire Colburn, *A Glimpse of Casual Queerness: The Radical Progress of Queer Visibility in Weimar Film and the Inevitable Backlash that Followed* (Indiana: Butler University, 2019), 49.

⁶⁰ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 49.

streets of Weimar Berlin might have been aglow with innumerable sexual opportunities, but they were also awash with those who sought to financially exploit these practices. For those arrested and prosecuted of homosexual acts or blackmail, the Weimar legal system did not differentiate between the sex worker and whomever paid for his services. Both the blackmailer and the blackmailed were considered criminals who offended the sensibilities of “ordinary, respectable Germans.”⁶¹

The relationship between homosexuals and the police in the Weimar Republic is complex and often contradictory in terms of the scholarship that has built up versus the few personal recollections we have available. Despite evidence that there continued to be police harassment, raids and prosecutions – particularly away from Berlin – those interviewed in *Paragraph 175* tend to emphasize a sense of synchronicity between homosexuals and the police. The reminiscence of those who lived through the period insist that they were largely unbothered by the law, and it rarely infringed on them socially. There is, however, a discrepancy between what one chooses – or is able – to remember, and what one – consciously or unconsciously – disregards. There are two things to consider here; firstly, these individuals are often remembering the past in the “present,” mediated by the stories and memories of others, and this is true not just of the recollections of “the police,” but more broadly, of Weimar itself. Alison Landsberg’s “Prosthetic Memory” is a model whereby individuals and groups “remember” and assimilate a past with which they were not directly connected, and this is often realized via the means of mass culture.⁶² It is a concept that I shall return to later when considering Holocaust appropriation and Americanization, but is also useful here in thinking about Weimar Germany and the sanguine stories shared. As each individual memory builds on a previous recollection, a collective narrative develops.⁶³ In this context, the dominant memory seems to be that city-dwelling homosexuals could seek out and enjoy vivacious existences and were largely able to carry on, regardless, of the police. A further consideration is that these men are remembering this past in terms of

⁶¹ Prickett, “We will show you Berlin,” 134-5. This correlation between those who were victims of Paragraph 175 and those who aimed to gain financially from it was one of the crucial components of Magnus Hirschfeld’s drive to legalise homosexuality, and is considered further below.

⁶² Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic memory: the transformation of American remembrance in the age of mass culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 9.

⁶³ Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 3.

what came afterwards. Conditions for Berlin's homosexuals would of course alter irrevocably after 1933, and this is scrutinized below. Gad Beck, a key memorialist for this thesis, notes that once the Nazis came to power "there was an incredible atmosphere of fear. [In the bar] they kept looking to see who was coming in... things used to be happy and carefree but now they were being persecuted."⁶⁴ Yet during the Weimar period, despite a constant police presence, many, particularly in Berlin, were able to maintain a degree of freedom and forge a sense of identity amongst the meeting places and clubs.⁶⁵ Through the individual reminiscence of those who testified, including Beck, Heinz F. Islerwood and Auden, as well as the scientific studies of physicians such as Hirschfeld, these identities often manifested as opposing social constructs, particularly in terms of Weimar law. For those who recalled the vibrancy of its culture, Weimar Berlin was, according to many of them, largely unfettered by stringent policing, and they were able to develop and nurture their homosexual identities. For Hirschfeld, the legal system had to be challenged to differentiate between the "true" innate homosexual and the "false" men who profited from homosexual acts such as prostitution and blackmail.⁶⁶ This dichotomous position between the stereotypical "good and bad, and right and wrong" is further exemplified in the topography of Weimar Germany, whereby the urban spaces fostered the immoral, whilst one could "live a moral life in a rural setting."⁶⁷ It is this topographical tension to which I now turn, to somewhat dispel the glittering myth of the urban, and complicate the notion that homosexuality was largely concentrated in – and restricted to – the immoral Gomorrah of the city.

"Band of men"⁶⁸

– The Männerbund, Masculinity, and the Youth Movement

By the 1920s, Weimar Germany had become increasingly industrialised, creating opportunities in urban areas which prompted many Germans to leave rural regions,

⁶⁴ Paragraph 175, 2000

⁶⁵ Prickett, "We will show you Berlin," 153.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 153-4.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 153.

⁶⁸ Glenn Ramsey, "The Rites of Artgenossen: Contesting Homosexual Political Culture in Weimar Germany," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 17, No. 1, *Masculinity and Homosexuality in Germany and the German Colonies, 1880-1945* Jan, (2008): 104.

resulting in mass migration to the major cities.⁶⁹ Many flocked to factories and offices to earn money, whilst others had to resort to more illicit means of survival; for instance, there was distinct upsurge in prostitution.⁷⁰ There was a growing sociocultural chasm between the two environments, in terms of how they were viewed by many Germans. Increasingly German cities were associated with decadence and degeneracy whilst those who resided in more rural areas were allegedly imbued with qualities of purity, morality, and national obedience.⁷¹ This was particularly manifested in the notion that German cities fostered homosexual identity much sooner than in the countryside.⁷² This social schism would later be accentuated by the Nazis to suit their ideological agenda, and ostracize their enemies.⁷³ But despite the significance of the capital, neither homoeroticism nor sexuality was confined to the basement bars of Berlin. As the 1920s wore on, appreciation of the body and of youth, nudity, and male companionship became more prevalent within many areas of German society. This section will consider the impact that the Great War had on German masculinity. It will analyze how homosexual men understood and negotiated their sexuality and their “maleness,” and how certain groups and organizations such as the *Wandervogel* invoked ideologies of virility and comradeship.⁷⁴ Many of these cultural developments happened far from the urban milieu and thus shift the emphasis from the cities in terms of the “golden years” of Weimar.

By 1918, Germany had lost more men in combat than either the United Kingdom or France.⁷⁵ As well as the devastating loss of life, the nature of the war that had been

⁶⁹ Shearer West, *The Visual Arts in Germany, 1890-1937: Utopia and Despair* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 170; Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 148.

⁷⁰ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 58.

⁷¹ Scholarship of the period has sometimes challenged this overly simplistic binary in which the country is represented as pure and the city as perverse, see Cornelia Usborne, *Cultures of abortion in Weimar Germany* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 145; Brendan Fay, *Classical Music in Weimar Germany: Culture and Politics Before the Third Reich* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 72; Katie Sutton, *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 174; Florence Feiereisen, Kyle Frackman, *From Weimar to Christiania: German and Scandinavian Studies in Context* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2009), 42.

⁷² Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 151.

⁷³ Ramsey, “The Rites of Artgenossen,” 95; Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 78-70; 103; Prickett, “We will show you Berlin,” 153-154; “Homosexuality and the Holocaust,” accessed 8 December 2017, http://www.williamapercy.com/wiki/index.php/Homosexuality_and_the_Holocaust ;

⁷⁴ Peter Morgan, “Coming out in Weimar: Crisis and homosexuality in the Weimar Republic,” *Thesis Eleven*, 111:48, (2012); *Paragraph 175*, 2000; Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 25.

⁷⁵ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 25.

fought and the effect it had on survivors proved instrumental in shaping meanings associated with post-war German masculinity and the place of men in German society. George L Mosse emphasizes links between militarism and masculinity, developed by German psychiatrists investigating shell-shock after the war. They often concluded that “war was the supreme test of manliness... [a] commitment to the nation... [and that] the shock of war could only cripple those who were of a weak disposition, fearful, and, above all, weak of will.”⁷⁶ It was further argued that military efficiency had been frustrated by “sexual disorders,” lengthy periods in purely male company, the practice of mutual sexual relief, and the after-effects of the traumatic act of killing. Consequently, there were concerns that conditions in the front were being replicated in post-war Germany and could lead to social discord. Doctors and psychiatrists feared an epidemic of brutish, troubled men who no longer received sexual gratification from women but rather one another, and claimed that male relationships formed during the war led to misogyny and hyper-masculine violence once the conflict ended. There were concerns that the mental and physical degeneration of these soldiers made them other than the “norm” and would ultimately destroy the German way of life.⁷⁷

The traumas of the First World War and its effect on the concept of German masculinity are of particular significance to this study in terms of how it influenced the post-war homosexual emancipation campaign, and how it informed the cultural memory of homosexuals themselves. Tamagne notes that “war reveals a country’s weakness... The war left little room for minorities and rendered suspect any and all forms of deviation. In Germany, the homosexual movements retreated into prudent silence.”⁷⁸ In a period of wartime patriotism, the homosexual came to represent a traitorous enemy, someone who was a risk to the German nation. Yet for many homosexual men, the war itself created conditions for male companionship, comradeship and courage. Moreover, the involvement of homosexuals in the war effort – albeit muted for self-preservation – was evidence that, rather than being “other,” homosexuals could integrate and share experiences with their heterosexual counterparts. The proximity of so many men in such perilous situations, alongside a homoerotic emphasis on the male body, strength and

⁷⁶ George L. Mosse, “Shell-Shock as Social Disease,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 35, No.1, Special Issue: Shell-Shock, Jan, (2000): 103-105.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 61-62.

⁷⁸ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 20.

masculinity, provided a space for “homosexual friendships” to flourish. These companionships were diverse in nature, and may not have been limited to encounters between “genuine” homosexuals, with many soldiers forming bonds with one another in order to provide comfort in the confines of the trenches. Tamagne notes that the visibility of such “friendships” challenged the contempt in which heterosexual men usually held homosexuals, whom they othered and considered effeminate. In the trenches, the men were not considered to be different, but rather were bound “together by a code of honor and shared experiences.”⁷⁹ Jason Crouthamel further argues that, rather than creating a generation of traumatized, sexually deviant soldiers, participation in the war enabled homosexuals to demonstrate their allegiance to Germany. Homosexuals hoped to procure societal assimilation by challenging “social and cultural perception of gays as degenerate ‘enemies of the nation’”⁸⁰ Marhoefer notes that “from their posts in the muddy, freezing trenches, homosexual soldiers looked forward to a post-war era in which the state would recognize their service and respect their rights.”⁸¹ Homosexual soldiers began writing to Magnus Hirschfeld asking for help in recognizing their contribution to the Fatherland, and the desire for equality within the eyes of the law. One wrote an anguished letter to the *Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee* (Scientific-Humanitarian Committee) in 1915 about his companion who died, angry not only that he had laid down his life for Germany but also that in death he would be meaningless; that the Fatherland that had eagerly sent him off to war would continue to treat men like him as bad citizens. He writes that these men, “who by nature are oriented towards the same sex perform their duty and their part fully and completely. It is finally time *that the state treat them in the same manner that they treat the state.*”⁸²

The First World War *did* somewhat invigorate the homosexual movement. By the 1920s, homosexual emancipation organizations invoked the homoerotic aesthetic of the wartime warrior in order that Weimar Germany might re-evaluate its notion of masculinity, identity and sexuality.⁸³ Groups such as Adolf Brand’s *Gemeinschaft der*

⁷⁹ Ibid. 22.

⁸⁰ Jason Crouthamel, “‘Comradeship’ and ‘Friendship: Masculinity and Militarisation in Germany’s Homosexual Emancipation Movement after the First World War,” *Gender and History*, Vol.23, No.1, (April 2011): 111.

⁸¹ Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic*, 39.

⁸² Ibid. 40, Emphasis in original.

⁸³ Crouthamel, “‘Comradeship’ and ‘Friendship,’” 111; Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 21.

Eigenen, GdE (Community of Self-Owners) “articulated the hygienic benefits of male friend-love among Germany's youth, primarily in reshaping German society into a strong and healthy "band of men"(Mannerbund).”⁸⁴ Given the emphasis on youth, strength and physicality, it is unsurprising that much of the testimony of homosexuals available to us reveals a preoccupation with physical endeavors as much as with frequenting bars and cabaret clubs. Whilst the latter was predominantly available in the big cities and for those over a certain age, sports and recreation was fostered in schools and was readily available to most, at least until the Nazis came to power. Often the testimonies reveal that through sporting physicality came sexual intimacy. Gad Beck recalls:

Sport became the center of my life. I had an athletics teacher, a blonde Jewish teacher. Oh my! So slim and strong and beautiful. One day we were showering together and I jumped on him. Exactly the opposite of the pederast teacher. *I* jumped on *him*! I ran home to my mother and said ‘Mother, today I had my first man.’⁸⁵

I will return to Beck’s recollection further below, but of significance here is that this emphasis on the physicality, and blossoming sexuality, of young men was often synonymous with the youth movements, which were growing in popularity. German philosopher and writer Hans Blüher argued that through aggressive and overt homoeroticism, nations were strengthened and wars were won, and that the German youth movement benefitted from male companionship and mutual male attraction.⁸⁶ Blüher was born and raised in a conservative family and educated at a prestigious gymnasium in Steglitz, south-west Berlin. It was in this locality in 1895 that the *Wandervogel* was created. The movement encouraged outdoor activities such as hiking, emphasized a return-to-nature, and embraced male camaraderie. There are parallels between the experience of the German Youth Movement and the wider experiences of young Germans under Weimar. According to Eric Weitz, the youth revolts of post- First World War Germany are arguably an (admittedly much more visible) antecedent of the homosexual movements that were to follow. During the 1918-19 German Revolution

⁸⁴ Ramsey, “The Rites of Artgenossen,” 104.

⁸⁵ *Paragraph 175*, 2000.

⁸⁶ Johansson and Percy, “Homosexuals in Nazi Germany,” (NP); JA Williams, “Ecstasies of the Young: Sexuality, the Youth Movement, and Moral Panic in Germany on the Eve of the First World War,” *Central European History* 34, (2001): 163-189.

students began to disassociate with tutors, elders and authority generally. They held rallies, sported the latest city fashions and embraced sex and eroticism.⁸⁷ Away from the decadent city streets but equally at odds with the adult society in which they lived, these youth groups proliferated. Though they had existed since around the turn of the century, scout and *Wandervogel* movements flourished after the war. Peter Morgan argues that “men, in particular, were thrown into a crisis of gender identity... [and that] in Berlin and other German cities and towns, radical experimentation with life possibilities took place.”⁸⁸ The post-war climate, a combination of a suspicion of authoritarian tradition, and a desire for male comradeship and camaraderie, was the ideal environment for these flourishing movements. The Youth groups were made up of many different types of children and young adults from right across Germany, and offered physical activities such as camping and hiking, and placed strong emphasis on a return-to-nature. They were able to operate separately from Prussian discipline, independently from adult influence and, “away from prying German eyes, they celebrated nature, friendship and the human body.”⁸⁹ The reality of the Wandervogal was somewhat dichotomous; such movements certainly provided a reaction to, and a sanctuary from, the restrictions imposed by authority figures such as teachers and parents, where youngsters could engage in all manner of activities. Yet the movement itself was characterized by stringent structures, which were hierarchical in nature and usually presided over by “the charismatic leadership of an adult *Führer*... [and] initiation ceremon[ies] began with a salute: “*Heil*””⁹⁰

The Youth movement was not without its controversies as increasing reports of pederasty began to emerge. The groups were subject to increasing external pressures from parents and “although relationships between adult leaders and boys were forbidden... [the groups] quickly gained a reputation for tolerating homosexuals.”⁹¹ Several of those who were interviewed in *Paragraph 175* experienced first-hand the sexual element of both the movement in particular, and indeed activities between responsible adults and minors generally. Beck protests that *he* instigated the encounter

⁸⁷ Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 25-25.

⁸⁸ Morgan, “Coming out in Weimar,” 51.

⁸⁹ *Paragraph 175*, 2000.

⁹⁰ Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 142-3.

⁹¹ John Alexander Williams, “Ecstasies of the Young: Sexuality, the Youth Movement, and Moral Panic in Germany on the Eve of the First World War,” *Central European History* 34, no. 2, (2001): 147.

with his sports teacher, and claims that his mother was accepting of her twelve year-old son having a sexual relationship with a twenty-two year-old teacher. Yet the isolated incident was never repeated, as Beck surmised that the teacher was likely “afraid of the possible consequences.”⁹² Young Berliner, Heinz Dormer, was also just twelve years old when he began sexual relations with other boys in the Scout movement, as well as some of the leaders who were in their early twenties. Aged seventeen, Heinz formed his own youth group, the *Ring of Wolves*, which “connected many of Heinz's interests: sexual affairs, amateur theater performances, and travel.”⁹³ Despite these controversial cases of sexual encounters at such a young age, those interviewed in *Paragraph 175* talk fondly of their time in youth movements, gazing wistfully at photographs of bronzed, healthy young men lounging in fields, rowing in boats and climbing trees. Yet, much like with the “bands of men” who had returned home from the war, there was concern that the largely exclusively male, and often homoerotic environment of the *Wandervogel* was problematic on a wider scale. Beachy argues that girls were excluded from the movement in order to avoid emasculating the German youth, and this fostered misogynist attitudes amongst the boys, a reinforcement of patriarchal ideologies, alongside a growing culture of anti-Semitism.⁹⁴ The youth movement in Germany would later be ripped apart by Nazism, as the state-sanctioned Hitler Youth sought to cleanse what they saw as the pederast and homoerotic elements that had infiltrated it.⁹⁵

Male-bonding flourished in the rural pursuits of German youth who rejected the confinement of the industrialised urban milieu in favour of the romantic, emotional mysticism that they fostered in nature and the countryside.⁹⁶ Many of those who shared their stories of persecution under the Nazis did not live in large cities such as Berlin, and their circumstances are crucial if we are to gain a full understanding of the different narratives that emerged, and the subsequent horrors they would endure under Nazism. There was a misconception that being away from the cities meant a degree of safety,

⁹² Beck, *An Underground Life*, 23.

⁹³ “Biography of Heinz Dormer,” accessed 9 December 2018, <http://www.pink-triangle.org>

⁹⁴ Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 149-152; Ramsey, “The Rites of Artgenossen,” 104-5. The exclusive emphasis on maleness, masculinity and homoeroticism in the *Wandervogel* has been challenged by some scholars and historians, who demonstrate that girls were also permitted to participate in some *Wandervogel* activities, see Elizabeth Heineman, ‘Gender Identity in the *Wandervogel* Movement,’ *German Studies Review* 12, no. 2, 249-70, (1989): 249.

⁹⁵ Johansson and Percy, “Homosexuals in Nazi Germany,” (NP).

⁹⁶ Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 8.

and certain testimonies reveal that some homosexuals fled from the cities to seek what they considered was refuge. Moreover, the narratives of those born and raised away from industrialised areas is often shaped by the particular types of opportunities rural spaces afforded.⁹⁷ Albrecht Becker lived in a small German mountain village. He recalls that

on a very lovely spring day I walked near the river and I met a very old man, he was forty-five years, I was eighteen... I was very happy and I went for three days in his home and lived with him, and we make, of course, love together. And I lived with him for about ten years.⁹⁸

In 1935, Becker was arrested and imprisoned in Nürnberg for three years. His small-town location may have meant a degree of relative anonymity from big-city Nazis, yet his exclamation at the time of his arrest that “Everyone knows I am a homosexual”⁹⁹ demonstrates both the extent to which those in small towns were aware of everyone else’s business and that there was a network of men even there who were aware of his sexuality. Indeed, so ingrained was Becker’s notion of his environment and its familiarity that when he returned after his imprisonment, he struggled with the ways in which the landscape had changes under the Nazis. He notes his dismay at finding ‘all the men were gone, either to the army or to prison... [so I enlisted in the Wehrmacht] as that’s where all the men were!’¹⁰⁰ Pierre Seel, whose testimony is central to part one of this thesis, was brought up in a prosperous Catholic family in French Alsace, far from the decadence of Weimar Germany and even the glittering boulevards of Montmartre and Montparnasse, the relatively tolerant and acceptable districts for French homosexual’s social lives.¹⁰¹ Yet his testimony still reveals he was able to avail himself of homosexual experiences in his town; there were dances and meeting places, and – as was to be Seel’s downfall – even hustlers and blackmailers, eager to capitalize on the increasingly strengthened rhetoric and laws against homosexual acts.¹⁰² Much of the young Seel’s identity was forged as a member of the *Zazous*, a subcultural youth

⁹⁷ Paragraph 175, 2000.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ See Nancy E. Rupprecht, and Wendy Koenig, eds., *Global Perspectives on the Holocaust: History, Identity, Legacy* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 249; Paragraph 175, 2000.

¹⁰¹ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 50.

¹⁰² Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 11-13.

movement in France before and during the Second World War, whose very *raison d'être* was opposition to the German occupying forces. The Nazi ideologies of order, discipline and military might were willfully opposed by the Zazous, who loved jazz and eccentric, outrageous fashions. These were purposeful, significant acts of cultural defiance against the austere, hostile environment created by the Nazis and supported by the collaborationist Vichy Government. The two parties also shared the dogma that “the youth” were the future of both countries, and movements such as the Zazous made ideal scapegoats in this ideological struggle. Their decadent behaviour and wild appearance were unpatriotic anathema to the “new order,” so they became the object of a cruel campaign by French fascists. By 1942, the cultural symbols of the Zazous began to be targeted; their oversized “zoot suits” were considered a provocative resistance to newly-establish cloth-saving regulations, and their long hair was often the target of attacks and would be forcibly and brutally cut.¹⁰³ As was the Nazi way, when Pierre Seel arrived at the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp he was literally stripped of his identity – forced into an ill-fitting camp uniform, and his cherished Zazou hair shaved, and a swastika traced into his scalp.¹⁰⁴

The spirit of the youth movements and their embrace of the outdoor life, brotherhood, and, often, sexuality is a key aspect of the collective memory of the pre-Nazi period for homosexuals. The images in *Paragraph 175*, and the oral recollections of survivors, demonstrate the celebration of the male body and the glorification of sexuality. Memories of the movement left an indelible mark on those who participated. When 85-year old Heinz F is asked if he remembers the boys, he replies with a smile, “I haven’t forgotten.”¹⁰⁵ Yet Heinz also recalls with sorrow the demise of these groups, largely at the violent hands of the expanding *Hitlerjugend* (Hitler Youth). The youth organization strand of the Nazi Party was officially formed in 1926 and by the time of the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, it was the sole youth movement allowed in Germany. Buoyed by a wave of nationalism and affection for the Führer, the membership grew rapidly, so that by 1934 approximately one in seven young Germans were members of the Hitler

¹⁰³ Larry Portis, *French Frenzies: A Social History of Popular Music in France* (Texas: Virtualbookworm.com, 2004), 99-103.

¹⁰⁴ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 29.

¹⁰⁵ *Paragraph 175*, 2000.

Youth.¹⁰⁶ Whilst the two movements may have shared a focus on exercise and physicality, ideologically they were poles apart. The wistful woodland wanderings, the playful camaraderie, and the joyful sexual escapades of the *Wandervogel* were replaced with a nationalistic, authoritarian cult, which provided a fertile training ground for military combat.¹⁰⁷ Gad Beck recalls in astonishment the rapid spread of the Hitler Youth, as all the German boys in his school rushed to join the movement. He notes that, following the Nazi Party's seizure of power "within four months the entire class turned brown."¹⁰⁸ With the movement's uniform came the uniformity of insidious ideals, the core of which was anti-Semitism, but also included homophobia.

Outside of the relatively insular and cocooned environment of the pre-Nazi period youth movements, German men wishing to experience sexual hedonism and decadence, hoping to be involved in activism and emancipation, or simply unable, financially, to survive often did relocate to larger, more urban areas.¹⁰⁹ There, they would discover a scene which was not just limited to bars and bath-houses, but a wider cultural movement which began to shape identities and forge a flourishing gay subculture.

"Knowledge will conquer prejudice"¹¹⁰

– Hirschfeld, Brand, and the struggle for homosexual emancipation

It was not only bars, clubs, meeting places and male-bonding rural groups that were visible signs of a post-war strengthening homosexual emancipation movement. The politics of sexual liberation, in cities such as Berlin particularly, was evinced in cultural texts including newspapers, magazines and film. A degree of relaxation of censorship laws post-war meant that there was a proliferation of written and visual media which spoke to the homosexual subculture. Jason Crouthamel maintains that "the postwar battle fought by homosexual men was not just for political emancipation; it was a battle

¹⁰⁶ Jean-Denis G.G. Lepage, *Hitler Youth, 1922-1945: An Illustrated History* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, Incorporated, Publishers, 2009), 27.

¹⁰⁷ Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 2.

¹⁰⁸ *Paragraph 175*, 2000. The youth uniform was based on the SA uniform and consisted of a "brown shirt, black shorts, and red armband with swastika" - Lepage, *Hitler Youth*, 22.

¹⁰⁹ Prickett, "We will show you Berlin," 137.

¹¹⁰ This is part of a longer quote, given by Magnus Hirschfeld's character towards the end of the film. He claims "the time will come when such tragedies will be no more. For knowledge will conquer prejudice, truth will conquer lies, and love will triumph over hatred." - *Anders als die Andern*. Film. Germany: Richard Oswald, 1919.

for the image and perceptions that homosexual men held of themselves.”¹¹¹ The cultural texts were conceived as part of the wider effort to bring about societal change for Germany’s homosexuals and to repeal Paragraph 175, and as such date back to the period following that statute’s enshrinement in law in 1971. Marhoefer outlines a history of the struggle for homosexual emancipation beginning as far back as the 1830s, including medical studies, public speaking and, by the turn of the century, the publishing of many hundreds of written texts on the subject.¹¹² Two of the key protagonists in the cause for reform were Magnus Hirschfeld and Adolf Brand, and this section considers how these figures utilized various mediums to try and realise their often-divergent visions.

Magnus Hirschfeld established the *Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee*, WHK (the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee) in Berlin in 1897. Beachy suggests the impetus for the founding of the WhK was the suicide of a young soldier on the eve of his wedding who felt shame at his homosexual feelings and worried that the spectre of Paragraph 175 would portend his eventual degradation.¹¹³ The motto of the WhK was “*Per scientiam ad justitiam*” – “Through science to justice” – and they aimed to bring about a reevaluation of attitudes towards homosexuals and a reform of the legal and cultural milieu. This maxim encapsulated both the aim of the institution and the environment in which they were trying to bring about these changes. Paragraph 175 had been introduced in 1871 under the guise of protecting the German people and reflecting their will, yet the statute was challenged throughout the rest of the century. Both medical and lay writing sought to define homosexuality to the “German people,” and explain why they should not fear it.¹¹⁴ For the next thirty years, the WhK pursued equality for homosexuals and the eradication of blackmail and prosecution.¹¹⁵ Hirschfeld’s efforts included distributing questionnaires about sexual preferences, publishing regular journals on every aspect of homosexuality and making numerous attempts to get

¹¹¹ Jason Crouthamel, *Hypermasculine Warriors Versus Effeminate Men: Masculinity and Sexuality in Print Media by German Veterans of the Great War*, in Annette Timm, Michael T Taylor, Rainer Herrn eds., *Not Straight from Germany: Sexual Publics and Sexual Citizenship Since Magnus Hirschfeld*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 298.

¹¹² Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic*, 26.

¹¹³ Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 87.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 86-90.

¹¹⁵ Grau, *Hidden Holocaust*, 2.

Paragraph 175 overturned.¹¹⁶ These efforts lead to a parliamentary commission to review the nation's moral code, which voted in 1929 to drop the anti-sodomy statute. But the growing influence of the Nazi party meant the commission's recommendation was never introduced in parliament'.¹¹⁷ However, Hirschfeld's legacy is considerable; his *Committee* had over a thousand members in 1914, he opened the Institute for Sexual Research in 1919, employing several staff, amassing an unparalleled collection of documents and photographs, offering counselling and advice and conducting extensive research. In the 1920's, a branch of the Institute was established in the Netherlands and in 1921 he organized the *First Congress for Sexual Reform* in Berlin, an academic conference that was a discernible success and led to the creation of the "World League for Sexual Reform, which at its height claimed a membership of more than 130,000."¹¹⁸

In 1903, Adolf Brand co-founded the *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen, GdE* (Community of Free Spirits). A conflict developed between Hirschfeld and Brand; broadly, Hirschfeld theorized that homosexuals represented an effeminate "third sex" while Brand argued that homosexuals were masculine, battle-ready warriors. Both, however, shared the desire to bring about the abolition of Paragraph 175 and the emancipation of homosexuals.¹¹⁹ In 1911, Brand wrote "What counts now above all is systematically, materially, and with the votes of all homosexuals, to support in the coming Reichstag election that party which alone until now has had the courage to openly advocate the repeal of P175!"¹²⁰ The complete antithesis of the Nazi rhetoric that would come to define the 1930s, Brand maintained that desire and procreation did not go hand-in-hand, rather propagation was only partly important to a man, and male companionship should be encouraged.¹²¹ In the Weimar period, the GdE's manifesto was clear :

¹¹⁶ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 207-208; p.33.

¹¹⁷ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 9.

¹¹⁸ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 42-43.

¹¹⁹ Morgan, "Coming out in Weimar," 49, Crouthamel, "'Comradeship' and 'Friendship,'" 111, 113, 123-126.

¹²⁰ Adolf Brand, 'Homosexuality and Reaction (1911),' *Journal of Homosexuality*, 22:1-2, (1992): 196. Brand was writing here about the Social Democratic Party who he felt were the only party that would fight for the existence of "friend-love," whether rich or poor, *ibid.* 197; for more on the political climate in regards to homosexual reform in Weimar, see Manfred Herzer, "Communists, Social Democrats, and the Homosexual Movement in the Weimar Republic," *Journal of Homosexuality*, 29:2-3 (1995); Harry Oosterhuis, "Homosexual Emancipation in Germany Before 1933" *Journal of Homosexuality*, 22:1-2 (1992):1-28.

¹²¹ Adolf Brand, "Friend-Love as a Cultural Factor," *Journal of Homosexuality*, 22:1-2 (1992): 147.

Self-determination over body and soul... setting friend-love beside women-love as having completely equal rights in the intercourses of the sexes amongst themselves... [and] repeal of all laws that are inimical to life and natural rights... in particular the repeal of P175, since it benefits only male prostitution and blackmail.’¹²²

Brand published *Der Eigene* (The Unique) from 1896 to 1932, proclaiming it to be “the first homosexual periodical in the world.”¹²³ The newspaper went through several iterations over the years and was notable for being a high quality “forum on homosexuality [that] encompassed scientific, literary, artistic and historical articles, poems, news bulletins and photographs of stunning, naked young men.”¹²⁴ Though he faced fines and was briefly imprisoned for immorality, Brand used publications such as *Der Eigene* as a means to bolster the notion of homosexual masculinity.¹²⁵ Rejecting Magnus Hirschfeld’s “third-sex” theory, Adolf Brand and fellow campaigners such as Benedict Friedlander emphasized “the homosexual man as even more masculine and athletic than the heterosexual man.”¹²⁶ With publications such as *Der Eigene* Brand tried to challenge Germany’s dominant homophobic ideology and endorse a notion of the homosexual warrior. It did so by utilizing “militarized language that highlighted how Brand conceptualized homosexual emancipation through the war experience. Words like “sacrifice,” “the front,” “battle” began to permeate the movement’s way of thinking about the relationship between homosexual men and the prevailing culture.”¹²⁷

From 1899 to 1923, Hirschfeld regularly published the newspaper *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* (Yearbook for Intermediate Sexual Stages), considered the world’s first newspaper to focus on homosexual compartment. It featured medical, sociological, biographical and literary articles, as well as regular updates on the endeavors of Hirschfeld’s WHK.¹²⁸ From 1919 *Die Freundschaft* (The Friendship) was the first

¹²² Adolf Brand, “What We Want (1925),” *Journal of Homosexuality*, 22:1-2, (1992): 155-164.

¹²³ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 69.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 70.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 69; Crouthamel, *Hypermasculine Warriors Versus Effeminate Men*, 298.

¹²⁶ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 42. Brand and Friedlander were drawing upon ancient Greek myths and practices which held that sexual friendships between men energised armies. The pair also maintained that ancient Greece was made great thanks to relationships between older and younger men and espoused such unions to ensure Germany’s glory. Much of what was being advocated by Brand and Friedlander was actually an adoption of Greek pederasty as opposed to homosexuality, see Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, 55-56.

¹²⁷ Crouthamel, *Hypermasculine Warriors Versus Effeminate Men*, 293.

¹²⁸ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 63.

homosexual newspaper in the world sold publicly at kiosks and newsstands.¹²⁹ Similarly, Hirschfeld's WhK utilized publishing houses to produce and publish many homosexual works including the popular and widely-read booklet *What Should the People Know About the Third Sex?* (1901), which was distributed over fifty-thousand times in many public areas, on transport and in meeting places prior to the war.¹³⁰ During the war years, such publications were usually censored. Post-First World War, publications sprang up in increasing numbers and with escalating levels of explicitness. As the 1920s wore on, increasing amounts of periodicals were published, thanks in part due to "lax and disorganized censorship under the Republic."¹³¹ The type of publication was evolving too. *Die Freundschaft* was largely political but also ran stories, poetry and letters. This is in marked contrast to Imperial Germany where such publications had to demonstrate some form of scientific merit and were not widely circulated beyond members of a particular organization, such as the WhK.

Yet homosexual publications were not simply accepted within German society. Marhoefer notes that many officials were concerned that the proliferation of publications might particularly affect Germany's vulnerable adolescents. Indeed, this concern seemed a cause to unite even the most disparate of political groups, including the Berlin League to Fight Public Immorality, Catholic and Protestant Women's Groups, the Bavarian People's Party and the Centre Party. 1926 saw the introduction of a '*Schmutz und Schund*' (Filth and Trash) law which sought to censor and ban publications that contained sexual or facetious content.¹³² Censorship of publications not only made it more difficult for people to obtain these texts; it had the added bonus of forcing homosexuals out of the shadows. Just as the Nazis would keep open the meeting places merely to round up the gays who frequented them, the early-Weimar censorship laws meant that those publications deemed "Filth and Trash" could not be publicly displayed, forcing those who wanted to buy them to ask for them and to. As Marhoefer notes this was to "risk publicly identifying oneself as a homosexual to the person working at the kiosk and anyone standing nearby, something most of

¹²⁹ Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 61, 164; Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 63.

¹³⁰ Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 89-90; Chuck Stewart, *Homosexuality and the Law: A Dictionary* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 2.

¹³¹ Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic*, 41.

¹³² Ibid. 31-35.

Friendship's readers had to avoid."¹³³ Homosexuals had to employ ingenuity and guile if they wished to purchase gay material, travelling to different parts of the city to purchase them, at great risk. One notes that "carrying the magazine home "was like you had a bomb in your bag""¹³⁴

Alongside the proliferation of homosexual print, Weimar saw a marked increase in other forms of homosexual cultural representations, from homosexual theatre troupes who encouraged reform of laws and attitudes through their performances to an emerging homosexual celluloid presence.¹³⁵ The first largely positive and unequivocal film concerned with homosexuality, *Anders als die Andern* (*Different from the Others*), was released in 1919, as the fledgling Weimar Republic came into being. *Anders* was directed by Richard Oswald and made with assistance from the WhK, and in particular Magnus Hirschfeld, who assisted with the screenplay, acted in a medical advisory capacity and even appeared in a segment of the film.¹³⁶ *Anders* tells the story of violinist Paul Korner, his early homosexual experiences at boarding school, later falling in love with his violin student, before succumbing to blackmail and ultimately suicide. Of the scholarship that has engaged with Oswald's film, some is critical of its representation of homosexuals as effeminate stereotypes, whilst others laud its progressive message, that repealing Paragraph 175 would greatly reduce the opportunity for blackmail, and at the same time create a more equal society, one in which the contribution of homosexuals to German society could be fully realised.¹³⁷ A caption towards the end of the film reads: "If you want to honor the memory of your friend, then you mustn't take your own life, but instead keep on living to change the prejudices whose victim – one of countless many – this dead man has become."¹³⁸ James Steakley notes that the issue of blackmail was a constant danger for homosexuals and cites Hirschfeld's argument that it was this extortion and humiliation that Paragraph 175 protected, rather than any danger that "the victimless crime of sodomy [posed]."¹³⁹ Response to the film was intense, ranging from

¹³³ Ibid. 49.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Laurence Senelick, "The Homosexual Theater Movement in the Weimar Republic," *Theatre Survey*, 49:1, (May 2008).

¹³⁶ James Steakley, "Cinema and Censorship in the Weimar Republic: The Case of *Anders als Die Andern*," *Film History*, Vol. 11, No. 2, *Émigré Filmmakers and Filmmaking*, (1999): 185.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 181-182; Ramsey, "The Rites of Artgenossen," 90-91.

¹³⁸ *Different from the Others*, 1919.

¹³⁹ Steakley, "Cinema and Censorship in the Weimar Republic," 186.

sold-out shows and commercial success to walkouts and bans in parts of Berlin, Munich, Stuttgart and Vienna. What makes *Anders* distinctive is the involvement of Hirschfeld himself, which purposefully politicized the film and serves to demonstrate the ways in which art and the everyday were overlapping. Hirschfeld's institute served in part as a "conduit" for homosexuals in need. Regular clinics were held there, enabling anyone who needed it access to both legal and relationship advice.¹⁴⁰ It is pertinent, then, that the narratives of the men who testified to blackmail and harassment are echoed in the film itself, whilst Hirschfeld's lengthy appearance in the film it actively called for viewers to rise up against the statute that allowed such things to happen.¹⁴¹ Whilst the film is not explicitly referenced by any of the men whose testimonies are examined in this thesis, it is worth noting the many similarities between the film's plot and the narratives of homosexuals of the period. These narrative structures emphasize awareness of one's sexuality at an early age, experimentation at school, finding love as an adult in an environment that often required extreme caution, blackmail and/or denunciation, and needless death – in the case of *Anders*, by suicide of its lead character. The narrative structuring of the testimonies often mirrors that of the filmic plot, emphasising the literary and aesthetic nature of the memory texts. Furthermore, the film generates particular meaning with its narrative ending; the dénouement is decisive, the conflict (in this case, the blackmail and suicide of the protagonist) is resolved, and the coda is established. Drawing upon his identity as a homosexual Jew, the film ends with Hirschfeld's analogous reading of Émile Zola's endeavors to overcome the anti-Semitic imprisonment of the Dreyfus Affair at the end of the previous century and the current struggle of homosexuals. The final title cards of *Anders*, in Hirschfeld's own 'voice' read:

"This is the life task I assign to you... what matters now is to restore honor and justice to the many thousands before us, with us, and after us. Through knowledge to justice!"

Over an open law book of the German Republic, a large hand appears, holding a brush. Drawing a large X, it strikes out, once and for all P175, that horrible law to which clings so much blood and tears.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 86.

¹⁴¹ Dyer, "Less and More than Women and Men," 5-9; Steakley, "Cinema and Censorship in the Weimar Republic," 182-187.

¹⁴² *Different from the Others*, 1919.

Different from the Others is a crucial cultural text, both in terms of its pioneering representation of cinematic same-sex love, and in its explicit argument for the repeal of the insidious law which had such a devastating impact on its protagonist, who represented German homosexuals suppressed by Paragraph 175. It was part of the wider effort by Hirschfeld and others to educate the German people about the many forms of sexuality, and achieve homosexual emancipation. This cultural activism – films, printed materials, conferences and so on – and those who pioneered it, are afforded significant status in the scholarship, with Hirschfeld in particular lauded as for his work in terms of the early gay liberation movement.¹⁴³ The impact on the memories of German homosexuals themselves varies, both of Hirschfeld, and more broadly in terms of the attempts to fight for their freedom. Christopher Isherwood may have been one of the more high-profile acquaintances and advocates of Hirschfeld, but Rolf Hirschberg claims that *many* homosexuals were aware of Hirschfeld and his work. During his oral testimony for the USHMM, he recalls Hirschfeld's parties, saying:

People came from practically all over the world looking for advice from him and he was very, very well-known... There were men, who wanted to be a woman, and they were operated on... [there were] masquerade balls so that people would not be recognized and could be in a comfortable environment... And everything was fine... Then came '32, all of a sudden, Mr. Hitler appeared on the horizon, you know.¹⁴⁴

Yet Heinz Heger appeared incognizant of the work of Hirschfeld, the Institute for Sexual Science and any form of homosexual mobilization. In his memoir Heger claims:

This was the first time, moreover, that I learned of this alleged International [movement] of homosexuals. I only wished – and still do today – that there really was such an international association. But as I know only too well from my own experience, this is something that will never be.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Elana Mancini, *Magnus Hirschfeld and the Quest for Sexual Freedom: A History of the First International Sexual Freedom Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 16; Ralf Dose, *Magnus Hirschfeld: The Origins of the Gay Liberation Movement* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2014), 7-9; Beachy, *Gay Berlin*, 86.

¹⁴⁴ "Oral history interview with Rolf Hirschberg," accessed 8 January 2017, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504930>

¹⁴⁵ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 106. It is important to note, however, that the Austrian Heger was writing this long after the war and the destruction of the Hirschfeld Institute in Germany. Heger's testimony, and the gaps and inaccuracies in it, are considered in chapter two.

Heger's awareness of the homosexual emancipation movement of the early twentieth century appears to have been completely obscured. The editor of his memoir pointedly notes that despite Heger's testimony being a crucial contribution to gay history, the author himself has had the memory of other key figures "blotted out by fascism and reaction, and [this] had to be rediscovered by the gay liberation movement of the 1970s."¹⁴⁶ This is but one example of how the collective memory of these survivors is marked, in part, by absence, omission, and "forgetting." Moreover, it is evidence that the cultural importance of Weimar is sometimes overstated. We can infer that its relevance and influence did not extend throughout Europe in as comprehensive a manner as is sometimes suggested.

As the 1920s drew to a close, the abolition of Paragraph 175 came tantalizingly close for those who had spent decades campaigning for it. In 1929, the repeal of the law was debated as part of a wider attempt at criminal law reform, yet the economic crash and the subsequent dissolution of the Reichstag a year later would prove its doom.¹⁴⁷ Instead of heralding a new dawn for homosexuals, free from the spectre of blackmail and imprisonment, the law would go on to be tightened further under Nazism. The following sections will go on to consider the catastrophic effect of Nazism on these men, as they are represented in the memoirs and testimonies of those who survived them. By 1933, the bath-houses, cafes and clubs that had flourished in the 1920s were now either boarded-up or used for bait.¹⁴⁸ Films were banned and books were burned, journals and magazines closed. Hirschfeld was exiled in France where he would die soon after, and the Institute for Sexual Science was ransacked, looted and its contents destroyed. Christopher Isherwood, whose apartment adjoined the Institute and who had enjoyed the company of Hirschfeld and his colleagues and spent time in the building, witnessed the destruction of the Institute in 1933.¹⁴⁹ Days later he would leave Berlin for good. He writes:

Today the sun is brilliantly shining; it is quite mild and warm. I go out for my last morning walk. The sun shines, and Hitler is master of this city. The sun shines,

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ramsey, "The Rites of Artgenossen," 102.

¹⁴⁸ "From Eldorado to the Third Reich," accessed 18 July 2018

<http://triangles-roses-photos.blogspot.co.uk>

¹⁴⁹ Jamie M. Carr, *Queer Times: Christopher Isherwood's Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 131.

and dozens of my friends are in prison, possibly dead. I catch sight of my face in the mirror of a shop, and am horrified to see that I am smiling. You can't help smiling, in such beautiful weather. The trams are going up and down the Kleistrasse, just as usual. They, and the people on the pavement have an air of curious familiarity, of striking resemblance to something one remembers as normal and pleasant in the past—like a very good photograph. No, even now I can't altogether believe that any of this really happened.¹⁵⁰

“Now there was a culture of fear.”¹⁵¹ – Persecution and Prosecution under National Socialism

Isherwood's incredulity at the rapidly worsening situation in Germany was echoed by others whose sexuality would soon endanger them considerably, yet for whom, unlike Isherwood, overseas escape was not an option. The rapid lurch into totalitarianism brought with it a new, frightening reality for German homosexuals. Michael Davidson notes that “overnight the streets seemed to have turned Nazi; overnight the air, which had been soft and warm and human, had become harsh and malignant.”¹⁵² Here Davidson articulates the oppositional memories that inform the narratives of those who experienced the periods; the cautious optimism of Weimar, countered by the shock and despair of what followed. For those who shared their memories, either in the memoirs, the oral histories, or the interviews with writers including Plant and Lemke, the two contrasting eras shaped their experiences and their identities. The survivors are often explicit in their references to the ways in which the catastrophic socio-political changes affected them.

The politics of the period are complex; Nazi Attitudes towards homosexuality shared many of the views of the homosexual that permeated non-Nazi homophobic discourse – the belief that homosexuality was immoral, that it negated biological reproduction, and that it encouraged the corruption of German youth. Erwin J. Haeberle argues that “the Nazi persecution of homosexuals... did not constitute isolated and otherwise incomprehensible events ... the Nazis merely continued and intensified what had long

¹⁵⁰ Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*, 256-257.

¹⁵¹ *Paragraph 175*, 2000.

¹⁵² Michael Davidson, *The World, The Flesh and Myself* (London: David Bruce & Watson, 1962), 159.

been general practice.”¹⁵³ Yet the Nazis targeted specifically European homosexuals as a group, for a particular set of reasons, and the persecution they suffered under Nazism was incommensurate with what had gone before. There are continuities here with the horrors of the Shoah. When analyzing Holocaust testimony, James Young stresses the sense of discontinuity that emerges in these narratives – emphasizing what is considered a “break in history.”¹⁵⁴ Though anti-Semitism was already rife throughout Europe, the sheer scale of the Holocaust, and perhaps more importantly the *intent* behind it can be seen as a brutal dis-continuum. Young notes that “as a result, the more violently wrenched from a continuum a catastrophe is perceived to be, the more desperate ... attempts become to represent its events *as* discontinuous.”¹⁵⁵ Much of the testimony from homosexual survivors of Nazi persecution stresses the schism that Nazism caused, the regression of attitudes, and the lurch towards violence. The Nazis strengthened and enforced the Paragraph 175 statute that already existed pre-war, and the relative sense of freedom that Weimar afforded proved to be fragile and fleeting. Survivor Karl notes that “the short breathing space during the Weimar Republic was not sufficient to reconcile us homophiles to our sex life. The persecutions of millennia have built up this deep feeling of guilt within us. Most of us fell powerless into the hands of the Nazis.”¹⁵⁶ As the inscription on the Nollendorfplatz plaque attests, one of the first steps towards this effacement the Nazis took in 1933 was either to close many gay bars or use them as bases of entrapment. Former bath-houses, cafes and clubs that had flourished in the 1920s were now either boarded-up or used for bait.¹⁵⁷ Alongside book burning and law-strengthening, statistics show that, as early as 1933, “homosexual men were one of the first classes singled out for the concentration camps,”¹⁵⁸ together with other groups the

¹⁵³ EJ Haeblerle, “Swastika, Pink Triangle, and Yellow Star - Destruction of Sexology and the Persecution of Homosexuals in Nazi Germany,” in M.B. Duberman, M. Vicinus, G. Chauncey, Jr. *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 1989), 378-379.

¹⁵⁴ Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, 16; see also Yehuda Bauer, *Remembering for the Future: The impact of the Holocaust on the contemporary world* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989), 181.

¹⁵⁵ James E. Young, “Interpreting Literary Testimony: A Preface to Rereading Holocaust Diaries and Memoirs,” *New Literary History*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Literacy, Popular Culture and the Writing of History (Winter, 1987): 404.

¹⁵⁶ Jürgen Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 31.

¹⁵⁷ Johansson and Percy, “Homosexuals in Nazi Germany,” (NP); See images two and three.

¹⁵⁸ Rüdiger Lautmann has done extensive research on the statistics of homosexual men interned concentration camps, as early as 1933, with numbers increasing due to roundups prior to the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games – see Rüdiger Lautmann, “The Pink Triangle: The Persecution of Homosexual Males in Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany,” in Salvatore J. Licata and

Nazis deemed to be “sexual degenerates.”¹⁵⁹ This progression from social, legal and political persecution to mental and physical persecution would prove catastrophic for many gay men.

This section will explore the significance of the twelve years of Nazi rule for both German homosexuals, and those from neighbouring nations ensnared by the Nazis. It traces the contrasts between the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich in order to provide the context that underpins and informs the memoirs that will be critically engaged with in chapter two. The section draws in part upon the pioneering text *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals* by Richard Plant (1986). Plant’s work is still considered to be one of the most comprehensive English-language histories of the fate of homosexuals under Nazism, and combines considerable research by the author with numerous survivor accounts.¹⁶⁰ As such, it is a pivotal text both in terms of the historiography of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, and, more broadly, its publication in the 1980s speaks to the wider cultural memory that was developing. These were collective memories being forged in the wake of the gay liberation movement, and under the shadow of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, both of which informed, and were informed by pink triangle narratives which were being brought into the public consciousness by researchers such as Plant.

The destruction of progress

As the 1920s drew to a close, it appeared as though a level of acceptance of, and equality for, Germany’s homosexuals was inching ever closer, with Hirschfeld and Brand placing sexual issues at the forefront of Berlin’s place on the world’s academic stage, at the same time that its homosexual social culture – whilst hardly visibly “accepted”

Robert P. Peterson, eds., *Historical Perspectives on Homosexuality* (New York City: Haworth Press/Stein and Day, 1981), 141-160; Rüdiger Lautmann, “The Pink Triangle: Homosexuals as ‘Enemies of the State’” in Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck, eds., *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 345-357; Rüdiger Lautmann, “Gay Prisoners in Concentration Camps Compared with Jehovah’s Witnesses and Political Criminals,” in Michael Berenbaum, ed., *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis* (New York: University Press, 1990).

¹⁵⁹ Haeberle, “Swastika, Pink Triangle, and Yellow Star,” 375.

¹⁶⁰ Jeffrey C. Blutinger, “Bearing Witness: Teaching the Holocaust from a Victim-Centered Perspective,” *The History Teacher* 42, no. 3, (2009): 271.

in the contemporary sense – “had managed an uneasy coexistence with the larger heterosexual society surrounding it”.¹⁶¹ Several factors would combine to consign this progress to oblivion. Not least of these was the worsening global economic situation, which was particularly ferocious in Germany with ruinous inflation, widespread unemployment and bitter civil strife.¹⁶² The Treaty of Versailles, agreed in June 1919 apportioned blame – and subsequent remuneration – for the First World War to Germany and its allies – the so-called ‘War Guilt Clause.’¹⁶³ For Hitler and the fledgling National Socialist Party, this treaty of ‘shame’ was synonymous with the Weimar Republic, which they saw as “a morass of corruption, degeneracy [and] national humiliation.”¹⁶⁴ They promulgated their nationalistic ideology on the notion that the nation had been “stabbed in the back” by Jews and other “enemies of the state.”¹⁶⁵ Of consequence here is the dichotomy that arose from this myth, whereby the *cities* that had to an extent presented many of the opportunities for homosexuals to live and thrive would progressively be seen as an intrinsic part of the *problem* in German society, and this would play a crucial role in the increasingly persuasive National Socialist ideology that emerged. Obsessed with a diminishing birth-rate, partly due to the huge losses incurred by Germany in the First World War, and what they considered the debauched nature of the population of the large cities, the Nazis had long argued that homosexuality was incongruent with Germanic ideals.¹⁶⁶ Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf* of his abhorrence of the “big city population [which] is growing more prostituted in its love life.”¹⁶⁷ This was an ideology that would be adopted and developed by Nazi leaders, including that of the man who would be instrumental in the persecution of homosexuals – Heinrich Himmler. Himmler particularly believed that many of Germany’s current problems could be resolved by a “return to blood and soil... [and that] big cities were moral cesspools.”¹⁶⁸ Richard Plant notes that “people in small provincial towns came to loathe Berlin as a centre of corruption.”¹⁶⁹ The Nazis engendered, fostered and

¹⁶¹ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 27.

¹⁶² Johansson and Percy, “Homosexuals in Nazi Germany,” (NP); Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 22.

¹⁶³ Elisabeth Gläser, Faith Baldwin, Gerald D Feldman, *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment After 75 Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 524.

¹⁶⁴ Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, 130.

¹⁶⁵ Ian Kershaw, *To Hell and Back: Europe 1914–1949* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 118; Conan Fischer, *The rise of the Nazis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 1.

¹⁶⁶ Johansson and Percy, “Homosexuals in Nazi Germany,” (NP).

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, though note that he does not explicitly refer to homosexuality at this time

¹⁶⁸ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 78. Himmler is quoting thinker and leader of the Artaman Sect, Walther Darre

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 45.

capitalized upon these feelings to further their own cause. Hirschfeld, once celebrated in Berlin and beyond, became the subject of repeated attacks and even an attempted assassination with a gleeful Nazi newspaper reporting that “it is not without charm to know that ... Hirschfeld was so beaten that his eloquent mouth could never again be kissed by one of his disciples.”¹⁷⁰ Gerard Koskovich points out the extreme contrast between Hirschfeld’s ongoing campaign for equality, based on his coda that “homosexuality was a harmless, inborn gender disturbance, and therefore unsuitable for legal prosecution [and the] Nazis “strict schema of male aggressiveness.””¹⁷¹ For the Nazis, homosexuality was an affront to the masculinity of German men and a danger to the future of the German people.

The burning of the Reichstag in February 1933 was crucial for the Nazis. It enabled Hitler to invoke emergency powers, led to mass arrests of communists and set the German state on the road to realizing its genocidal anti-Semitism. The destruction of the Reichstag and the intent behind it can be read as a symbol of the political mood in Germany at the time. Responses to it were complex and contradictory and demonstrate how homosexuality was often used as a tool against one’s opponents. When the Nazis blamed the communists for starting the fire in an attempt to seize power, communist leaders responded by accusing the chief suspect Marinus Van der Lubbe of being “a degenerate half-wit and homosexual prostitute, kept by the S.A. leader, Roehm.”¹⁷² In the days that followed there were several decrees issued by the Prussian Minister of the Interior, including the proposed banning of indecent publications and the closure of certain public houses and meeting places. Gunther Grau has argued that “these decrees already betokened a policy that would assume a clearer shape over the coming months and years: a policy of arbitrary measures designed to eradicate through terror... the ‘scourge’ of homosexuality.”¹⁷³ Many German homosexuals had increasingly been able to enjoy cautious yet vivacious social existences, whilst artists and academics such as Isherwood, Auden, Hirschfeld and Brand were documenting these lives and campaigning for equality. The Nazis determined to eradicate this cause by parallel means of social, legal, political and physical persecution.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 44.

¹⁷¹ Koskovich, “From Eldorado to the Third Reich” (‘NP’).

¹⁷² A.J.P Taylor, ‘Who Burnt the Reichstag? The Story of a Legend,’ *History Today*, Volume 10, Issue 8, (August 1960): 520.

¹⁷³ Grau, *Hidden Holocaust*, 26.

The destruction of culture and science and the identification of homosexuality as a tool for eradicating the enemy

On March 11, 1935, SS First Lieutenant Carl Marks submitted to his superiors a report pertaining to a raid on a Berlin gay bar two days earlier by the Gestapo and the SS. Marks was one of twenty men dispatched to the *Weinmeister Klause* restaurant on Weinmeisterstrasse, where they proceeded to seal off the exits and detain those inside, before removing them to the local Gestapo headquarters, where they faced interrogation.¹⁷⁴ These practices would increase markedly over the following two years, firstly by Ernst Rohm and his SA men, who raided gay bars throughout Germany, then later by Himmler and the Gestapo, partly as a counter-offensive to the perceived homosexual nature of the SA. Many of the meeting places were either closed, or left open as a means to entice and capture homosexuals who frequented them.¹⁷⁵ There was another, more symbolic, use for former sites of homosexual meeting places which demonstrated to the people of Berlin that National Socialism intended to supplant the city's gay culture. Berlin's *Eldorado* bar, once a thriving destination for homosexual men, lesbians and transvestites, was emblematically transformed into a Nazi party propaganda office. Swastikas and campaign slogans obscured the joyful images of dancing girls as well as the poignant signage above the entrance that once exclaimed to those who travelled far and wide, seeking acceptance: "*Eldorado – You've found it!*"¹⁷⁶ This was a symbolic transformation of a celebrated social space of the persecution homosexuals were to face – a joyous place of individuality and hope, overshadowed and overpowered by ugly messages of hate and oppression. Heinz F. recounts that where once the atmosphere was "happy and carefree, now there was a culture of fear."¹⁷⁷ Whilst it wasn't entirely "happy and carefree," the cultural memory of Weimar was strengthened in reaction to the Nazi persecution that followed, and this is exemplified in the jarring before-and-after images of the *Eldorado*.

¹⁷⁴ "Topography of Terror - Gestapo, SS and Reichssicherheitshauptamt on the 'Prinz-Albrecht-Terrain,'" accessed 19 April 2020 <http://www.topographie.de>

¹⁷⁵ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 51; Johansson and Percy, "Homosexuals in Nazi Germany," (NP).

¹⁷⁶ See figures two and three.

¹⁷⁷ *Paragraph 175*, 2000.

Alongside the continued incursion into social spaces, the Nazis escalated their political and legal persecutions, which in turn expedited their use of violence. Although the Berlin bars and bedrooms of homosexuals were being raided by SA thugs, this was arguably, and ironically, a “silent war” on homosexuals.¹⁷⁸ Public social spaces for homosexuals were often either ignored by the general public, or else they were oblivious to their existence, particularly to those Germans outside the big cities. However, two major incidents were to demonstrate to Germany – and indeed a wider Europe – that National Socialism was intent on eradicating Weimar decadence – the destruction of the Hirschfeld institute and the execution of the high level Nazi and homosexual Ernst Röhm.¹⁷⁹

The Nazis would infamously encourage a night of insidious book-burning of tomes with an “un-German spirit” on the 10th May 1933, during which hundreds of thousands of predominantly Jewish writings were destroyed. It is pertinent to note, however, that this was preceded some four days earlier by “students at the College of Physical Education [who] wished to begin the operation at the Sexual Science Institute.”¹⁸⁰ Throughout the day, to the sound of a musical accompaniment, first students and then SA members ransacked the Institute, destroying furnishings, art, and photographs, as well as removing huge amounts of books, periodicals and magazines in readiness for burning. Fortuitously for him, Hirschfeld was out of the country at the time, on a world tour, so when they burned his life’s work three days later, they made do with throwing a bust of his likeness on the pyre instead.¹⁸¹ Magnus Hirschfeld, a pioneer of the first gay liberation movement, died in exile two years after the Nazi seizure of power, yet his work, and his legacy form an important part of the cultural memory of German homosexuality in the early twentieth century.¹⁸²

Another figure who features prominently in the narratives of those who have shared their experiences of this period is chief of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA), Ernst Röhm. Some gay Germans mistakenly thought that Ernst Röhm’s homosexuality meant they would

¹⁷⁸ Beck, *An Underground Life*, 147.

¹⁷⁹ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 10.

¹⁸⁰ Grau, *Hidden Holocaust*, 31. It is indicative of the strength of feeling against homosexuals that was starting to take hold, both amongst the SA and civilians that they wanted to begin their print purge here.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* 31-33.

¹⁸² Haeberle, “Swastika, Pink Triangle, and Yellow Star,” 365.

enjoy a level of protection not afforded to other groups considered antithetical to Nazi ideology. Muller notes that “some mistook Nazi anti-gay politics as somehow ambivalent so long as SA chief Ernst Röhm was tolerated. Although Röhm was not *openly* homosexual, his homosexuality was widely known.”¹⁸³ Albrecht Becker notes that “many gay Germans were quite sure nothing would happen to them as one of the Nazis was like them.”¹⁸⁴ Yet Röhm’s life, career and fate, should not be comparable to, or conflated with, that of the “ordinary” homosexual. Röhm considered himself above all else a soldier and loyal servant of Hitler and was notably brutish and violent.¹⁸⁵ Concurrently, however, Röhm conducted his affairs so casually and with such gusto and openness so as to enrage the virulently homophobic Heinrich Himmler.¹⁸⁶ By the closing days of 1933, Röhm’s SA had swelled to almost three million members, whilst Himmler’s rival, and subordinate, SS numbered just 50,000.¹⁸⁷ During his rise to power, Hitler had repeatedly turned a blind eye to Röhm’s sexual proclivities in favour of his skills of organization and his ruthlessness, even going so far as to issue statements in support of him and his methods at the expense of “his private life [which] cannot be an object of scrutiny unless it conflicts with the basic principles of National Socialist ideology.”¹⁸⁸ Plant asserts that it was largely due to Röhm and his SA storm troopers that Hitler was able to rise to power, that this band of men were ruthless killers that enabled Hitler to sweep away every political obstacle before him.¹⁸⁹ Despite his contribution to the Nazi ascension to power and domination, Röhm and the SA’s days were numbered. Heinrich Himmler’s pernicious homophobia, combined with his grand ambitions for the SS allowed him to convince the Führer that Röhm and his followers were planning an uprising, and on June 30th 1934 – which became known as *The Night of the Long Knives* – Röhm and many of his SA followers were assassinated.

Röhm’s legacy was significant both to the gay men who articulated a misguided kinship with the Nazi, and to those who sought to use him as a propaganda tool. Muller notes

¹⁸³ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 10; for more on Röhm, see Eleanor Hancock, *Ernst Röhm Hitler’s SA Chief of Staff* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹⁸⁴ *Paragraph 175*, 2000.

¹⁸⁵ Bruce Campbell, *The SA Generals and the Rise of Nazism* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 81.

¹⁸⁶ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 61.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 54.

¹⁸⁸ Joachim Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich*. Cambridge (Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 1999), 144.

¹⁸⁹ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 60.

that, even in death, Röhm's sexuality was held up "as an example of the "true nature" of the Third Reich. During the 1930s and 1940s, homophobia would become one of the most frequently used tools of both Nazi and Stalinist propaganda to portray the other side as morally degenerate."¹⁹⁰ This was not limited to Röhm, and can instead be considered part of a broader "technique of homosexualizing the enemy."¹⁹¹ Plant considers various means, including a number of films, both during and post-war in which Nazism was equated with homosexuality.¹⁹² In addition to such cultural methods, using homosexuality as a tool to eradicate the enemy was evident elsewhere, and as such has contributed to the collective narrative that has developed. Lemke has argued that "a number of those convicted under P175 of homosexual offences were not gay. The Paragraph was used as a tool of political persecution when no other criminal charges could be dreamt up."¹⁹³ Heger's testimony also highlights the practice of individuals or groups using homosexuality as a method of denunciation. His memoir notes how his Austrian prison guard "gleefully" told his cell-mates that he was homosexual, knowing it would lead to verbal and physical abuse, whilst often the charge of homosexuality against a person were completely invented due to the violent response it often invoked.¹⁹⁴

The cultural practice of homosexualizing the enemy is a form of derogatory, ingrained homophobia on the part of individuals, groups or nations.¹⁹⁵ It is of interest here not just in terms of the impact it had on those being persecuted by the Nazis at the time, but also how they understood, negotiated and articulated their experiences. Moreover, argue Dominique D. Fisher and Lawrence R Schehr, homosexualizing the enemy can be understood as a nationalistic paradigm, particularly in the United States, following the gay liberation movement, and with the emergence of the AIDS crisis. The authors demonstrate how, during the debates in the 1990s about gays being admitted into the armed forces, homosexuals were presented as the enemy and AIDS fears were accentuated.¹⁹⁶ This is particularly pertinent, given the shift of focus to the US in part

¹⁹⁰ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 10.

¹⁹¹ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, p.15.

¹⁹² Ibid. 15-16.

¹⁹³ Jürgen Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 13; Frank Rector, *The Nazi Extermination of Homosexuals* (New York: Stein and Day, 1981), 117.

¹⁹⁴ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 23.

¹⁹⁵ Dominique D. Fisher, Lawrence R Schehr, *Articulations of Difference: Gender Studies and Writing in French* (California: Stanford University Press, 1997). 116.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

two of this thesis, as many of these instances of homosexualizing the enemy arose as a result of the gay liberation movement, the AIDS crisis, the adoption of the pink triangle as an appropriated political metaphor, and the concomitant emergence of survivors' testimonies.

It is here, I would argue, that important points emerge regarding the specificity of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. There are those who argue against its relevance, particularly when considered in terms of the Jewish Holocaust, or even doubt the veracity of their claims of victimhood. In addition, some – largely conservative – writers claim that gay men would not and could not have been identified as a specific “group” to persecute and that, even if they had been, this persecution was not peculiar to National Socialism.¹⁹⁷ However, Plant argues that whilst it was certainly more difficult to identify homosexuals than other groups, there *were* ingenious methods employed by the Nazis to identify and ensnare homosexuals, and they were incongruous with those that had gone before.¹⁹⁸ Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams' 1995 book *The Pink Swastika* in particular attempted to debunk what the authors considered to be “gay revisionism,” whereby homosexuals were attempting to wrest the Holocaust from its real victims.¹⁹⁹ Lively and Abrams' claimed that the gay liberation movement I shall be engaging with in part two was responsible for the creation of a myth of homosexual victimhood that attempted to obscure the truth, that is, Nazi homosexuals were *perpetrators*. “While we cannot say that homosexuals caused the Holocaust, we must not ignore their central role in Nazism,” write Lively and Abrams. “To the myth of the 'pink triangle' — the notion that all homosexuals in Nazi Germany were persecuted — we must respond with the reality of the 'pink swastika.’”²⁰⁰ Their work has been widely discredited, with Arlene Stein stating that the authors have produced “political rhetoric, mixing serious scholarship with lies and outright distortions, truths with half-truths and falsehood.”²⁰¹ Lively and Abrams' book was written as a response

¹⁹⁷ For example Judith Reisman, “And Now for the Pink Triangle,” *Christopher Street*, Vol. 8, No. 11.29, (2005); Judith Reisman, “The Pink Swastika as Holocaust Revisionist History,” The Institute for Media Education, accessed 4 August 2019 <http://www.drjudithreisman.com/>

¹⁹⁸ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 123.

¹⁹⁹ Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams, *The Pink Swastika: Homosexuality in the Nazi Party* (California: Veritas Aeterna Press, 1996).

²⁰⁰ “Anti-gay religious crusaders claim homosexuals helped mastermind the Holocaust,” accessed 18 April 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2005/anti-gay-religious-crusaders-claim-homosexuals-helped-mastermind-holocaust>

²⁰¹ Stein, “Whose Memories? Whose Victimhood?” 143; see also Jensen, “The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness,” 322.

to the growing awareness of this particular victim group, following the publication of several memoirs, and the creation of many memorials. They claim that their work was in part responsible for the replacement of the pink triangle with the rainbow flag as “the primary symbol of their movement.”²⁰² My interest here is not necessarily the claims and counter-arguments themselves, but rather the contributions they make to this cultural memory, in particular how this fresh attack on this history is another example of the continued persecution and subjugation these survivors faced.

An increase in persecution and prosecution

With the destruction of the underground gay movement and the Institute for Sexual Science, and a strengthened ideology which stigmatized homosexuals, there was an increase in physical harassment and the laws to create a climate of terror. Documents dated soon after Röhm’s demise give us an indication of how the Nazi fear and loathing of homosexuals was now enveloping all areas of German society. These include minutes of local meetings decrying homosexual loiterers in Hamburg railway station, adult men preying on the Hitler Youth, hostels of ill-repute, and names of men with “normal, everyday professions” who had been recently convicted of offences under Paragraph 175. Running parallel to this was a marked increase in persecution through more *official* channels; Gestapo telegrams ordering further lists of homosexually-active men to be drawn up, and memos from doctors to the Secret Police offering assistance in resisting ‘the spread of this abnormal disposition’.²⁰³ At the same time, Himmler and Goering oversaw a marked escalation of Nazi propaganda, ensuring that the nation was aware both of the “homosexual conspiracy” that had been planned by Röhm and his cronies, and the efforts by Hitler to ensure Germany’s moral purity by ridding the state of this “sickness.”²⁰⁴

Amendments to Paragraph 175 were made in June 1935, pointedly on the first anniversary of the Rohm Putsch.²⁰⁵ By broadening the definitions of sexual acts, the

²⁰² Lively and Abrams, *The Pink Swastika*, 3; In reality, the rainbow flag had been created and adopted as a symbol for gay activism almost two decades earlier, in 1978 – see Dustin Lance Black, Gilbert Baker, *Rainbow Warrior: My Life in Color* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2019), 3.

²⁰³ Grau, *Hidden Holocaust*, 40-47.

²⁰⁴ Harry Oosterhuis, “Male Bonding and Homosexuality in Nazi Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 32, No. 2, April (1997): 194-195.

²⁰⁵ Koskovich, “From Eldorado to the Third Reich” (‘NP’); Grau, *Hidden Holocaust*, 64-66; See appendix A for a reproduction of the Nazi amendments to Paragraph 175.

Nazis made it easier to force courts to prosecute a much wider range of “offences.” Their revisions of Paragraph 175 in 1935 allowed for prosecution for relatively minor acts, enabling the Nazis to deal with the “problem” of homosexuality, particularly in regards to the diminished “German birth rate, which obsessed the German leaders who hoped to increase births to 1.5 million a year.”²⁰⁶ To this end, Himmler issued a secret directive in 1936 to the Fuhrer and the head of the Secret Police indicating his creation of the Reich Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion, cementing the link between the two, highlighting the inherent dangers they posed to German society and setting out a number of measures that were to be implemented to deal with them.²⁰⁷ Himmler would defend this decision that winter in a speech to SS leaders in the Bavarian town of Bad Toelz, where he bandied around wild calculations of how many able-bodied, sexually capable men were currently part of the German population, how many of these were homosexual – he estimated 7-8% - and what the consequences of this “plague” were for the nation.²⁰⁸

Once established, the Reich Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion set about their dual tasks of first *identifying* and then *punishing* gay men. In order to identify homosexuals, they would employ a variety of techniques, as detailed in confidential documents kept by the State Criminal Police. These included collating existing national police records; identifying areas frequented by rent-boys through surveillance and removing them and their services; employing the use of public workers – hotel door staff, taxi drivers – to provide information leading to apprehension; monitoring advertisements in local press for any signs of homosexual activity, and consideration of claims of impropriety made by youths, as it was thought that homosexuals often seduced youngsters in their charge.²⁰⁹ By 1939, the Nazis had records of around 33,000 German homosexuals, and for those imprisoned under Paragraph 175 it was commonplace for those prisoners, rather than being released at the end of their sentence to be dispatched into “protective custody,” the Nazi euphemism for concentration camp.²¹⁰

As the Nazis invaded other nations, territories that were earmarked as being part of the

²⁰⁶ Johansson and Percy, “Homosexuals in Nazi Germany,” (NP).

²⁰⁷ Grau, *Hidden Holocaust*, 88-91.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. 91; Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 88-89.

²⁰⁹ Grau, *Hidden Holocaust*, 97-98; see also Warren Johansson and William A. Percy, 1990, (NP).

²¹⁰ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 216; Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 24.

new Germany were to eradicate the practices of homosexuality and abortion, in accordance with Himmler's directives. Himmler argued that this applied to Poles especially, due to their geographical closeness with Germany, arguing that Polish homosexuality, particularly, could contaminate Germans if not dealt with.²¹¹ Whilst in Sachsenhausen concentration camp, Heger noted that as new transports of gay prisoners arrived, the "majority of [them] were Austrians or Sudeten Germans. It seemed that action was under way in these new "German Districts" to cleanse them of "degenerate" homosexuals."²¹² This specific type of persecution – which linked the "problem" of homosexuality with questions of family, propagation and sexual conformity – would continue to inform the post-war environment.

"Protective Custody" – Homosexuals in prisons and concentration camps

The number of gay men who perished in Nazi concentration camps has been the subject of much scholarly and historical debate. Rüdiger Lautmann has estimated that between "50 and 63,000 men were convicted of homosexual activity between 1933 and 1944."²¹³ whilst the figure most often given for those interned in camps is between 5 and 15,000, many of whom were killed.²¹⁴ Yet historians have pointed out that this does not take into account those randomly murdered, killed in prisons, or those who committed suicide. I am, obviously, predominantly concerned here with those who died as a direct result of their homosexuality, yet we can broaden this out to consider how the pernicious Nazi ideology had wider consequences, in terms of whom this persecution affected. In 1942, Heinz Heger's father took his own life, tormented both by his son's imprisonment in a concentration camp, and the abuse and lack of support he received due to his son's homosexuality.²¹⁵ Heger's father campaigned ceaselessly to many government departments for his son's release, against a tide of opposition. Heger notes 'He could no longer put up with the abuse he received... Filled with bitterness and grief for an age he could not fit into, filled with disappointment over all those friends who either couldn't or wouldn't help him. He wrote a farewell note to my mother, asking for her forgiveness for having to leave her alone My mother still has the letter today and the last lines read: "and so I can no longer tolerate the scorn of my acquaintances and

²¹¹ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 119.

²¹² Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 40.

²¹³ Johansson and Percy, "Homosexuals in Nazi Germany," (NP).

²¹⁴ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 154; Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 20; Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 120.

²¹⁵ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 20.

colleagues, and of our neighbours. It's just too much for me! Please forgive me again. God protect our son!" With his suicide directly attributed to what had happened to his son, and the subsequent response from everyone he knew, arguably the father of Heger could also be considered a victim of the Nazi's crackdown on homosexuals. Other testimonies demonstrate that post-war survivors themselves often thought about taking their own lives. Pierre Seel talks about being driven to the brink of suicide, both from the memories of his own experiences, and from not being able to divulge them, as well as the shame of what he had done to his family. This history cast a long shadow over the victims/survivors and others whom it indirectly touched, and the experiences many had in concentration camps in particular are, unsurprisingly, the umbra.

Following research into several German concentration camps, Lautmann demonstrated that homosexual prisoners were often ostracized and thus found it virtually impossible to create and maintain the support networks that some other groups of prisoners did.²¹⁶ Eugon Kogon has detailed how homosexual prisoners were also often chosen for medical experiments, usually for castration, or administered hormone implants in the hope of "reversing" their homosexuality.²¹⁷ Homosexual prisoners were already ostracized by the symbol of the pink triangle and segregation (block) and indeed had to "limit their contacts with *each other*... as the slightest signs of friendship might be taken as evidence that they were failing to reform."²¹⁸ While there is some suggestion that homosexual men were able to use their sexuality as a means of survival in the camps, the majority of this relatively small, heterogeneous, stigmatized group had little to no protection or support given to them.²¹⁹

In his testimony, Heger emphasizes that the brutality was relentless and comprehensive from day one. Beaten by the SS upon first arrival, then by his assigned block leader, Heger, and the fellow homosexual inmates he was placed with, faced a daily onslaught of mental and physical persecution designed to break their spirit, remove their dignity, or kill them. Many were with faced with punishing work details, and were used as target-practice for the SS. Furthermore, claims Heger, these atrocities provided sexual

²¹⁶ Johansson and Percy, "Homosexuals in Nazi Germany," (NP).

²¹⁷ Eugon Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the System Behind Them* (New York City: Octagon Books, 1979), 144; see also Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 175-178.

²¹⁸ Koskovich, "From Eldorado to the Third Reich" (NP).

²¹⁹ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 166-167; 179-180.

gratification for the camp commandant who sadistically masturbated whilst watching the torture of homosexuals.²²⁰ Heger witnessed many examples of torture upon homosexuals whilst in various camps, usually involving some form of sadomasochistic element, such as whipping, mutilation of genitals and anal rape. This was often accompanied by the sadistic implication from the torturer implying that the victim was receiving some form of sexual gratification from it.²²¹ Because of the absoluteness of this homophobic ideology, it was customary that homosexuals in concentration camps should not be allowed to mingle with or “contaminate” other prisoners. In the camps, they often were made to sleep in their own blocks, and were not permitted to enter non-homosexual blocks or vice versa. Whilst in barracks, they were made to sleep with their hands outside the blankets at all times, even in freezing temperatures. These proscriptions reflected the belief that sexual gratification was foremost in their minds, even in these conditions.²²²

The experiences of gays during the Weimar period were heterogeneous and were informed by class, age, and geography. Those interned in concentration camps were largely forcibly homogenized under the pink triangle, and set in opposition to other groups in camp. This led to a narrative of “hierarchies” that will be critically examined in chapter two, but also the testimonies from gay survivors stress the dissimilarities amongst their own “group.” Focusing on his difference to other’s convicted under Paragraph 175, Erich provides a useful insight into the disparate nature of the homosexual experiences in concentration camps when he recalls:

The intellectuals were the first to crack. From the café to the camp – most of them were unable to handle that. They were not used to physical labor and deprivations on the outside. They did not know wretched grub either. And now such overrefined, high-strung types here in the middle of the filthiest muck.²²³

It is interesting to note here that Erich is still talking about homosexuals, just *different* ones; With their wealth, status and professions, these homosexual prisoners appeared to have little in common with Erich. He situates himself as average and in the middle –

²²⁰ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 33-55; Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 165-166.

²²¹ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 41; 84-85.

²²² Ibid. 34-39.

²²³ Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 19-20.

quite literally in the sense that he knew this was the safest place to be on camp marches - as opposed to the other homosexuals. He recalls “they picked on the tall, strong, handsome guys just as much as on the real queens. Both types did not live long.”²²⁴ Erich attributes at least part of his survival to his lower class, claiming that the guards despised him less than most of the other homosexuals, and that his lived experiences in poverty attuned him to extreme hunger from an early age.²²⁵ Erich understood and articulated his experience in relation to the diversity of the men who were imprisoned, homogenized

into an identity of “the homosexual,” which took no account of the complexity of their lives, their class status, or their personal histories. This is oppositional to the creation of a gay *political* identity in part two in which these questions of difference in terms of class and race were fore-fronted as part of the gay liberation movement.

For those who were subjected to surveillance, subjugation, persecution and prosecution, and particularly those who survived or perished in the harsh environment of a concentration camp, this was a time of disaster; a large-scale decimation of a period of optimism and the promise of progress. Those who have testified about their experiences reveal much about how they recall and remember “the past,” that is, both the “decadence” of Weimar and the “destruction” of Nazism. Survivors often understood these periods by dividing them into before and after, and I have somewhat complicated this by demonstrating that the Weimar Republic was not the fabled land of dreams that it has often been presented as. My interest is not simply in contextualizing both periods, but to begin to trace how they were understood, and thus contributed to the cultural memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. Chapter two consolidates this contextualization by a focused engagement with traumatic texts which render the experiences I have thus far alluded to.

²²⁴ Ibid. 20.

²²⁵ Ibid.

Chapter Two

“I have made up my mind to speak, to accuse, to bear witness”¹

– Stories of Silence and Survival

Chapter two engages with the framework of Holocaust memory to analyze three key written survivors’ testimonies – Heinz Heger’s *The Men With The Pink Triangle* (1980), Pierre Seel’s *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual: A Memoir of Nazi Terror* (1995) and Gad Beck’s *An Underground Life: Memoirs of a Gay Jew in Nazi Berlin* (1999). Whilst a scholarship *has* developed since these memoirs were first published, it is often a rich, broad history of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals rather than a focussed engagement with specific memory texts. Following brief summaries of their narratives, I produce original readings of these memoirs in relation to both theories of traumatic testimony and the fact the stories were told in a context where homophobia persisted. This chapter addresses the testimonies from a literary/cultural memory perspective and thus engages with key history and memory theorists. These include Lawrence Langer and his work on Holocaust testimony, which specifically focusses on Jewish experiences but which provides a useful frame with which to think about other victims of Nazism, and how we can critically evaluate and understand their testimonies. Michael Rothberg’s *Multidirectional Memory* (2009) examines how the Holocaust has been used as a framework to articulate other histories of victimization whilst still being considered “unique”, and this work informs my mobilization of Holocaust memory work. This chapter demonstrates the effectiveness of using the model of traumatic memory - most often associated with analyzes of Holocaust testimony - for examining the effect of prolonged silencing on the survivors. This enforced silence meant the narratives that eventually appeared were often marked by anger, exaggeration or hyperbole, and are characterized by contrasts. The memoirs are ostensibly “true” testimonies, but the authors regularly indulge in narrative flourishes and a degree of literary license. The survivors recall moments of unimaginable bravery, yet they are told within the context of a homophobic paradigm which stresses “weakness,” and this tension speaks to a wider debate about Holocaust narratives and their vexed relationship with concepts of the “heroic.”

¹ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 43-44.

“Ours is an empty memory”² – Filling the void of “Willful Forgetting.”³

In the preface to his memoir, *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi recalls the overwhelming necessity that Holocaust survivors felt in terms of sharing their stories and making others aware of their ordeals. He wrote that “the need to tell our story to ‘the rest’, to make ‘the rest’ participate in it, had taken on for us, before our liberation and after, the character of an immediate and violent impulse.”⁴ However, the aftereffects of traumatic experiences are complex, and whilst some survivors such as Levi felt compelled to convey their memories, many other survivors wanted to “forget,” or at least suppress what they had endured. Often this desire to disremember was informed by feelings of guilt, shame or impotence in terms of what they experienced.⁵ Klaus Müller, a consultant for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and curator of their collection dedicated to gay persecution, notes that “when we document the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, mostly we only have perpetrator records; records from the Gestapo, or the police or the camp administration. We have very few testimonies from gay survivors themselves.”⁶ Part two of this thesis goes on to explore how and why the pink triangle was transformed by activists into a symbol of solidarity and a motif for a political movement, yet those who survived the horrors of Nazism, as well as a post-war world indifferent or antagonistic to their experiences, threw off the pink symbol of their oppression. When survivor Heinz Heger locked away his uniform, he hoped never to see that hated triangle again.⁷

Post-war, many homosexuals continued to be persecuted and prosecuted, and freedom from concentration camps did not necessarily mean “liberation.” Many homosexuals who had survived the camps had to serve the remainder of their sentences in German

² Klaus Müller, *Introduction*, in Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 13.

³ Andreas Huyssen, “The Voids of Berlin,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 1 (1997): 60.

⁴ Primo Levi, Philip Roth, *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 9.

⁵ Efraim Sicher, ed., *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory After Auschwitz* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 99.

⁶ “Interview with Dr Klaus Müller,” accessed 11 April 2019, <https://www.ushmm.org/collections/the-museums-collections/curators-corner/documenting-nazi-persecution-of-gays-the-josef-kohout-wilhelm-kroepfl-collection>

⁷ “Documenting Nazi persecution of gays,” accessed 16 April 2017, <https://www.ushmm.org/collections/the-museums-collections/curators-corner/documenting-nazi-persecution-of-gays-the-josef-kohout-wilhelm-kroepfl-collection>

prisons, thus instantly silencing them, and muting their memories.⁸ Still classified as criminals by the German government, they faced the ignominy of being denied any reparations, recognition or compensation, whilst constantly facing the risk of re-imprisonment upon release and being kept on lists of “sex offenders.”⁹ West Germany in particular retained Paragraph 175 and continued to use it to try prosecute and imprison thousands of homosexuals each year.¹⁰ This official, hegemonic endorsement of Paragraph 175 by the state sent a message about the status and value of homosexual lives which informed everyday practices. Families were reluctant to allow those convicted under Paragraph 175 back into their lives, whilst employers often dismissed workers if they discovered their “homosexual past.”¹¹ At the same time as the world began to talk about – and listen to – victims of the Holocaust, the West German Federal Constitutional Court further alienated the homosexual victims of the Third Reich, holding that the Nazi revision of Paragraph 175 was constitutional and was non-specific to Nazi Germany, rather it was a continuation of how the “German people” felt, morally, about homosexuality.¹²

Andreas Huyssen argues that Berlin has, as a space, been central to a century of cataclysmic change, from Weimar to Fascism, to Cold War and eventually reunification. Each subsequent development was partially defined by deliberate “forgetting” – of Weimar’s cultural innovations, of Nazi terror, or by negating Cold War socialist spaces.¹³ In his analysis of what became post-reunification Berlin, Huyssen describes the newly-reinstated German capital as being “marked as much, if not more, by absences as by the visible presence of its past.”¹⁴ The continued culture of shame and silence enforced upon gay survivors of Nazism mean that there was a *void* where the memories of these men should be. This “absence” of a space in which to testify has come to define the cultural memory of these victim and survivors, and is

⁸ Duberman Bauml, Vicinus and Chauncey, eds.), *Hidden from History*, 4.

⁹ “One Day They Were Simply Gone: The Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals,” accessed 9 February 2015 www.rictornorton.co.uk

¹⁰ Rainer Hoffschmidt, “140.000 Verurteilungen nach 175,” in *Invertito 4* (2002): 140–149.

¹¹ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 18; Karl Lang, imprisoned during the war for violating Paragraph 175, recounts that, post-war, he was fired from his position in a Hamburg bank once his “crime” was discovered, see “Karl Lange ID Card,” accessed 15 August 2018,

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/id-card/karl-lange>

¹² Johansson and Percy, “Homosexuals in Nazi Germany,” (NP).

¹³ Huyssen, “The Voids of Berlin,” 60.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

often an integral issue in the few testimonies we have. Their horrific experiences also need to be considered alongside the struggles they had to be able to recount them. Muller concurs that “ours is an empty memory. We have few names, and fewer faces: not more than fifteen gay Holocaust survivors have spoken of their experiences.”¹⁵ In terms of contributing to the collective narrative, the paucity of first-hand, written recollections is complemented by oral testimonies from survivors. These include ‘Karl’ and ‘Erich’ who recounted their experiences in a set of interviews in the early 1980s German Democratic Republic, and Albrecht Becker and Karl Gorath, told alongside the oral testimonies of Seel and Beck in the 2000 documentary, *Paragraph 175*.¹⁶

The varying experiences of western-European, often specifically German, homosexuals before and during the Second World War have been documented by researchers, filmmakers, and historians working largely post 1970s – though some as early as the 1950s. As interest in non-Jewish victims of Nazi persecution began to increase so too did the scholarship which traced the histories of homosexual victims and survivors.¹⁷ German refugee Richard Plant began research for *The Pink Triangle* by returning to his native land in the 1950s to track down the friends he left behind when he fled the fledgling Nazi state. Plant aimed to uncover the truth about the fate of the gay victims of Nazism, yet his dispiriting experience speaks to the continuing context of homophobia in which he found himself. Plant was eager to demonstrate the scale of the victimization that homosexuals suffered at the hands of the Nazis, and the subsequent silencing and continued persecution of the German state at the end of the war. Travelling to various parts of the country, he notes that he spent his days trawling through archives, collections and “death lists” and his nights wandering wearily and appalled through small German towns being as ignored by the locals as were the gay

¹⁵ Klaus Muller, in Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 13.

¹⁶ Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany; Paragraph 175*, 2000.

¹⁷ See, for example, Rector, *The Nazi Extermination of Homosexuals*; Plant, *The Pink Triangle*; Duberman Bauml, Vicinus and Chauncey, eds. *Hidden from History*; Grau, *Hidden Holocaust*; Günter Grau, "Final Solution of the Homosexual Question? The Antihomosexual Policies of the Nazis and the Social Consequences for Homosexual Men" in *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined*, Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Geoffrey J. Giles, *Why Bother About Homosexuals? Homophobia and Sexual Politics in Nazi Germany* (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2001); Linda Jacobs Altman, *The Forgotten Victims of the Holocaust. The Holocaust in History* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow, 2003).

survivors he was researching.¹⁸ In post-war Frankfurt, Harold – a former companion of Richard Plant and one of the few interviewees who would speak to him – argued that nobody would believe or accept any discoveries that Plant made about the Nazis and their homosexual victims, either in Germany or the wider world.¹⁹ This is an assertion with which Plant concurs, stating that when they had finally served their sentences, most homosexual men were loathe to discuss their experiences publicly.²⁰ Years of Nazi persecution and propaganda had regressed attitudes and undone all of the potential progress that pioneers such as Hirschfeld and Brand had tried to achieve.²¹

In 1978 writer Jürgen Lemke interviewed fourteen, mainly working class, East German gay men to capture their experiences from a period spanning the Third Reich to the fall of the Berlin Wall. These first-person accounts would form the basis of Lemke's text *Gay Voices from East Germany*, first translated into English in 1989.²² Though, unlike Plant's *The Pink Triangle*, it was not solely devoted to tracing the histories of gay victims of Nazism, it does offer useful accounts of a repressed minority at a time when such histories were not being widely acknowledged. Significantly, Lemke captured the reminiscences of these "gay voices" during a period of transition, that is, within the wider context of changes in the law and the tentative East German gay liberation movement.²³ The German Democratic Republic may have decriminalized homosexuality a full year before their West German counterparts – 1968 and 1969 respectively – yet this hardly increased the visibility for East German homosexuals.²⁴ That Lemke was able to persuade these men to unbury their pasts, not to mention get them published, speaks to the growing clamour amongst lesbians and gays in the GDR for rights and representation.²⁵ Despite continued homophobia, a growing sense of

¹⁸ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 193-196.

¹⁹ Ibid. 200.

²⁰ Ibid. 13.

²¹ These post-Second World War attitudes echoed Brand's post-First World War assertion that unless efforts are made to change the psychology of a homophobic society, their perceptions of homosexuals would remain constant, see Crouthamel, "'Comradeship' and 'Friendship,'" 119.

²² Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*.

²³ Jürgen Lemke, "Gay and Lesbian Life in East German Society before and after 1989." *The Oral History Review*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Winter (1993): 35.

²⁴ McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 2.

²⁵ Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 35.

sexual revolution in 1970s Europe was also being felt in East Germany, and this created a space which emboldened sexual activists.²⁶

Lemke's interviews begin with the story of Erich, born at the turn of the twentieth century in the *Prenzlauer Berg* district of Berlin and arrested by the Nazis and sent to a concentration camp in 1935. In the intervening years, Erich endured orphanages and a World War, and tough post-WWI conditions lead to petty crime and sex work.²⁷ Like so many others, Erich had a mistaken belief that, when the Nazis came to power, "his kind" were insignificant, and were, thus, safe. It was, of course, an erroneous assumption, and eventually Erich was added to a list, and one day taken away. His account of his interrogation by the Gestapo invokes tropes of physical and mental abuse, degradation, and a suggestion of victim hierarchies, which are reiterated in other survivors' memoirs. He recounts that:

Before they beat us up, they would bombard us with the same words that I had already heard so many times in my life. And always the same question. Do you know so-and-so? ... And then again, do you know him, or him? When I ventured to ask why I was being held here, they all roared as if on cue and almost collapsed from laughing ... The situation was clear from the very first day. Of all those the Nazis had herded together in the cellar, we were the lowest of the low.²⁸

The narrative that Lemke elicited from Erich demonstrates the complexity of these histories and memories. Erich's articulation of his recollections reveals patterns, themes and events which are echoed in the survivors' testimonies I will unpick below, and which contribute to the collective memory of this group of victims and survivors. The insistence that homosexuals were the "lowest of the low" has permeated the narrative of Nazi persecution of gays and is now one of the most pervasive assertions throughout the testimonies. Erich maintains that this hierarchy was evident in Nazi concentration camps whereby those imprisoned under Paragraph 175 were made to do "the hardest and shittiest work."²⁹ This was particularly true in terms of the infamous

²⁶ Josie McLellan, "Glad to be Gay Behind the Wall: Gay and Lesbian Activism in 1970s East Germany," *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 74 (2012) 108.

²⁷ Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 15-18.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 18.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 19.

Sachsenhausen clay pits, in which most of the homosexual prisoners were made to work.³⁰ These were grueling and dangerous conditions in which malnourished and mistreated men were forced into slave labor.³¹ Heinz Heger refers to Sachsenhausen as “a camp of torture and toil.”³² For Erich “Sachsenhausen was a nightmare ... For us, clay pits became grave sites ... in the camp we called the clay pit the death pit.”³³

Erich’s testimony contributes to the collective memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, both in the specificity of its subjugation stories and, more broadly, in his post-war experiences in terms of continued silencing. Lemke’s interview with Erich emphasizes the “hidden history” of homosexuals persecuted by the Nazis and their continued post-war repression.³⁴ An elderly Erich laments:

What is the use of saying: I suffered terribly. I’m telling you about my time in the camp and I realize that I want to convince you of my suffering. That’s something I haven’t done for a long time. You sit down as some old codger in a bar or a café, and who is willing to listen to you? I’m not even invited as a veteran with this story of mine ... There will always be people who turn away when you tell them the whole truth about yourself.³⁵

This turning from the truth defines the collective memory of these shunned survivors for whom there was no space to tell their stories and thus, it was assumed, there was no audience. I now *turn to* three key written texts, the first of which was published half a century ago, which constitute a collective core in relation to the memory of gay men persecuted by the Nazis. I begin with a brief précis of each memoir, before critically engaging with them from a literary/cultural memory perspective and in relation to a Holocaust testimony model, in order to produce original readings of the texts and how we might understand their contribution to the collective memory of “the men with the pink triangle.”

³⁰ Petersen & Licata, *Historical Perspectives on Homosexuality*, 152; Barry D Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 58.

³¹ Kurt Wallach, *Man's Inhumanity To Man* (North Carolina: Lulu Press INC, 2020), 68.

³² Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 37.

³³ Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 19.

³⁴ Jeffrey M. Peck and Jürgen Lemke, “Being Gay in Germany: An Interview with Jürgen Lemke.” *New German Critique*, no. 52 (1991): 153; Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 1.

³⁵ Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 24-5.

The Men with the Pink Triangle – Memoirs of the ‘Lowest of the Low and Damnedest of the Damned.’³⁶

First published in Germany in 1972, Heinz Heger’s *The Men with the Pink Triangle* is considered to be the first full-length memoir documenting a homosexual’s experience of Nazism, and for decades was the primary source for anyone interested in this dark chapter of history.³⁷ Later translated into several languages, Heger’s landmark text created a cultural space into which survivors, historians and playwrights could create their own works which spoke to this history.³⁸ The memoir begins in Vienna in March 1939, a year after the Anschluss between Germany and Austria, when a single incident in the life of twenty-two-year-old Viennese student Heinz Heger was to determine the course of the rest of his life. It is a pattern we shall see repeated in the narratives in this study and demonstrates the fragility of the environment they lived in, where a chance encounter, a lapse in concentration, or a question of judgement could have catastrophic long-term consequences. Heger was born and raised in an affluent, strictly Catholic, respected and tolerant family. Aware of his homosexuality from an early age, he felt comfortable confiding his feelings to his mother, whose primary concern was that of his safety, telling him that “whatever happens, you are my son and always come to me with your problems ... Just be careful to avoid bad company, and guard against blackmail, as this is a possible danger.”³⁹

³⁶ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 32-34.

³⁷ “Curator’s Corner: Documenting the Nazi Persecution of Gays,” accessed 16 April 2017, <https://www.ushmm.org/collections/the-museums-collections/curators-corner/documenting-nazi-persecution-of-gays-the-josef-kohout-wilhelm-kroepfl-collection>

³⁸ For the historical significance of Heger’s text, see Craig Griffiths, *The Ambivalence of Gay Liberation: Male Homosexual Politics in 1970s West Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 29, 125-6, 131; Texts that were published after Heger’s include Rector, *The Nazi Extermination of Homosexuals*, 1981, Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 1986, Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 1995, Beck, *An Underground Life*, 1999. Heger’s pioneering memoir, along with the early writing of Richard Plant, is often credited as partial inspiration for Martin Sherman’s play *Bent* (1979), though this has been disputed – see Tish Dace, *Martin Sherman: Skipping Over Quicksand* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, Incorporated, Publishers, 2011), 79-80. *Bent* tells the story of two German men persecuted and imprisoned by the Nazis in 1930s Berlin. The work, later made into a film, undoubtedly raised awareness of the persecution of homosexuals under Nazism but has been considered problematic in terms of its comparisons between homosexuals and Jews and their treatment in concentration camps – see Emmanuel Sampath Nelson, ed. *Contemporary Gay American Poets and Playwrights: An A-to-Z Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 409, though Sherman has argued that his identity as both Jewish and homosexual, and the partial erasure of the histories of both groups, informed his writing – see Dagmar Herzog, ed. *Sexuality and German Fascism* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), 340.

³⁹ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 18.

Once at university, Heinz met like-minded people and fell in love with Fred, the German son of a high-ranking Nazi official. The romance between the two was to be short-lived as, in March 1939, the Gestapo, under suspicion of him violating Paragraph 175, arrested Heger. He was interrogated and sent – without a thorough trial – to an Austrian prison. As his release date approached he was informed that he was instead to be transferred to Sachsenhausen concentration camp.⁴⁰ Heger was devastated, not only for the further loss of freedom, or the indignity of being incarcerated for something he felt was perfectly natural, but also due to fear of the stories he had heard while incarcerated, stories of torture and death in such camps and how men like him rarely came back alive.⁴¹ Heger’s memoir details the brutality and futility of daily life in Sachsenhausen, then later Flossenbürg concentration camp, where he remained until “liberation” in 1945.

In May 1981, a year after it was first translated into English, Heger’s memoir was also being recognized in France, as part of a debate about the Nazi deportation of homosexuals, in a small bookshop in Toulouse. In wary attendance at that event was fifty-eight-year-old Frenchman Pierre Seel, himself a survivor of Nazi concentration camps, who had secretly carried his burden for five decades before finally seeing his memoir, *I Pierre Seel: Deported Homosexual*, published in 1995.⁴² Seel was born in 1923 into a prosperous, devoutly Catholic family in the Alsace region of France and had a pleasant but unremarkable childhood. Heinz Heger had already been in a German concentration camp for almost two years when the Gestapo came calling in Alsace for Pierre Seel. He was still a teenager in 1941 when he was arrested for a homosexual encounter and deported to Germany. As with Heger’s testimony, Seel’s memoir reveals camp life which consisted of a regime of beatings, exhausting physical labour, and extreme hunger, all overseen by the ruthless SS and a sadistic commandant. For Seel, this experience culminated in the public murder of his lover Jo, an event which came to define much of his life. Much of the remainder of Seel’s memoir consists of a combination of shame, anger, and an ongoing crusade for recognition.

⁴⁰ It was common practice for those detained under Paragraph 17 not to be released when they had served their prison sentence, but rather to be sent directly to a concentration camp, see Anton Weiss-Wendt *Eradicating Differences: The Treatment of Minorities in Nazi-Dominated Europe* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 43.

⁴¹ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 19-26.

⁴² Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 123.

The third memoir under scrutiny is Gad Beck's *An Underground Life: Memoirs of a Gay Jew in Nazi Berlin*. Beck was born in June 1923, a twin along with his sister Margot, to an Austrian Jewish father and a German mother. In the earliest chapters of his memoir, Beck recounts a very happy childhood, one where the family observed many traditional Jewish customs, yet were relatively relaxed with their son's often-flamboyant ways.⁴³ Indeed, much of Beck's narrative emphasizes the comparisons and contrasts he experienced in his formative years; the conventions of religion often sat comfortably alongside Beck's blossoming sexuality, which was partly cultivated in Berlin's youth groups, until they were usurped and destroyed under Nazism.⁴⁴ Beck's story is remarkable in that he was able to evade capture by the Nazis throughout most of the war despite his Jewish roots, his active role in the Zionist resistance movement, and his continuing homosexual encounters. Unlike the experiences of Seel and Heger, Beck was never explicitly persecuted or prosecuted for his homosexuality. Instead, Beck was able to utilize a network of his homosexual acquaintances to assist both in his continued survival in the Berlin underground, as well as helping Jewish friends escape the country.⁴⁵ Only as the war was in its final death throes, was Beck finally arrested and incarcerated.

It is important to note here that, despite the gradual emergence of a body of work which speaks to this persecution, it was often acquired in a society which still vilified such victims. As such, some of those who testified did so under the promise of protecting their identities. This plea for anonymity can also be read as a loss of identity, as a result of their experiences under Nazism, and their continued silencing post-war. One of the key facets of wars and conflicts is the process of dehumanizing the enemy, and this was a practice crucial to belligerents in the Second World War and the Holocaust in

⁴³ Beck, *An Underground Life*, 9-15.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* These groups themselves were somewhat of a dichotomy, as whilst they were a 'real example of German-Jewish assimilation' (13), they resembled the youth movements that would become such an important part of Nazism, and from which children such as Margot and Beck would ultimately be excluded. Furthermore, there are echoes of the experiences shared by Seel, and the men featured in *Paragraph 175*, who emphasize the importance of the youth groups to their homosexual development as well as helping to forge and foster a group identity and sometimes offer protection. As Gad notes 'the motto of the youth leadership had always been "We're staying together!"' (68).

⁴⁵ "Gad Beck ID Card," accessed 19 May 2018, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/idcard.php?ModuleId=10006666>

particular.⁴⁶ Alongside striped garments and shaven heads, one of the most indelible acts of Nazi dehumanization in Auschwitz was tattooing numbers onto the flesh of Jewish prisoners. This process effectively erased a person's name and identity and reduced them to mere victim.⁴⁷ Primo Levi notes that "its symbolic meaning was clear to everyone ... You no longer have a name; this is your name."⁴⁸ Measures of dehumanization are conspicuous in the testimonies of the homosexual survivors too; the effacement of their identity is evident in the process of the recounting of survivors' memories, whereby their very "names" become contentious. While Levi "no longer had a name," in terms of their testimonies, many homosexual survivors could no longer *give* a name. Years of being reduced to symbols and stripes, followed by decades of silence and silencing, had rendered many of them "nameless" by necessity. Jeremy D. Popkin argues that "authors who publish their work under a pseudonym usually do so to conceal some essential fact about their identity."⁴⁹ In the testimony given to Jurgen Lemke, we never learn survivor Erich's full name, and this inconspicuousness is a recurrent element of these latently revealed memories. On occasion, survivors wanted to preserve a degree of anonymity, as they were often recounting their stories in an environment still hostile to homosexuality. Some survivors are referred to by forename only, such as Karl, Erich, and Harold, reflecting how their names are presented in the original texts.⁵⁰ In other cases, entire pseudonyms were created in order to preserve anonymity. Teofil Kosinski, imprisoned for homosexuality and sent to various concentration camps, opted to present his story as a form of fiction as he feared the repercussions should he use his true identity.⁵¹ Even the most eminent memoir in this limited canon, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, employed the pen-name of Heinz Heger, when in fact the memoir was constructed by an author called Hans Neumann, using testimony from survivor Josef Kohout. Though Kohout is recognized by his actual name in certain settings, most notably the archive of the United States Holocaust

⁴⁶ David Livingstone Smith, *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others* (New York: St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2011), 15-16.

⁴⁷ Erin Heather McGlothlin, *Second-generation Holocaust literature: legacies of survival and perpetration* (New York: Camden House, 2006), 21.

⁴⁸ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 104.

⁴⁹ Jeremy D Popkin, 'Ka-Tzetnik 135633: The Survivor as Pseudonym.' *New Literary History* 33, no. 2 (2002): 343.

⁵⁰ See Plant, *The Pink Triangle*; Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*.

⁵¹ Lutz Van Dijk, *Damned Strong Love: The True Story of Willi G. and Stefan K.* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995).

Memorial Museum, he is otherwise, ironically, largely “hidden from history” at the expense of Heger. Heger has become so culturally ubiquitous as the preeminent memoirist of this history that it was this name, rather than Kohout, which was chosen when renaming a city square in Vienna as a memorial to him – Heinz-Heger Park was inaugurated in 2009.⁵² Continued silenced and shame are key facets of the collective memory that has been forged by these survivors, and they have cast a long shadow over the rest of their lives. During a promotional interview for *Paragraph 175*, it is noted that 92-year old “Heinz F. is very old, seemingly past the age of shame, but still he doesn't want us to know his full name. His awful story, however, is something he will share.”⁵³

The memories of this handful of men were captured over a period of almost thirty years. The focus of each differs in terms of the experiences they recount, yet each contributes to a developing, collective memory of this “unique history.” The narratives reveal preoccupations with victim status and hierarchies, which can be understood in terms of how the survivors positioned themselves and their experiences. The memoirs have a complex relationship with the notion of “heroic acts” and particular uses of language, which I consider as part of the broader scholarship around Holocaust literature and testimony. Finally, the memories were being captured and conveyed in an environment of apathy or antagonism, which often informs the manner in which the silenced try to speak.

“All the way on the bottom”⁵⁴ – “Hierarchies” and the Holocaust Frame

Using the survivors’ memoirs, this section argues that homosexual victims of Nazi persecution often sought to understand their subjugation in terms of other victim groups, and thus created a victim/survivor spectrum, a hierarchical scale of traumatic experience with homosexuals at the lower end. Critical interpretation of the testimonies of different groups of victims of Nazism is complex - particularly when making comparisons between them or noting their dissimilarities. A set of questions arise in

⁵² Griffiths, *The Ambivalence of Gay Liberation*, 131; There is an information plaque as part of the memorial which explains that Heger is a pseudonym for Kohout, and this is acknowledged on the city’s information website, accessed 24 May 2021,

<https://www.wien.gv.at/bezirke/alsergrund/umwelt/heinz-heger-park.html>

⁵³ “Paragraph 175: The Nazis' Victims of Shame.” accessed 15 June 2020,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2000/10/19/paragraph-175-the-nazis-victims-of-shame/417b95da-70b4-4c99-8adf-27ff4414c24e/>

⁵⁴ *Paragraph 175*, 2000.

relation to thinking about how to recognize other Nazi victims which would both honour the cultural memory of the specificity of the Holocaust whilst at the same time being cognizant of the particular experiences to which other persecuted groups were subjected. My methodology uses both wider cultural memory paradigms and theoretical frameworks associated with Holocaust testimony in order to analyze these testimonies of gay victims of Nazism. The methodologies developed for Holocaust memory are politically and ethically charged and debated and using a Holocaust memory methodology in order to analyze the experiences of other victims of Nazism is potentially problematic. My engagement with these theoretical frames is precisely not intended to collapse the differences between the attempted destruction of European Jewry and the persecution of Homosexuals. Rather it is to show how the models for understanding traumatic memory, that were inaugurated in relation to the Holocaust, can illuminate traumatic memories of other victims. Michael Rothberg notes that “one of the major stumbling blocks to a recognition of the interactions that take place among collective memories is the belief that one’s own history, culture and identity are a ‘separate and unique thing’”⁵⁵ The theory of the “uniqueness of the Holocaust” constitutes a vast scholarship.⁵⁶ One of the principal assertions is that the planned annihilation of European Jewry was distinct, and, thus should be differentiated from the persecution of other victims of Nazism.⁵⁷ This argument, according to Rothberg, in part gained prominence in response to public silence around the Jewish genocide in the immediate post-war period.⁵⁸ Ironically, “silencing” is also salient in the collective memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, alongside many survivors’ insistence that elements of the persecution were *specific* to homosexuals. Such specifics, the survivors maintain, include being selected for the worst work, being subjected to particularly brutal – and often sexualized – violence, and being ostracized by the majority of other prisoner groups, all marked by their own triangle, and all virulently homophobic.

⁵⁵ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional memory: remembering the Holocaust in the age of decolonization* (California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 7.

⁵⁶ Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, 10; Lucy Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 14; Steven Katz, “Quantity and Interpretation – Issues in the Comparative Historical Analysis of the Holocaust,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol.4, No.2 (1989): 31.

⁵⁷ Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, “The Politics of Uniqueness: Reflections on the Recent Polemic Turn in Holocaust and Genocide Studies,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, V13, No.1, Spring (1999): 29

⁵⁸ Rothberg, *Multidirectional memory*, 8.

This thesis is not an intervention in the question of uniqueness. My aim is not to dispute the arguments put forward by exclusivists, nor to engage in an unseemly “one-upmanship” of victimhood. However, the terrain of Holocaust studies has ensured that any study concerned with homosexual persecution by the Nazis cannot ignore these debates. More specifically, these gay victims often attempted to make sense of their own suffering in relation to Jewish Holocaust victims, and repeatedly stressed a hierarchy of victimhood, with homosexuals “all the way on the bottom.”⁵⁹ Rothberg warns of the danger of the uniqueness model creating “a hierarchy of suffering ... [which can in turn lead to] competitive memory.”⁶⁰ There are a recurrence of competing claims throughout the memoirs of gay victims; there is repeated emphasis on the worst treatment meted out to homosexuals, and they invariably invoke an indignant lack of recognition, often at the expense of other victim groups.

Heinz Heger understood, and articulated, his low status even before he was sent to a concentration camp. Following his initial arrest by the SS for “homosexual behavior” in 1939, Heger was detained in a Vienna prison whilst he awaited trial.⁶¹ Here, Heger was immediately “othered” both by those in charge and those detained alongside him, as his sexuality was used as a means to instigate acts of domination and subjugation against him. He recalls:

My fellow prisoners were criminals ... They immediately wanted to know what I was in for ... When they found out I was “queer,” as one of the policemen gleefully told them, they immediately made open advances to me, which I angrily rejected ... Then they started to insult me and “the whole brood of queers,” who ought to be exterminated. It was an unheard-of insult that the authorities should have put a subhuman such as this in the same cell as two relatively decent people. Even if they had come into conflict with the law, they were at least normal men and not moral degenerates. They were on quite a different level from homos, who should be classed as animals. They went on with such insults for quite a while, stressing all the time how they were decent men in comparison with filthy queers.⁶²

⁵⁹ Paragraph 175, 2000.

⁶⁰ Rothberg, *Multidirectional memory*, 9.

⁶¹ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 22-23; Such “trials” were often perfunctory affairs, arranged and conducted hastily, and usually resulted in a prison sentence, then were often followed by detainment in a concentration camp.

⁶² *Ibid.* 22-23.

This then was Heger's initial experience of how his sexuality – only recently articulated via his love for his companion Fred – came to inform his every experience, not least in terms of positioning himself at moral odds with other groups who were targeted by the Nazis. He distinguishes himself from those imprisoned as actual “criminals,” including murderers, yet to these criminals, the authorities, and the SS, “degenerates” such as him were worse than everyone else, and less than human.⁶³ By January 1940, Heger was condemned to Sachsenhausen concentration camp, ostensibly for the discovery of a postcard and a declaration of affection. Even his recollections of the transportation to the camp reveal the extent of the homophobia many of these men constantly faced which contributes to the collective memory of a hierarchy at which they were “on the bottom.” Heger describes that his transit consisted of cells in:

cattle trucks ... set aside for the worst criminals ... I was placed in one of these cells, together with two young men of about my age, condemned to death for a murder ... and with a certain degree of grisly pride they took turns in describing the details of their crime ... They soon got it out of me that I was a “175er,” a “filthy queer,” as they called me from then on. They, too, spoke of homosexuals with utter contempt ... they were at least “normal men.”⁶⁴

The two men repeatedly subjected Heger to sexual assaults and he was constantly reminded that his status was beneath them. Heger repeatedly rhetorically questions how he, as merely a man with loving feelings for another man, can be considered “abnormal” and lesser than rapists and murderers.⁶⁵ Heger's articulation of a victim hierarchy is rendered more explicitly when he recounts his initial experiences in Sachsenhausen. He recounts that:

Jews, homosexuals, and Gypsies, the yellow, pink, and brown triangles, were the prisoners who suffered most frequently and most severely from the tortures and blows of the SS and the Capos. They were described as the scum of humanity, who had no right to live on German soil and should be exterminated ... But the lowest of the low in this “scum” were we, the men with the pink triangle.⁶⁶

⁶³ Ibid. 22-26.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 28.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 32.

Heger attempts to make sense of his, and other “pink triangle” prisoners’ experiences by situating them within the wider contexts of other groups, notably Jews and Roma. The Nazi concentration camp system of segregation-by-symbol enabled “victim groups” to identify themselves in relation to others, and informed how some groups interacted with one another, as well as how they understood their treatment by their captors. Heger claims that this identification was aided by making the pink triangle several centimetres larger than those worn by other victim groups “so that we could clearly be recognized from a distance.”⁶⁷

Pierre Seel’s recollection of his time in Shirmeck-Vorbruck internment camp further verifies the accounts of torture and rape of gay prisoners, the “social relationships” that formed between different groups of victims, and the treatment that was meted out to homosexuals, in part as a consequence of this. His testimony further contributes to the collective memory of this persecution and the shared narrative of a hierarchical scale of victimhood. Interviewed in *Paragraph 175*, Seel claims that ‘there was a hierarchy. There was no doubt that the weakest in the camp were the homosexuals ... all the way on the bottom’.⁶⁸ Marked not with a pink triangle but with his camp’s equivalent – a blue bar on his camp uniform – Seel was, like many others, subjected to the daily toil of forced labour and brutish treatment.⁶⁹ He too works through his experiences in relation to other groups, arguing that the “hierarchy” of prisoners in the camp meant that homosexuals could not engage with one another, or attempt to forge any form of collective defence. He writes:

The barrack was made up of networks of various affinities, some political, which slightly reduced the isolation and hardship of everyday life. I was not part of any of these solidarity groups. With my blue ribbon, which was quickly interpreted by my fellow inmates, I realised I could expect nothing from them. Sexual crime is an added burden for a prisoner’s identity ... In the universe of inmates, I was a completely negligible element that could be sacrificed at any moment.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ibid. See also Clive Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows: The Development of Gay and Lesbian Culture in Queensland* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 22; This will be considered in more detail below, in terms of misremembering and exaggerated claims in memoirs and testimony.

⁶⁸ *Paragraph 175*, 2000.

⁶⁹ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 29-35; Seel notes that, unlike Heger, he was never made to wear, nor did he see, a pink triangle. The blue bar on his camp uniform largely denoted Catholic or asocial prisoners, but the category was widened to include homosexuals.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 36.

Further elucidation of the “special status” afforded to homosexuals in the camps can be found in Erich’s testimony to Jurgen Lemke. Upon his arrest by the Gestapo in the Berlin borough of Pankow, Erich concurs,

the situation was clear from the very first day. Of all those the Nazis had herded together in the cellar, we were the lowest of the low. When it came to “homo hatred,” the Nazis could give free rein. Where they had to organize hatred against Communists and Jews among their henchmen and followers with a massive propaganda effort, whole centuries of Christianity handed them homo hatred on a platter ... The hierarchy of the triangles was a reflection of the outside world. Among the low we stood beneath the very lowest. The criminals could have pulled off the most appalling crimes, but they easily ranked above the homos.⁷¹

There is, then, a constant reiteration of a ranking of victims in which homosexuals were treated worse than other prisoners, and this forms an integral element of the collective memory of this group. Whilst the narratives might be considered to drift into the hyperbolic, the claims that these gay men were largely isolated and unable to form any kind of defensive group is supported by the scholarship that has subsequently developed, based on a variety of historical documentation. In certain camps, homosexuals were largely excluded from work areas where they may have been able to communicate and they were either violently targeted or actively avoided by other prisoners, many of whom were as homophobic as their captors.⁷² Whilst in some camps, those imprisoned under Paragraph 175 were segregated, in others they were dispersed, so that they could be observed and kept in check by other prisoners who were mostly hostile to them. A report on conditions in Austrian camps such as Emsland and Rodgau notes the benefit of:

distributing homosexuals so that everywhere they are faced with a great majority of non-perverts who keep them, as well as each other, under control, out of a healthy abhorrence of homosexuality that is very widespread among prisoners ... In the allocation of work, it is important to ensure that homosexual prisoners do not have the opportunity to be with other individual prisoners without being under constant and direct supervision ... To put homosexuals together in isolation, apart from offering the opportunity of secret homosexual

⁷¹ Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 19-21.

⁷² Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 237.

activity, would appear to contain the risk that a ‘homosexual atmosphere’ will take shape which drags the individual still deeper into homosexuality.⁷³

The near-universal revulsion for them amongst other prisoner groups meant that there was little scope for solidarity amongst homosexuals. Tamagne demonstrates that homosexuals “did not occupy decision-making positions in the prisoner hierarchy ... the pink triangles were at the lowest level, right before the Jews.”⁷⁴ The overwhelming ostracization of homosexuals as a group informs much of their collective narrative and how they have been positioned in opposition to other groups. This was not limited to life in the camps of course, as the continued suppression of those who survived them further contributed to the sense of a hierarchy of memories, including the struggle for lasting memorialisation examined in detail in chapter four. The next section critically engages with the particular literary and stylistic devices utilized within the memoirs, and the notion of “heroism” in the face of extreme adversity, much of which is inexorably linked to the continued sense that this particular group of victims were the “lowest of the low.”

“You won’t hear heroic tales about our kind”⁷⁵

- Trauma, testimony and the “indomitable human spirit.”

Writing in his memoir about his sudden release from his incarceration in Shirmeck concentration camp, Pierre Seel states mildly, “I was not killed.”⁷⁶ Gregory Woods notes the banality of Seel’s language here, and the absurdity of using such ordinary words to describe such extraordinary events. Woods suggests that language can almost no longer represent the reality of the lived experiences of the survivors.⁷⁷ It is often argued that in terms of representation the Holocaust is “incomprehensible” and “unspeakable.”⁷⁸ Yet the voluminous canon of Holocaust literature and scholarship

⁷³ Grau, *Hidden Holocaust*, 153.

⁷⁴ Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, 237; this isolation was not limited to the camp confines – even externally there was limited support for gay prisoners from fellow homosexuals, fearful of “guilt by association,” and they were also often ostracized by their own families.

⁷⁵ Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 15.

⁷⁶ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 48.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* xxviii.

⁷⁸ Berel Lang, *Holocaust representation: art within the limits of history and ethics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 17; Joanna Newman, Toby Haggith, eds. *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television Since 1933* (London: Wallflower, 2005), 163.

suggests that despite the apparent “limits of language,” focus should perhaps shift from claims that the Holocaust is “unrepresentable” to attempting to analyze and understand the myriad ways it *has* been represented.⁷⁹ In this section, I consider the form of the testimonies and how much we can access the traumatic experiences in the performative language, margins, silences and ellipses of these texts. I then consider the idea of “heroic” narrative, which has been focused on in Holocaust testimonies in terms of how conditions under Nazism rarely allowed for what are traditionally understood as heroic acts. Although there are of course many instances of heroism from survivors, they were often precursors to violent reprisals. Contrarily, Holocaust testimony can reveal what Langer has termed “unheroic memory.”⁸⁰ Such memory attempts to challenge the notion that “spirit,” “strength,” and a “will to survive” in circumstance that were usually beyond the control of those being persecuted by the Nazis. This is complicated further when we analyze texts from homosexual survivors, some of whom focus either explicitly or implicitly on “heroic acts.” This focus is sometimes a defensive act, given the homophobic context in which they are *recounting* their stories, as well as the homophobic context in which they *lived* these stories.

There are often stylistic devices employed in written memoirs which problematize the issue of language with regards to the camps, specifically, the appropriateness of consciously writing poetically.⁸¹ James Young asserts in relation to Holocaust testimony that in order to counter Himmler’s vow that the Holocaust would be a “never-to-be-written page in history ... ‘Literary testimony’ became for many victims the sole reason to survive.”⁸² Young further notes that contemporary critical theorists increasingly stress the centrality of “poetizing” to cultural activity, so once we accept that the *form* of camp testimony is inherently and necessarily poetic and literary we can

For a collection of essays which make attempt to meaning of the Holocaust from a number of philosophical, political and spiritual perspectives, including contributions from Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, and in which the editor suggests that trying to understand the Holocaust with intellectualism and thinking will result in failure, see Roger S. Gottlieb, ed. *Thinking the Unthinkable: Meanings of the Holocaust* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990). See also Michael Rothberg, Neil Levi, eds. *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

⁷⁹ Joost Krijnen, *Holocaust Impiety in Jewish American Literature: Memory, Identity, (Post) Postmodernism* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 23.

⁸⁰ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 162.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 129.

⁸² Young, “Interpreting Literary Testimony,” 406.

move on to consider both their *content* and their *raison d'être*; how and why they exist, in what context and as a response to what?⁸³

The structure of a traumatic memoir adheres to “certain literary conventions: chronology, description, characterization, dialogue, and above all perhaps, the invention of a narrative voice.”⁸⁴ In relation to Holocaust survivor testimony, Langer stresses that from the chaos of the camp experience where nothing makes sense, memoirists, using first memory, then language, must assign some sense of meaning where there is none. He argues that “all surviving victims who write about their camp experiences must adopt some strategy for providing entry to the readers imagination into that distant world.”⁸⁵ Using the model of Holocaust testimony is useful in terms of homosexual survivors of Nazism because it articulates a model of traumatic memory and writing which allows these memoirs to be read in specific ways. The testimonies from the few homosexual survivors that are available to us often adhere to a similar narrative structure, including, variously, vivid descriptions of their young pre-war lives, the awakening of their sexuality and the difficulties this consciousness sometimes engendered. The testimonies usually describe a seemingly inevitable arrest, incarceration, and sometimes frank and brutal depictions of violence. Many then document a lengthy and often futile struggle for recognition, recompense or redemption. The memoirs convey the range of experiences and thus emotions of each survivor, and these largely consist variously of bewilderment, fear, pain, despair, and anger. Rarely, given their continued, sustained rejection by post-war society, do the texts offer a redemptive coda. Yet, this is not to say that the memoirs do not sometimes offer the reader instances of heroism and elements of hope, given that these are shared memories of those who managed to survive, and attempted to help others endure often-unimaginable trauma. These attempts to convey optimism amongst the anguish, however, need to be read and understood in the wider sense of how and why survivors remember and render traumatic testimony.

Langer asserts that narratives of traumatic experiences such as those who endured Nazi persecution often attempt to accentuate affirmative traits of victims and survivors. Due

⁸³ Ibid. 407.

⁸⁴ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 41.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 42.

to both their bleak subject matter and the lack of control the victims ultimately had in terms of their own destiny, Holocaust texts might emphasize positivity in an attempt to reassure the casual reader and render heroic those who perished. In relation to Jewish Holocaust survivors Langer argues that “scarcely a volume appears on this subject that is not celebrated as a homage to the “indomitable human spirit.””⁸⁶ Whilst all those persecuted and oppressed by the Nazis deserve recognition and remembrance, using redemptive, optimistic, consoling language to do so risks oversimplifying their actual, ambivalent experiences. Perishing in – or surviving – concentration camps was often arbitrary, and emphasizing heroism in the face of adversity does a disservice to the victims.⁸⁷ A critical focus on heroism or resistance in Holocaust narratives risks suggesting that a “will to survive” was in any way effective within the universe of the camps, where in reality “strength and resilience” meant little.⁸⁸

As part of his analysis of Erich’s testimony, detailing the decade of Nazi persecution he faced, Lemke wonders:

What kept Erich going? No succor from philosophical beliefs, no comfort from religion... certainly no personal ties, for he deliberately denied himself emotional bonds with his fellow human beings either inside or outside the camps during those years, and he comments on the often fatal consequences for those who did. Above all, though, he seems to have maintained an unshakable, impenetrable, obstinate refusal to surrender to the will of his masters.⁸⁹

Lemke infers that Erich was somewhat in control of his destiny, that being resolute in the face of adversity, and the fact that he endured a severe childhood, might ensure his survival.⁹⁰ Erich maintains that “Being deprived on the outside stood me in good stead in the camp ... I had learned very early on to look after myself first ... I had no strong, emotional ties to the outside, so I could concentrate fully on survival.”⁹¹ Yet despite this, Lemke does concur that Erich’s survival may not entirely be due to his will, and certainly not because he was especially “heroic.”⁹² Whilst it may suit the reader to

⁸⁶ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 4; 15-16.

⁸⁹ Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 13.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 19.

⁹² *Ibid.*

believe that heroism, comradeship or innate strength might ensure endurance, heroic actions, where they were able to manifest, often, as Erich agreed, had quite devastating consequences.⁹³

I turn now to an incident in Gad Beck's memoir which demonstrate the complexity of narratives about heroism and survival – the attempted rescue of his first love from Nazi deportation. The context is, of course, much different to that of Erich, Heger or Seel, whose testimonies largely concerned their experiences *within* concentration camps, and who thus would have faced a very specific set of challenges. In 1940, 17-year old Gad Beck was still in Berlin and active as part of Chug Chaluzi, a Jewish resistance group, which set up safe houses, delivered money, and helped Jews to escape Nazi Germany. Around this time, Beck had begun a relationship with Manfred Lewin, a young Jew also active in the resistance group. Beck's memoir details the blossoming, illicit romance between the two, as Manfred struggled with his sexuality, as well as the increasingly perilous situation for Berlin's Jews.⁹⁴ The text emphasizes the escalating sense of foreboding that pervaded the capital, as, in 1941, "transports" began, and rumours circulated about precisely what was happening in concentration camps.⁹⁵ In late-1942, Manfred Lewin and all of his family were ordered by Nazi officials to vacate their apartment and prepare to be transferred east. The language used within the sequences where Beck attempts to convey the final few days of the Lewin family has the effect of situating the reader within the maelstrom. The weeks preceding the event were marked by an escalation of denunciations and deportations, as more and more of Beck's associates were "relocated" or murdered.⁹⁶ Beck writes:

It got increasingly quiet around those of us who were still left. And then it happened. Even when you expect a catastrophe, it always comes too soon. The Lewins got their lists. Just a few months before, they had repainted their apartment ... And now they were supposed to leave.⁹⁷

⁹³ Ibid. See also Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 4, 5-16.

⁹⁴ Beck, *An Underground Life*, 53-56.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 60-65.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 66-67.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 67.

It has been argued that those who experienced traumatic events are less likely to forget them than they are more mundane ones.⁹⁸ Yet even the most prosaic recollections can contribute to the representation of traumatic memory.⁹⁹ Beck's remembering of the house painting seems incongruous with the sudden presentation of a list that will likely lead to the family's extermination. It may appear to be a "mundane memory," yet for Beck it is inexorably tied to the impending "catastrophe," another example of the resilience of his friends and family who have endured years of surviving on meagre rations in cramped and unfit accommodation, alongside increased persecution and brutality.¹⁰⁰

Beck's articulation of the subsequent events contributes to the wider collective memory of the notions of "heroism" in Holocaust testimony, in terms of how audacious acts are conveyed and their often futile outcomes. The Lewins had already been picked up and taken to a pre-deportation assembly camp in Berlin, leaving only Manfred and his brother to report the following day. Beck notes that:

the motto of the youth leadership had always been "We're staying together!" And the same certainly applied for the Lewins. For me, in love and selfish as I was, this sentence had a different meaning – I did not want to be separated from Manfred ... I was in absolute despair, almost panic-stricken. The brothers were ... determined to hold on to the only certainty they had left: They would see their family the next day, and together they would face the events to come.¹⁰¹

The Lewin brothers' determination and defiance were contrasted by Beck's despair. Beck and Manfred made love one final time that night and the next day, the brothers joined the rest of their family. In a desperate attempt to rescue his great love, Beck turned to Manfred's German employer who loaned Beck his own son's Nazi Youth uniform in order that he could disguise himself and free Manfred from the assembly camp, a plan

⁹⁸ Julia Shaw, *The Memory Illusion: Remembering, Forgetting, and the Science of False Memory* (London: Random House Books, 2016), 165; Mark Pendergrast, *The Repressed Memory Epidemic: How It Happened and What We Need to Learn from It* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 78.

⁹⁹ Glejzer & Bernard-Donals, *Between Witness and Testimony*, 86; see also Lincoln Shlensky, "Lost and found: Aharon Appelfeld's Hebrew literary affiliations and the quest for a home in Israeli letters," *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History* 26, no. 3 (2006).

¹⁰⁰ Beck, *An Underground Life*, 54-55.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 68.

described as “risky, but ingenious.”¹⁰² The reader is then led on Beck’s courageous – or foolhardy – journey as the innocuous young man in the Hitler Youth uniform stood before the *Obersturmbannführer* (a senior SS Leader) with a “Heil Hitler” and a request that he temporarily borrow the Jew known as Manfred in order that he return some keys to a former employer.¹⁰³ The juxtaposition between the parties could not be more pronounced; the SS men were largely indifferent to the situation, as Beck notes, for them, the whole operation was “no big deal ... the entire incident was not especially interesting to him”¹⁰⁴ Yet for Beck – and he assumed for Manfred – this was a moment of triumphant bravery and daring, and the start of their future together. Beck writes:

I walked out of my old school building onto the street... I was back in my world, with my Manfred next to me. I was filled with a combination of triumph and security as we walked down the street together... I beamed at him... and said quietly, “Here’s some money. Now go to my uncle in Teltow like we discussed and wait for me. I’ll come as soon as I can.”

He stood there, took the twenty marks and looked at me. “Gad, I can’t go with you. My family needs me. If I abandon them now, I could never be free.” No smile, no sadness. He had made his decision. We didn’t even say goodbye. He turned around and went back.

In those seconds, watching him go, I grew up... I never saw Manfred again.¹⁰⁵

Manfred and his family were murdered at Auschwitz along with scores of Beck’s other Jewish friends and companions. Beck’s doomed attempt to rescue Manfred, and Manfred’s noble act of staying with his family, are both heroic and hopeless. The story recounted in Beck’s memoir demonstrates that a will to rescue and survive, based on the notion of “human spirit” was often ultimately futile in the world of the camps – or in this case, on the way to them. The reader then must try to process such events and make sense of how audacious actions are faced with catastrophic reactions. Langer argues that “when a courageous, resolute, well-intentioned act that we admire results not in rescue but in unexpected and unforeseeable disaster, we as audience have to contend with the collapse of belief in the heroic gesture that defies fate and deifies the will to action.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Ibid. 69.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 69-70. The *Obersturmbannführer* was one of the military ranks in the SS and in this instance, he oversaw the fates of all those who passed through the assembly camp, which was located in Beck’s former school.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 70.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 32.

Yet, despite being ultimately unsuccessful, the rescue attempt has become a pivotal memory in the story of Gad Beck. The USHMM holds as part of its collection a small book of hand-written memories made for Beck by Lewin and donated to the museum the same year Beck's memoir was published.¹⁰⁷ The book is also displayed online and is presented as a cultural artefact that forms part of the wider story of Manfred and Beck, a friendship that, for the USHMM, is defined by the rescue attempt, as it notes:

To understand why Manfred Lewin, a young Jew in Nazi Berlin, wrote this book in 1941 for his friend Gad Beck—to understand why Gad, 19 and Jewish, risked his life attempting to save Manfred from deportation—read these words from the play that brought them together. German writer Friedrich von Schiller's *Don Carlos*: No Matter what you plan on doing, will you promise to undertake no act without your friend? Will you make me this promise? Friendship, valor, and the fight for freedom were the ideals of this 18th-century German drama.

Once again, the focus is on “heroic acts,” as the reader/viewer is informed that “friendship, valor, and the fight for freedom” was what guided Beck as he “risked his life” to save his friend. It was an event that would inform Beck's memories in life, and his memory in death, as many obituaries published after he died focused on the story of Beck's attempted rescue of Lewin. His actions, and more broadly the memoir itself, have been described as “a monument to determination, endurance and nerve.”¹⁰⁸ Such platitudes are perhaps to be expected in public documents such as newspaper notices, which offer broad bibliographical summaries of a life lived and lost. Yet, obituaries also contribute to collective memory creation.¹⁰⁹ As we have seen, attempts at articulating fearlessness and fortitude, whether implicit or explicit, *do* permeate both the narratives of traumatic experiences and the collective memories they help to construct.

The experiences that contribute to the collective narrative include how those sharing their testimonies experienced surveillance, blackmail, torture, or imprisonment. They

¹⁰⁷ “Do you remember, When: Curator note and interview,” accessed 15 April 2016, <https://www.ushmm.org/collections/the-museums-collections/collections-highlights/do-you-remember-when/cover> This is considered further in chapter four.

¹⁰⁸ “Gad Beck: Writer and activist who survived as a gay Jewish man in Nazi Germany,” accessed 15 April 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/gad-beck-writer-and-activist-who-survived-as-a-gay-jewish-man-in-nazi-germany-7982453.html> See also “Gad Beck, who has died aged 88, was a gay Jew in wartime Berlin, placing him in double jeopardy with the Nazi regime,” accessed 15 March 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/9412925/Gad-Beck.html>

¹⁰⁹ Janice Hume, *Obituaries in American Culture* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 13-14.

detail incidents of hopelessness and despair, alongside moments of hope and defiance. The heteronormative understandings of heroism and resistance inform the writing, and the authors place emphasis on particular experiences that articulate audacity. In July 1943, the Nazis executed twelve members of the Dutch resistance, including gay artist and writer Willem Arondeus, whose final words were “Let it be known that homosexuals are not cowards.”¹¹⁰ Like Beck and Lewin’s stories, Arondeus’ life and his last, defiant utterance has since been memorialized as part of the United States Holocaust Memorial’s identity card exhibit.¹¹¹ The articulation of courage speaks to wider attempts in the testimonies of survivors to undermine an insidious homophobic trope equating homosexuality with weakness and emphasize the strength and resilience of the homosexual protagonists.

There are instances throughout the testimonies which detail the suffering wrought upon homosexuals which whilst not explicitly presented as “heroic” acts, are certainly examples of endurance. Two of the more explicitly rendered accounts of Nazi violence against homosexuals are presented in Seel’s memoir. Upon his detainment by the Gestapo in 1941, Seel details the horrific treatment meted out to him and others arrested for “violating” Paragraph 175. Seel recalls:

Early in the morning I presented myself to the Gestapo with my summons. As soon as my name was checked off on a list, I was brutally shoved into a separate room, which rapidly filled up with a dozen young men, some of whom I knew by sight ...

The interrogation was only just starting. Did I know other homosexuals? What were their names and addresses? ... I remained silent ...

The blows came raining down ... One after another, the interrogators yelled, threatened, brutalized. They tried to corner us, exhaust us, quell any resistance ... The walls echoed with our screams...

At first we managed to endure the suffering. But ultimately it became impossible. The machinery of violence accelerated. Outraged by our resistance, the SS began pulling out the fingernails of some of the prisoners. In their fury, they broke the rulers we were kneeling on and used them to rape us. Our bowels were punctured. Blood spurted everywhere. My ears still ring with the shrieks

¹¹⁰ Robert B. Ridinger, *Speaking for Our Lives: Historic Speeches and Rhetoric for Gay and Lesbian Rights (1892-2000)* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2014), 630.

¹¹¹ “Willem Arondeus ID Card,” accessed 1 May 2017, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/idcard.php?ModuleId=10006538>

of our atrocious pain. When my eyes reopened, I thought I was in the back of a butcher's shop.¹¹²

Seel and those imprisoned with him suffered ten days of similar barbarity, before being sent to Schirmeck concentration camp. His memoir goes on to detail the sadistic violence he and other homosexuals endured in the camp, before recounting an incident that would come to define a large part of the rest of his life. Seel recounts:

Days, weeks, months wore by. I spent six months, from May to November 1941, in that place, where horror and savagery were the law. But I've put off describing the worst ordeal I suffered. It happened during my earliest weeks in the camp and contributed more than anything else to making me a silent, obedient shadow among the others.

One day the loudspeakers ordered us to report immediately to the roll-call site ... an execution. Two SS men brought a young man to the center of our square. Horrified, I recognized Jo, my loving friend, who was only eighteen years old ...

Now I froze in terror. I had prayed that he would escape their lists, their roundups, their humiliations. And here he was, before my powerless eyes, which filled with tears ...

Then the loudspeakers broadcast some noisy classical music while the SS stripped him naked and shoved a tin pail over his head. Next they sicced their ferocious German shepherds on him: the guard dogs first bit into his groin and thighs, then devoured him right in front of us. His shrieks of pain were distorted and amplified by the pail in which his head was trapped.

Since then I sometimes wake up howling in the middle of the night. For fifty years now that scene has kept ceaselessly passing and repassing through my mine. I will never forget that barbaric murder of my love...¹¹³

There is a danger that being too explicit in testimony risks audience estrangement; that graphic depictions of violence may create a barrier between "survivor" and "witness," when they share the "ordeal of testimony."¹¹⁴ Yet, as Langer has argued, such expressions of violence and vulnerability can be intentional on the part of the survivor, as they purposefully "offend our sense of order, reason, and civilized behaviour."¹¹⁵ Survivors push language to its limits – and beyond – to try and make sense of their

¹¹² Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 25-26; see also Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 18; p.33 which describes Erich's arrest and interrogation by the Gestapo, and their attempts to get the arrested men to denounce one another, and Karl's entrapment by an SS officer in the city of Breslau for merely "brushing against him," reviled by his captain and unit, stripped of his rank, hastily tried in court and sentenced to a year's imprisonment under Paragraph 175.

¹¹³ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 43.

¹¹⁴ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 28.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

experiences to the reader, and themselves. The use of explicit language in Seel's memoir in part foreshadows the anger that came to define Seel himself. His painful and violently rendered memory of being captured and tortured articulate the need he felt to both reiterate the allegiances many homosexuals had formed, and their resoluteness in protecting one another in the face of the enemy. It was a staunchness that was usually ultimately futile, but for the memoirists, it was imperative to demonstrate the tremendous suffering that many endured to protect the identities of others. In line with Langer's argument, the violence that was an everyday part of life for those anathema to Nazi ideology could not be evaded by heroic acts, and the tone of the testimonies doesn't aim to suggest any sort of hierarchy of heroism but, like Arondeus before them, Seel and the other memoirists still wanted to emphasize that such "endurance" at least existed. Seel's recollection of the murder of Jo, however, as well as being graphic and brutal, is marked by despondency and despair. All Seel could do so was look on as his great love was killed in an unimaginable way. Yet it was not unwritable. His account may be considered transgressive, but for Seel, it was also imperative that it be shared; that Jo's murder be part of the record. We can also see in Seel's words the effects this horrific experience had on him – it rendered him silent and passive in the camp, as a means of survival, but in the long-term it informed his anger, and determination to tell these stories, as well as revealing the lasting, psychological effects that he suffered. Here, I would suggest, though perhaps not conventionally conveyed, we see multiple examples of "heroism" and endurance.

Gad Beck's memoir stresses the heroic efforts of the underground resistance and reveals the extraordinary amount of distress and pain these men were willing to suffer before giving up theirs – and others – secrets. Upon capture by the Gestapo, one of Beck's co-resistance friends, Paul Dreyer, denied he had knowingly been assisting Jews to escape Berlin, and instead, writes Beck, he said he did so "because they were such nice, pretty boys. The poor idiot exposed himself as gay, in hopes that that might help him. Instead, it brought him an additional battering."¹¹⁶ Dreyer's inadvertent admittance of homosexuality wrought upon him the most unimaginable suffering. When Beck met him again months after liberation, Dreyer had been set upon by specially-trained dogs

¹¹⁶ Beck, *An Underground Life*, 148.

who ripped off his ears and testicles and Beck astutely notes “It is a mystery to me how he survived at all.”¹¹⁷

In addition to the reader expectations of heroism in traumatic testimony that Langer details, the gay survivors’ memoirs have a complex understanding – and representation – of the notion of heroism in the face of adversity. It is informed by constantly-reinforced environments of homophobia and a desire to prove their resilience rather than any perceived weakness. This fragility of fortitude can be understood in the way homosexuals related to other victim groups and bring us back to the notion of a suspected hierarchy, as the one is bolstered by the other. This section was headed with a quotation from Erich in his interview with Jurgen Lemke, and I return to it here at the end thus:

Buddies, human contacts, solidarity? Why didn’t I find myself a dear little friend? ... Only someone who doesn’t have a clue asks such questions ... This homespun wisdom may well apply to all the prisons and penitentiaries in the world, but not to a German concentration camp, and certainly not to a 175er ... Everyone becomes his own good neighbor when it’s a question of hanging on to that last shred of life. ... The hierarchies of the triangles was a reflection of the outside world. Among the low we stood beneath the very lowest. Where the Communists were able to draw their strength, we just reached into a black hole ... The fact that we were met everywhere with “Ha, you queer swine” ... You won’t hear heroic tales about our kind. At any rate I don’t know of any.¹¹⁸

Erich’s interview was conducted in 1984, when there was little interest in these histories and memories. Such indifference was as crucial to the collective memory that would emerge as the homophobia and hierarchies of victims, and it informed the narratives themselves, as survivors channeled their voice and outrage. The combination of disinterest, willful silencing and continued persecution and oppression had a conspicuous effect on the language used by survivors, as well as some of the claims within their narratives.

“A sentimental story – but not a word is true”¹¹⁹ – mistruths, misremembering and the narrative voice.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 21.

¹¹⁹ Tuula Juvonen, “Which Are the Stories that Suit Us Best? The Story of Gad Beck,” *The SQS Journal of Queer Studies*, 01/08, August (2008): 89.

In 1961, Adolf Eichmann, one of the key Nazi architects of the Holocaust, was put on trial in Israel. In her complex reflection on the trial, Hannah Arendt lamented that, in the case of the oral witness testimony to the Holocaust, “few possess the moral virtues requisite for such narrative simplicity and clarity.”¹²⁰ She argued that the sometimes chaotic, often circuitous, and perhaps untrustworthy “performances” by Holocaust survivors detracted from the function of the prosecutors. Yet a key purpose of testimony is to give voice to those who have not spoken and could not speak, to shift focus from the aggressors to their victims.¹²¹ The issues that Arendt and others have with testimony – “unruly confessions, contradictions and misremembering”¹²² – arguably are outweighed by the fact that the victims are *able to speak*. As Langer iterates, survivor’s narratives can contain errors and lapses, but he asserts that the importance of the testimonies themselves outweighs these.¹²³ By allowing the witnesses in the trial more space than Eichmann and his crimes, a collective story began to build up.¹²⁴ This is also the case with gay survivors; we can begin to detect a collective narrative, defined by willful forgetting and complexities in terms of “heroic acts” and “hierarchies.” If we now understand the preoccupation with being of “lower” stature than other victims/survivors, and how this might relate to the incorporation of heroism into their narratives, these can also be interpreted as part of a wider issue within the memoirs, of mistruths and misremembering.

Part of the conventional format and structure of a written memoir is the creation of “a narrative voice.”¹²⁵ This voice attempts to recall and recount past events, from a present-day standpoint, and make sense of them. In doing so, and whilst adhering to a set of literary practices, the voice can sometimes articulate inaccuracies. French writer Charlotte Delbo was imprisoned in Auschwitz for resistance activities and in her

¹²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, Penguin, 1994), 229.

¹²¹ For example in the Nuremberg trials, which were criticized for focusing too much on the perpetrators at the expense of the victims, or, in the case of this thesis, the imbalance of the amount of Nazi documentation on the persecution of homosexuals measured against the dearth of testimony from the survivors.

¹²² Marianne Hirsch & Leo Spitzer, “The witness in the archive: Holocaust Studies / Memory Studies,” *Memory Studies*, 1750-6980, Vol 2, (2009): 154.

¹²³ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, xv.

¹²⁴ Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 152-3.

¹²⁵ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 41.

memoir, *None of Us Will Return*, Delbo documents her experiences in the camp, revealing how the narrative voice can sometimes struggle to accurately recount past events. She writes, “Today I am no longer sure that what I have written is true, but I’m sure it happened.”¹²⁶ Delbo’s Holocaust memoir is more self-aware than many, in terms of how her memory is working in the present, attempting to recall “what happened” in the past, and that sometimes this can lead to discrepancies or untruths. There is perhaps not the same level of sophistication in the memoirs of gay survivors in terms of being cognizant of inaccuracies in their narratives, but they exist within the texts nonetheless. This section unpicks some examples of these inaccuracies, misremembering and hyperbole exhibited in the memoirs, and posits that, as with the insistence on hierarchies we have already considered, they are largely a response to the continued subjugation of the survivors.

One of the purposes of part one of this thesis is to demonstrate the particularities of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, and the continuities with non-Nazi homophobia. Thus, I am interested in what the memoirs, often unwittingly, reveal both in relation to one another and as part of the collective memory that has developed. When read in conjunction, the testimonies both affirm and refute, they corroborate and contradict one another, revealing much about the contexts *in which the stories were heard*. When Heinz Heger was finally able to recount his tale more than three decades had passed, and in the intervening years he has built up a mythology around the Nazi victimization of gays that somewhat belies the factual evidence. He writes:

Thousands upon thousands of homosexuals must have lost their tormented lives [at Sachsenhausen], victims of a deliberate operation of destruction by the Hitler regime. And yet till this very day no one has come forward to describe this and honor its victims. It seems that “good taste” nowadays prevents people from speaking of the destruction of concentration-camp victims, particularly when these were homosexuals.¹²⁷

Scarcely a word has been written on the fact that along with the millions whom Hitler had butchered on grounds of “race”, hundreds of thousands of people were sadistically tortured to death simply for having homosexual feelings. Scarcely anyone has publicized the fact that the madness of Hitler and his gang was not directed just against the Jews, but also against us homosexuals, in both

¹²⁶ Charlotte Delbo, *None of Us Will Return* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 128.

¹²⁷ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 37.

cases leading to the “final solution” of seeking the total annihilation of these human beings.¹²⁸

In reality, though Sachsenhausen held more homosexual prisoners than any other, due to its close proximity to Berlin, the number of homosexuals who died there is thought to be in the several hundreds, rather than Heger’s assertion of many thousands.¹²⁹ Moreover, though no one could doubt the ferocity of Nazi homophobia, there was not a planned “final solution” in terms of homosexuals, no master plan put in place to annihilate them all, though it is not untrue that homosexuals *did* perish in places such as Buchenwald, Flossenburg, Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz.¹³⁰ The point here is not that Heger is inflating the numbers or making exaggerated genocidal claims, although he certainly does both. The focus instead should be the complex nature of testimony, particularly testimony which is speaking to an assumed apathetic if not hostile audience. Some of the claims within these passages – the number of homosexuals killed by the regime, and the manner in which they were all killed – are problematic, but this does not negate Heger’s testimony. Rather, the narrative needs both contextualizing, and situating as part of a wider Holocaust memory framework, in terms of remembering and recounting with exaggeration and hyperbole, and the particular articulation of the author.

How then, might we account for such instances of misremembering, exaggeration and hyperbole? Stephen Gilligan and Robert Schwarz note that traumatic events “will often be accompanied by symptoms of post-traumatic stress, which itself is often accompanied by the disruption and dissociation of memory.”¹³¹ This sits awkwardly with traditional historiographic belief that if a memory is unbelievable, it is untenable,

¹²⁸ Ibid. 118.

¹²⁹ Johansson and Percy, “Homosexuals in Nazi Germany,” (NP).

¹³⁰ Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 11; 31-32; Unlike Heger, Pierre Seel’s testimony does articulate the fact that there was no intent to completely annihilate homosexuals. He notes that his equivalent of the pink triangle (a blue bar on his uniform) not automatically single them out for destruction. He notes that, for example, red-barred Communists did not stay long at Schirmeck before being deported to even worse camps, whilst the maroon-barred Gypsies and yellow-barred Jews only passed through briefly before being sent East for extermination – Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 30.

¹³¹ R Schwarz and S Gilligan, “The Devil is in the Details: Fact and Fiction in the Recovered Memory debate,” *Family Therapy Networker*, (March/April): 22.

that is if it can be doubted or disproved, it is invalid.¹³² Yet, the very traumatic nature by which the testimony came into being informs the memories it is trying to represent. As Janet Walker has argued “forgetting and mistakes in memory may actually stand, therefore, as testament to the genuine nature of the event a person is trying to recall.”¹³³

The recollections of survivors in Plant’s *The Pink Triangle* and Heger’s experiences recounted in his memoir are some of the earliest recorded testimonies of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals committed to print. As such, they constitute a fledgling collection of memories, recalled far enough from the events that they have had time to fester silently, in some cases for decades. Moreover, with little official corroborative contextualization then-published to confirm their claims, these early recollections are sometimes marked by bold statements and hyperbole. Consider the claim that the pink triangle was larger than that of other victim groups.¹³⁴ The allegation was first made by Heger in his 1972 memoir, and has since gained traction and become an integral part of the wider collective memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals.¹³⁵ Yet, according to both Plant and Lautmann, the assertion that the pink triangle was larger than the others is unproven.¹³⁶ Given this alleged exaggeration on Heger’s part, should it cast doubts on the veracity of his entire testimony and render his memoir moot? Or rather, should we understand his hyperbole as a result of the remembrance and rendering of traumatic testimony itself? In their work on testimony, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub argue that inaccuracies in recollections of survivors are precisely due to the ways in which the traumatic memories are brought forth and should not mean the negation of the testimony. They offer, by way of example, a witness to an uprising in Auschwitz who claimed to have witnessed the explosion of four chimneys, which was later revealed to be just one. This led to some historians rejecting the entire account of the survivor, yet, for Laub, this is too simplistic, and the person “was testifying not

¹³² Janet Walker, *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 4-7.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 4.

¹³⁴ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 32.

¹³⁵ See, for example, Petersen & Licata, *Historical Perspectives on Homosexuality*, 148; Rita J. Simon and Alison Brooks, *Gay and Lesbian Communities the World Over* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009), 141; Fiona Shelton, Nesrin Oruç Ertürk, Oliver Holz, Vana Chiou, *International Insights: Equality in Education* (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2019), 191.

¹³⁶ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 164; Rüdiger Lautmann, *Seminar Gesellschaft und Homosexualität* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), 334.

simply to empirical historical facts, but to the very secret of survival ... the historians said that she knew nothing. I thought that she knew more, since she knew about the breakage of the frame, that her very testimony was now reenacting.”¹³⁷

When we consider testimonies of this kind, particularly in light of the decades of silence the survivors endured, discrepancies, gaps and questions of accuracy within these narratives are to be expected. Closer textual analysis, not only of each line of a testimony, but the overarching themes that emerge from the language used within it, can reveal much about the “homosexual experience” of Nazi persecution. But they also reveal much about the fury at the silence which surrounded their experience. In 1961, the Eichmann trial was televised and broadcast around the world, and is considered one of the key events in terms of bringing the Holocaust into the wider public consciousness.¹³⁸ More than one hundred survivors were called as witnesses, yet not specifically to prove Eichmann’s guilt, as most of them likely had little knowledge of him.¹³⁹ Instead, alongside all of the documentation that the prosecution intended to use to demonstrate Eichmann’s culpability, the role of the witnesses was to tell *their* stories – many publicly for the first time – to a watching world. Yet the inclusion of such a volume of witness testimony, some of which meandered off-topic or was mediated by post-war memories, was problematic for some. In her analysis of the trial, Arendt was particularly critical of some of the witness testimonies detracting from the specificity of the crimes committed by the perpetrator in the dock.¹⁴⁰ For example, Arendt considered Auschwitz survivor, Yehiel Dinor, a failed witness due to his use of multiple narratives, his literary language and his physical exertions (the witness famously fainted under direct examination and was in a coma for weeks). Yet critics of Arendt argue that by returning mentally to his trauma, which was then manifested physically, the witness ‘said it all’ about Auschwitz.¹⁴¹ Similar criticisms of hyperbole and exaggeration might be leveled at Heger, Seel and Beck, yet, like the fainting witness or the meandering testifier in the Eichmann trial, the very circumstances the

¹³⁷ Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (Florence: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 62.

¹³⁸ Natan Sznajder, Daniel Levy, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 105; 111.

¹³⁹ See Deborah E. Lipstadt, *The Eichmann Trial* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011).

¹⁴⁰ Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 86-7.

¹⁴¹ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 154.

survivors are recounting often inform both the narration *and* the narrator. Seel readily admits to a level of confusion – and certainly fury – throughout his testimony, yet this elderly survivor who is angrily recalling his unimaginable experiences is *defined* by them; the rage is a response to the years of subjugation and silencing he endured.

In terms of its veracity, Beck's testimony in particular has been subjected to scrutiny. Following the release of his memoir, Beck embarked upon lengthy promotional tours, lectures and appearances on television, as well as appearing in two documentaries. Beck was one of several survivors whose testimony formed the basis of Epstein and Freedman's 2000 film *Paragraph 175*, and in 2006 was the subject of his own film, *The Story of Gad Beck*.¹⁴² The documentary has the sub-title *Die Freiheit des Erzählens*, which translates as "The Freedom of Narrating," and its makers acknowledge that "Gad Beck is a great storyteller."¹⁴³ This literary flair is concomitant with a man whose memoir begins "Once upon a time."¹⁴⁴ Critiques of *The Story of Gad Beck* emphasize the performative aspects of Beck's narrative, both in talks and seminars he delivered, and in the film itself.¹⁴⁵ The filmmakers emphasize Beck's tendency towards "counter-factual[ness] and wishful-thinking."¹⁴⁶ These statements, which draw attention to the use of language and form to distort, embellish and belie the facts of what happened, are further corroborated by those who were close to Beck at the time. Commenting in the film on one of the pivotal moments in Beck's memoir, which was discussed in length above – the doomed rescue of his lover Manfred – a former friend of Beck's alleges that it is "a sentimental story – but not a word is true in it."¹⁴⁷ Hans-Oskar Baron Löwenstein de Witt was a companion of Gad Beck, and the two were imprisoned together in the Rosenstrasse internment camp. Löwenstein de Witt was so enraged by Beck's alleged fallacies that he attempted to take the editors of his memoir to court. Yet Beck's sister Margot, who features prominently in his memoir is

¹⁴² *The Story of Gad Beck*. Film. Germany: Carsten Does and Robin Cackett, 2006.

¹⁴³ "The Story of Gad Beck," accessed 18 March 2019, http://www.gad-beck.de/index_en.html

¹⁴⁴ Beck, *An Underground Life*, 5.

¹⁴⁵ Juvonen, "Which Are the Stories that Suit Us Best?" 87-90; "The Story of Gad Beck," accessed 4 April 2019, https://e-dokumen.com/document/24449_the-story-of-gad-beck.html

¹⁴⁶ *The Story of Gad Beck*, 2006.

¹⁴⁷ Juvonen, "Which Are the Stories that Suit Us Best?" 89.

somewhat more equivocal in her appraisal of her brother's narrative, arguing that "By all the fantasy it is the truth – he just knows how to decorate it."¹⁴⁸ In terms of the "reliability" of a memoir and how distance from an event can help shape a person's narrative voice in particular ways, the editor of Beck's memoir himself admits that Beck;

has ... had plenty of opportunities to learn how to present his stories best, since he has a long history in giving guided tours to groups who want to learn from a first-hand witness how it was possible to survive... This retelling has brought new layers, tones, and emphasis to his stories – whatever he thought the respective audiences knew how to appreciate best.¹⁴⁹

Beck makes an astute observation on the opacity of his memory when he recounts his "experience" of Kristallnacht. Beck was working as an apprentice in a Jewish-owned clothes shop and was first aware of the 'night of broken glass' the following morning when called in to help board up the windows and remove the garments that the SS has smeared with human faeces. He writes:

That's how I experienced the terrible November pogrom ... I couldn't join the chorus of voices saying that they had seen burning synagogues all over. If all the Jews who say that today had really been standing there watching, then all of German Jewry would have been out on the streets that night. I'm sure whoever happened to be outside ran home as fast as possible as soon as the glass starting shattering. And year after year I observe how the ninth of November is commemorated in Germany, with mayors and dignitaries ... every year the same words ... and all I can do is smell the shit ...¹⁵⁰

Beck's claim might be less one of inaccurate remembering than a useful example of how collective memory develops as groups are able to converse with one another and share their experiences. A collective memory for homosexual victims of Nazism was silenced for so long, adversely affecting the accuracy of individual narratives that could not be read in conjunction with one another.

The elderly Beck omits parts of his story depending on his audience and when challenged by the filmmakers about various disparities in his testimony he retorts "I

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Beck, *An Underground Life*, 37.

can no longer know how it was. Pick out the version that suits you best.”¹⁵¹ He has become a professional teller of his tale and here he is literally telling the audience to shape it to their concerns. The responses to Beck’s memoir from those people – an editor, a friend, a sibling – who were in some way part of his narrative, reveal much that is of use when considering testimonies of these survivors. In questioning the “romantic, decorative” way he shapes his narrative, critics of Beck’s memoir echo concerns that manifest whenever one analyzes survivor testimony. Emmanuel Ringelblum encapsulates these concerns when he says that ‘Every superfluous word, every literary turn of language or embellishment grates on the ear and evokes resentment.’¹⁵² Key to my argument in this chapter is that what is written cannot be examined in isolation on the page. Instead, it needs to be considered alongside *when* it was recorded. Moreover, these texts are recounting their writerly present as well as the event of their past. In relation to recapturing memory through writing Primo Levi notes that writing retroactively ‘draws from a suspect source ... it contains more considerations than memories, lingers more willingly on the state of affairs such as it is now than on the retroactive chronicle.’¹⁵³ Testimonies are shaped by contemporary events and by distance. They are indelibly marked by those whom the authors have come into contact with since, as well as by the years of silencing they were often subjected to. Indeed, Dori Laub maintains that silence is “an essential part of the historical truth... a way of being, of surviving, of resisting. It is not merely [one’s] speech, but the very boundaries of silence, which attest, today as well as in the past, to this assertion of resistance.”¹⁵⁴ When examining survivors’ testimonies, we ought to invoke Laub’s edict that it is important to respect what the teller knows, as opposed to what they did, or could not know.¹⁵⁵ The length of time in which survivors such as Heger have been “allowed” to forget – almost five decades – goes a considerable way to explaining their misremembering of some of the “facts” amongst their memories. Speaking alone, from afar, speaking with mediated memories, and knowledge of the Holocaust and the concentration camps. These writers were all testifying in the absence of a collective memory of their own and at the same time beginning to forge one –

¹⁵¹ Juvonen, “Which Are the Stories that Suit Us Best?” 90.

¹⁵² Emmanuel Ringelblum, in Joseph Kermish, ed. *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1986), 7.

¹⁵³ Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 34-35.

¹⁵⁴ Felman & Laub, *Testimony*, 62.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 61.

however differentiated – and this is what is so interesting and complex about considering them in the context of the Holocaust frameworks and here in relation in particular to the question of the impact of distance on reliability or accuracy.

“Someone who shouts alone is easily suspect”¹⁵⁶ – Locating the self and dispelling myths through memory.

“Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream.”¹⁵⁷ Here, Adorno indicates the difficulty that survivors encounter by their very existence. Their status as survivors was bestowed often by pure accident or by circumstance, and they had to live with the fact that they *lived*. The sense of guilt felt by survivors of traumatic events has been widely documented in Holocaust scholarship.¹⁵⁸ Survivors question how they were arbitrarily able to survive, and this “survivors’ guilt” was often accompanied or replaced by shame, and an insistence on the preservation of the memory of those who perished.¹⁵⁹ As with Holocaust survivors, gay victims of Nazism often want to bear witness not only to tell *their* story but also that of all those who *didn’t* survive.¹⁶⁰ This double function of the narrator as both

¹⁵⁶ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 126.

¹⁵⁷ Theodor Adorno, “Meditations on Metaphysics” in Levi, N. and Rothberg, M., eds *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 362.

¹⁵⁸ “Survivor’s Guilt” is often associated with the writings of Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, see Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 2017; Judith Kelly, *Primo Levi: recording and reconstruction in the testimonial literature* (Leicester: Troubador, 2000) 83; Jonathan Druker, *Primo Levi and Humanism After Auschwitz: Posthumanist Reflections* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 28; Wiesel wrote of the burden of guilt thus: “I am alive, therefore I am guilty. If I am still here, it is because a friend, a comrade, a stranger, died in my place.” Elie Wiesel, *Legends of our time* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 172.

¹⁵⁹ The phenomenon of “Survivor’s Guilt” constitutes a significant, yet contested, body of literature within Holocaust scholarship. See Ruth Leys, *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Ruth Jaffe, “The Sense of Guilt within Holocaust Survivors,” *Jewish Social Studies* 32, no. 4 307–14 (1970); Samuel Juni, “Survivor Guilt: A Critical Review from the Lens of the Holocaust,” *International Review of Victimology* 22, no. 3 321–37 (2016). The phenomenon of “Survivor’s Guilt” is not confined to the field of Holocaust scholarship; in 1995 Walt Odets investigated the psychological impact of HIV-negative men negotiating the “guilt” associated with surviving their friends who had died of AIDS. Whilst not detracting from those living with AIDS or those who had perished from it, Odets argued for recognition of what he termed “survivors of the epidemic.” – Walt Odets, *In the shadow of the epidemic: being HIV-negative in the age of AIDS* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

¹⁶⁰ Primo Levi considers these the “true, complete witnesses” – Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 83-84.

survivor and witness is of utmost importance, as not only does the survivor have the “benefit” of release, the inference is that the witness will then transmit the narrative further, making it public in the form of written texts, documentaries and reading groups.¹⁶¹ Whilst his memoir represents an implied, often unspoken need to bear witness, Gad Beck is explicit about the need for the members of the Youth Aliyah resistance organization to escape and survive in order to recount the Nazi’s atrocities.¹⁶²

Holocaust testimony is often marked by survivors attempting to make sense of their past in terms of their present.¹⁶³ Testimony gathering is mediated by context, by the passing of time and by those collecting and recording the stories and is easily appropriated and distorted. The importance of these witness’s testimony cannot be underestimated. Writing in 1995, Gregory Woods asserts that many of the now-elderly gay survivors were hesitant to recount their tales and were wary of the people to whom they were being asked to testify; they were a different generation that might struggle to comprehend not only the horrors the men endured but also the years they were silenced.¹⁶⁴ Some of Langer’s witnesses stress the value of testifying, not just because of the process of telling, but because it leads, perhaps, to a sense of belonging; of the awareness that other people had similar experiences.¹⁶⁵ This is particularly pertinent to such a relatively small group of victims such as homosexuals, who would otherwise have difficulty identifying one another as survivors. When they finally *did* find freedom, homosexual men invariably attempted to return to their jobs, homes and lives, and regain a sense of pre-war “normality.” Yet, both Heger and Seel’s memoirs articulate absent environments in which they now found themselves, which were not conducive to healing. They had returned to silenced spaces “in the shadows of society.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Aleida Assman, “History, Memory and the Genre of Testimony,” *Poetics Today*, 27:2, Summer (2006): 269.

¹⁶² Beck recounts how, faced with deportation, Jizchak Schwensen, a youth leader in Youth Aliyah, and later leader of the Zionist organization Hechalutz, went into hiding precisely so he could live to bear witness to his organization’s underground Zionist resistance movement. Beck, *An Underground Life*, 63.

¹⁶³ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 2.

¹⁶⁴ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, xxiii.

¹⁶⁵ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 145.

¹⁶⁶ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 117.

Early on the morning of April 20, 1945, on Adolf Hitler's fifty-sixth birthday, ten days before he committed suicide, Flossenberg concentration camp was evacuated by the Nazis, and Heinz Heger began a death-march to Dachau. Many prisoners collapsed or were shot on the way, whilst Heger marched alongside several fellow "pink-triangles" who vowed to attempt to stay together and escape as soon as they were able. Two days later, they were free and in the care of advancing Allied soldiers. In spring 1945, prisoner no. 1896 from Flossenburg concentration camp in Bavaria once again became Josef Kohout from Vienna.¹⁶⁷ Returning home from six years of imprisonment, intimidation, punishing work and horrific violence, during which he had repeatedly cheated death, Heger found his family home unchanged, his books in the same place in his room, and his tearful mother waiting to say hello just as she had said goodbye all those years before.¹⁶⁸ For Heger, nothing had changed, yet everything had changed; for example his subsequent attempts at continuing with his education were haunted by his memories of the camps, of the brutal SS, and the torture and torment he endured.¹⁶⁹

In relation to Holocaust testimony, Friedlander points out that whilst there was a general reluctance amongst historians, intellectuals and political leaders, certainly in the late 1940s and early 1950s, to openly discuss Nazism, this silence was not replicated in survivor communities.¹⁷⁰ It is notable here that there *were* survivor communities for victims to feel part of, and engage with. Post-war Jewish survivors left Europe to build communities in the United States and Palestine, where they hoped to avoid further persecution, and attempted to become part of a cohesive group which would eventually find the strength and the conditions which might allow them to articulate their experiences.¹⁷¹ According to Heger, the best that homosexuals could hope for was that they would be allowed to exist in peace amongst their neighbours, provided they live a

¹⁶⁷ "Personalizing Nazis' Homosexual Victims," accessed 17 April 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/06/26/us/personalizing-nazis-homosexual-victims.html>

¹⁶⁸ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 116.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Saul Friedlander, "Trauma and Transference," in Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg, *The Holocaust Theoretical Readings* (New Jersey: Rutgers University, 2003), 208.

¹⁷¹ Steve Hochstadt, *Sources of the Holocaust* (London: Macmillan Education UK, 2017), 297; Herzog notes that even in the late 1950s elements of German society were still very anti-Semitic, meaning that Jews who remained here were unable even to rebuild their lives let alone mourn, grieve and remember the Holocaust, see Dagmar Herzog, "Sexuality, Memory, Morality," *History & Memory*, Indiana University Press Volume 17, Number 1/2, Spring/Summer (2005): 246.

quiet, scandal-free life and did not expect any friendliness or support from anyone.¹⁷² The silence of individual survivors of Nazi tyranny was “maintained in relation to the outside world and was often imposed by shame, the shame of telling a story that must appear unbelievable and was, in any case, entirely out of tune with surrounding society”.¹⁷³ Though Friedlander is talking here of Jewish Holocaust survivors, this is also the case with homosexual victims of Nazism. By the early 1950s, there were once again social spaces in parts of Germany for homosexuals to meet, and former camp inmates did indeed frequent them, yet they were wary of telling their stories, and often only did so if their anonymity was assured.¹⁷⁴ Very few survivors would meet in private and discuss their ordeals and even less publicly. Their accounts of persecution simply did not fit into a post-war society that not only did not recognize them as victims, it actively punished them as criminals.¹⁷⁵

For Maurice Halbwachs “memory depends on the social environment.”¹⁷⁶ That is, memories are constructed in particular social and historical contexts that *allow* individuals to remember. These contexts are often defined by the needs, values and representations of society.¹⁷⁷ These elements, by their very nature, will mean that memories of an event that do not fit the dominant narrative will ultimately be marginalized or side-lined. Although all participants in an event own and can share the memory of it, this sharing often happens unequally and the more pervasive representations are invariably those that are given public space and become the predominant memory.¹⁷⁸ Pierre Seel is at pains to point out the importance of bearing witness despite the hostile environment. He writes, “I had to bear witness even if I did it anonymously. Was I the only one? I wanted to find out, track down other witnesses, for someone who shouts alone is easily suspect. And that suspicion hurts.”¹⁷⁹ Bearing witness performs the function of dispelling myths in the affirmation of particular

¹⁷² Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 117.

¹⁷³ Friedlander, “Trauma and Transference,” 208.

¹⁷⁴ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 192, 201.

¹⁷⁵ Rudiger Lautman, (NP); Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 13, 193-196.

¹⁷⁶ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 37.

¹⁷⁷ Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Struggles for Memory* (London: Latin American Bureau, 2003), 11

¹⁷⁸ Popular Memory Group, *Popular Memory: theory, politics, method*, in Robert Perks., and Alistair Thompson, eds. *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 76-77.

¹⁷⁹ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 126.

experiences. For example, Nazi ideology stressed an obsessive conflation of homosexuality and sex; there was sustained propaganda warning that homosexuals were intent on the seduction and corruption of German youth, coupled with the notion that homosexuals sought sexual gratification above all else. Plant emphasizes the Nazi belief that gay men were obsessed with sex and “nothing was more important to them than their genitalia.”¹⁸⁰ Himmler was particularly virulent in emphasizing the sex in homosexual, considering them lewd, un-masculine and immoral.¹⁸¹ Certainly, camp records indicate the homosexual prisoners were usually segregated from other prisoners, were not permitted to enter non-homosexual blocks or vice versa and whilst in their own blocks had to sleep with their hands outside the blankets at all times, even in freezing temperatures, once again echoing the belief that sexual gratification was foremost in their minds, even in such conditions.¹⁸² At roll call for the homosexuals in Flossenbug, the commandant, demonstrating the Nazis preoccupation with homosexuals and sex, would insist to his assembled 175ers: “I know you’d all like to do it here. Make it with sweet, young German boys.”¹⁸³ What the memoirs reveal, however, and what would certainly be borne out by what we know of camp conditions, is a complete refutation of these fabricated Nazi ideologies. Seel repudiates their claims as follows:

So between periods of labor, I made sure not to talk to anyone, locking myself up in a desperate solitude untouched by any sexual desire. In that place, there was no room for even the thought of desire. A ghost has no fantasies, no sexuality. Each of us thus had to remain alone amid the crowd. During rare moments when we could stare at one another in silence, I noted a few acquaintances ... But it was hard to recognize them, for our clothes, our shave heads, and our starved bodies had erased each man’s age and identity. He had become a staggering shadow of himself.¹⁸⁴

In reality, seeking refuge in the body or the mind was a luxury not afforded to those in camp. One could hardly indulge in intimate acts with others, just as one could not seek solace in imagination, when toiling in such unimaginable conditions. The suggestion

¹⁸⁰ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 165-166.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. p.78, John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 13.

¹⁸² Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 34.

¹⁸³ Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 22.

¹⁸⁴ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 54.

that recalling – and retreating into – earlier memories in order to nullify the present reality is refuted by some survivors.¹⁸⁵ Erich is rankled when asked about intimacy or friendship, claiming it was simply too dangerous to risk closeness with anyone and that even suggesting sharing the burden of camp life demonstrates the chasm between those telling and those listening. He writes, “This homespun wisdom may well apply to all the prisons and penitentiaries in the world, but not to a German concentration camp, and certainly not to a 175er.”¹⁸⁶

“All the dead who barely ruffle the consciences of the living”¹⁸⁷ – the imperative to speak

It took more than five decades for Pierre Seel to feel able to speak out about the ordeal he and others faced. Fifty years of being unable to forgive and forget, whilst simultaneously struggling with remembering.¹⁸⁸ He writes of “strolling through cemeteries that do not exist, the resting places of all the dead who barely ruffle the consciences of the living and I feel like screaming. When will I succeed in having the overall Nazi deportation of homosexuals recognized?”¹⁸⁹ For Seel, this recognition felt unattainable, and for those “others” with whom he interacted, it would likely never be understandable. The “self” of Seel, an identity forged in part by his experiences under Nazism, was at odds with those around him. He notes, “I’m grateful to them and I appreciate their support. But what can I say to them?”¹⁹⁰

Langer notes that Holocaust survivors sometimes reveal within their narratives dual personalities or several selves – the one that existed before the persecution began, the self that developed within the camp, and finally what remained afterwards.¹⁹¹ All are connected by memory and all inform one-another. John R. Gillis has argued that “the ability to recall or remember something from one’s own past is what sustains

¹⁸⁵ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 4.

¹⁸⁶ Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 21.

¹⁸⁷ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 140.

¹⁸⁸ In *Paragraph 175*, 2000, Seel veers between attempts to avoid being interviewed at all, struggling with memory of the horrific physical abuse he encountered, whilst admitting that he cannot forgive and forget his German abusers.

¹⁸⁹ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 140.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 48.

identity.”¹⁹² These complex negotiations of identities are writ large in the testimonies of gay victims of the Nazis. Seel’s narrative is particularly explicit in negotiating his selves throughout his memoir and it can help us to understand how memory shapes identity, and how it situates Seel in the world as both author and survivor.¹⁹³ By 1942, with the entry of the United States and the invasion of the Soviet Union, the war had become truly global and Seel, now considered a German citizen, was called upon to fight for the people who had caused him such immeasurable suffering. By his own admission, much of these years are either a blank to Seel or a muddle of “dates, places and details ... No matter how hard I try to recall and pinpoint events, they elude me. Forgotten? Repressed? It’s as if I concentrated all my willpower on surviving and not on remembering. All that’s left are random snatches of memory, unsettling in their disorder.”¹⁹⁴ Indeed, as the war drew to a climax, and Nazi Germany towards collapse, Seel once again questioned his identity; was he a pious young Catholic Alsatian, turned flamboyant homosexual Zazou? A tortured camp inmate, turned silenced recluse, turned unwilling German fighter? Now, with many of his self-described “comrades” dead and the Soviets closing in he asked himself “what was to become of me? To survive in this new situation, I had to change my identity yet again. What was I? Alsatian? French? German? Was I a traitor? A deportee? A POW? A deserter?”¹⁹⁵ Interestingly here is the complete absence of Seel’s ‘self’ as a gay man, as if it had been completely eradicated from his identity.

When the war was finally at an end, Seel eventually made it home and he was suffocated by silence; he felt unable to share with anyone the horrors he had endured fighting for the German army, or indeed the shame he felt in having been complicit in death. Indeed, he felt unable to talk with *anyone* about what he had been through. Not only did nobody close to him want to listen, he had to contend with the sight of all his former acquaintances from Steinbach Square returning from hiding. Whilst in camps, those imprisoned for violating Paragraph 175 were often lumped together into a

¹⁹² Jelin, *State Repression and the Struggles for Memory*, 14.

¹⁹³ Dan Ben-Amos, Liliane Weissberg, eds. *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 10.

¹⁹⁴ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 52.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 72-73.

homogeneous whole, the reality on the outside, of course, was more complex. Seel notes that:

In my town, the grand-bourgeois homosexuals had all returned. They appeared not to have suffered under the occupation. They talked about nothing; they made no statements. There was no public discussion about what had happened to homosexuals. Nothing came to rescue me from my silence.¹⁹⁶

Seel articulates an assertion of a class identity, citing those who had the means to avoid the fate of “ordinary gays” such as Seel.¹⁹⁷ Once again, Seel feels sidelined and marginalized and struggles to make sense of what he has been through and how it has come to define him, particularly in relation to others.

One of the problems faced by survivors when attempting to tell their story is not only how to convey such unimaginable horror to a contemporary audience, who are presumably subject to a completely different set of moral and ethical codes and values, but also how to come to terms with the events *themselves*. Langer argues in relation to Jewish survivors that a “divided self” emerged when trying to recount one’s camp experience – one that lives and exists in a contemporary environment and all that that implies, and the other, the camp inmate, whose experiences the survivor themselves can scarcely believe.¹⁹⁸ One of the challenges that these testimonies from the death camps have to meet is how to make the reader really understand not only what the circumstances *were* but also what they *meant*. The act of stealing bread or shoes might mean little in contemporary society but for the victims, it meant the difference between life and death.¹⁹⁹ What emerges through Langer’s subjects is the sense that the victims feel a bitter divide from those who – actively or passively – allowed these atrocities to happen. What he dubs “anguished memory” not only emphasizes the chasm between survivors and their witnesses, it demonstrates that this memory is not reparable.²⁰⁰ The ability to narrate one’s story may have some redemptive value but time and again these narratives stress the idea of “doubling”; the reader has one perception of life, the

¹⁹⁶ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 91.

¹⁹⁷ It also speaks to the fact that the persecution of gay men was not total, and was not a “final solution.”

¹⁹⁸ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 66-68; Langer refers to this as the ‘futility of memory’, 74.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 140.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 52-53.

narrator has two, or as I argue, *several* selves. There are resonances here with the traumatized gay survivors of the concentration camp system.

James E. Young notes that “‘remembering the self’ is not a case of restoring an original identity, but a continuous process of ‘re-membering’, of putting together moment by moment, of provisional and partial reconstruction.”²⁰¹ The narratives at the centre of this chapter reveal multi-layered individuals often encountering internal turmoil. Beck particularly laments that he felt alone from an early age, not only due to his emerging awareness of his homosexuality but also as a result of negotiating his Jewishness in an increasingly hostile environment.²⁰² This is made explicit when the non-Jewish side of his family became staunch Nazi party members. The irony that they harboured virulent anti-Semitic views, yet made an ‘exception’ for Beck and his family, is not lost on him. He writes “Well, if all the Jews were like you...”²⁰³ Beck’s political and Jewish ‘selves’ are eventually foregrounded in his narrative as he becomes more politically engaged and active amongst the Jewish resistance. He notes that “In my awakening political identity, I never posed the question of comparison [between Jews and ‘Aryans’]. I had no desire to try and receive acknowledgement in places where I was not wanted.”²⁰⁴ Though he is not explicitly referring it here, Beck’s negotiation with his homosexuality identity is similarly stoic. He feels the need neither to account nor seek acceptance for it.

Langer argues that “reluctance to speak has very little to do with *preference* for silence.”²⁰⁵ It is often driven by concern that the story will not be believed, or even listened to. Even prior to this realization is the seemingly impossible task of telling the story in the first place. What form of language can do justice to such acts? For Young “violent events and massive human suffering always seem to have stimulated an outpouring of what might be called “factually insistent” narrative.”²⁰⁶ He is referring to the marked increase in interest in Jewish historiography in the aftermath of the Holocaust, but an interest that followed a form of amnesia in the immediate post-war

²⁰¹ Young, “Interpreting Literary Testimony,” 175.

²⁰² Beck, *An Underground Life*, 17, 35.

²⁰³ Ibid. 31.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. 25.

²⁰⁵ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 61.

²⁰⁶ Young, “Interpreting Literary Testimony,” 404.

period. Several factors conspired to change this situation; Israeli debates about German reparations in 1951, the passing of a federal law in West Germany to compensate victims of Nazi persecution in 1956, and the high profile captures and trials of Rudolf Kastner and Adolf Eichmann in the late 1950s and early 1960s.²⁰⁷ However, the legal reparations offered did not extend to all victims of the Nazis. As Hochstadt notes “Homosexuals were not only prevented from filing claims, but they continued to be prosecuted under the laws carried over from the Third Reich”.²⁰⁸

Practical considerations that contributed to Seel’s silence were determined in part by the state system. By the 1950s, Seel felt compelled to get married and the couple had two sons. Not only was Seel still tormented by his wartime experiences, he found family life difficult, not least financially. The French government provided pensions for concentration camp survivors but Seel was reticent about claiming one as in order to do so he would be forced to reveal why he had been imprisoned. For Seel, it was preferable to remain impoverished than to have everyone discover his homosexuality. When his wife discovered he had been in a concentration camp she not only wanted to know *why*, but also why he did not claim a pension.²⁰⁹ When he later attempted to receive official recognition for his deportation and subsequent reparations, he was told that in order to do so he needed to provide documentary evidence of his incarceration and two eye-witnesses who could verify his time in camp. Michael Rowlands indicates that written records are of particular importance for remembrance and that “material images [e.g. police lists of homosexual acts; deportation records; German ‘nationalization’ records] take the place of verbal images precisely at those points when naming things and events becomes impossible.”²¹⁰ But this was problematic in the case of Seel whose records were destroyed when the Russians advanced at the end of the war; the very things – physical, material - which had implicated and incarcerated him during the war would be the same things which – by their absence- continued to ‘torture’ him post-war. The silence imposed upon Seel for decades meant that not only was he faced with the ignominy of not being recognized as a victim, he was also denied

²⁰⁷ Friedlander, “Trauma and Transference,” 208; Steve Hochstadt, *Sources of the Holocaust* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 266.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 269.

²⁰⁹ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 103-111.

²¹⁰ Michael Rowlands, “Memory, Sacrifice and the Nation,” *Cultural Memory Journal*, Number 30, Winter (1996-97): 8.

the opportunity to apply for any real form of compensation.²¹¹ In Seel's case, his silence was shaped by the ongoing conditions around him, which by now were non-Nazi in nature, but at the same time that regime still cast a long shadow over Seel, both literally and figuratively.

Throughout his memoir, Seel is conscious of the continued subjugation to which he was subjected, proclaiming that "history... erases anything that does not suit it officially."²¹² Yet, as Seel demonstrates, silencing is not always simply about a state or administration refusing to listen to individual narratives, or even actively suppressing them. In relation to this, Seel recalls how his own *family* imposed silence upon him, lest it brought shame upon *them*. He writes that he could not find solace in revisiting his old cruising grounds, for they were now patrolled by angry mobs ashamed by defeat and buoyed by increased anti-homosexual legislation.²¹³ Seel's only outlet was a confessional outpouring to his mother on her deathbed: "I told her everything ... A barrier had fallen ... She was the exception to my pact of silence. It then took me another thirty years to speak again."²¹⁴ From then on, Seel imposed silence upon himself. He buried his memories with his mother.²¹⁵

Telling, bearing witness, performs many functions. For Seel it was a need to remember the past in order to protect the future, combined with a latent, consuming anger, not only at his own treatment for so long, but at the continuing homophobic attitudes he encountered daily.²¹⁶ With his marriage having fallen apart and his children now grown, it would be Heger – a man he had never met and whose experience under Nazism was so different from his – that would enable Seel to break his silence. In 1981, upon attending a book-shop debate on Heger's memoir newly released in France, Pierre Seel finally, reluctantly began to open up. He wanted to draw attention to this "forgotten" history, as well as gain some restitution for his long-repressed experiences. Ultimately, for Seel, recompense meant a cheque for a little over \$1000, whilst recognition would mean admittance and apology for French deportations of homosexuals to German

²¹¹ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 138-139.

²¹² *Ibid.* 133.

²¹³ *Ibid.* 91-94.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.* 98-99.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* 101, 111.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.* 128-129.

concentration camps. His legacy would include streets named, posthumously, after him and a film based loosely on his experiences.²¹⁷ Yet memorialization is not confined to the emergence of films, memoirs, novels, concrete structures or websites. For Seel it is a personal ritual, an act of remembrance that – because of decades of continued persecution and prosecution, distrust and denial, secrecy and silence – may well have been replicated time and again by others unable to share their experiences. He writes: “When I have finished wandering, I go home. Then I light the candle that burns permanently in my kitchen when I am alone. That frail flame is my only memory of Jo.”²¹⁸

Survivor testimonies aim to work through their trauma, make sense of what they experienced and then convey it to others.²¹⁹ Readers expecting a form of meaningful resolution, or reassuring closure are instead often faced with a coda of despondency.²²⁰ As the narratives under scrutiny here make clear, these victims emerged into a world of disgust and mistrust, and liberation was a contested concept. Jewish survivors took little solace in being liberated into a world where most of the families had been murdered.²²¹ Homosexuals who survived the camp experience were liberated into a deeply homophobic world. Indeed, they continued to be persecuted and prosecuted after the war.²²² The environment into which they emerged was not one of freedom and recognition.

Hammermeister argues that “we only care about the history of those who matter to us. As a silenced and humiliated group after the end of the Second World War, homosexuals were in no position to [tell their story].”²²³ Moreover, as Joanna Bourke has noted “it is individuals who ‘remember’, ‘repress’, ‘forget’ and are ‘traumatized,

²¹⁷ “Inauguration de la Rue Pierre Seel le 23 février,” accessed 24 April 2020

<http://reloaded.e-llico.com/article.htm?articleID=16863>;

“Paris names four squares and streets for LGBTQ icons,” accessed 24 April 2020

<https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/france-paris-lgbtq-street-names-scli-intl/index.html> Accessed 24/4/20; *Un amour à taira* Film. France: Christian Faure. 2005.

²¹⁸ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 140.

²¹⁹ Yahya R. Kamalipour, ed. *Global Discourse in Fractured Times: Perspectives on Journalism, Media, Education, and Politics* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 204; Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 106.

²²⁰ Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 15.

²²¹ *Ibid.* 157.

²²² “Exhibit to Detail Nazi Persecution of Gays,” accessed 20 July 2018,

<https://jewishjournal.com/culture/arts/7900/>

²²³ Kai Hammermeister, “Inventing History: Toward a Gay Holocaust Literature,” *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 70, No. 1, Winter (1997): 23.

not ‘societies’.”²²⁴ Yet without the appropriate *resources* at their disposal, these individuals are unable to collate and share their memories of the past.²²⁵ Winter, Hamilton and others have argued that it is crucial to maintain the sense of an individual’s *private* memory, as well as those memories that have been mediated into a collective, *public* group narrative.²²⁶ In order to develop a strong case for acknowledgement, apology and reparation – individual stories are embedded into a sort of “collective case.” The sometimes problematic issues surrounding the reliability and validity of individual voices are overcome once they form part of a larger “whole,” a group, whose findings are considered factual, reliable and useful as evidence.²²⁷ Winter goes on to claim that there is a danger that “witnesses forget, or reconstruct, their narratives as a kind of collage, or merge what they saw with what they read”.²²⁸ The more a particular version of events becomes the most salient, and accepted narrative, the easier it is for subsequent memories to fit into and, equally, the more difficult it then becomes for any challenge to this dominant narrative. A survey of adults in Britain and the United States in the early 1990s found that as few as twenty-five percent of adults even knew that homosexuals were victims of Nazism.²²⁹ This is an important statistic in terms of the publication dates of my subject memoirs. Hammermeister argues that this is unsurprising for in order for victims of persecution to be remembered, they have to be able to recount their individual narratives.²³⁰ In other words, without *memories*, there can be no *memory*. By denying homosexuals the environment and the opportunity with which to publicly share their experiences, homosexuals were denied the chance to form any sort of collective group, with a shared memory, and thus a distinct identity. Steven Epstein talks about “‘legitimising’ homosexuality within society so that homosexuals develop ‘explanations, strategies and defences,’”²³¹ in order to be recognized both as ‘themselves’ and, perhaps more importantly, so that they can foster

²²⁴ Joanna Bourke, “Remembering War,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39, 4, (2004): 473.

²²⁵ Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 4.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ Schaffer and Smith, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives*, 3

²²⁸ Jay Winter, “Sites of Memory,” in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 314.

²²⁹ Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 15.

²³⁰ Hammermeister, “Inventing History,” 19.

²³¹ Steve Epstein, “‘Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity’ The Limits of Social Constructionism,” *Socialist Review* (1987): 11.

a discernible “gay identity.” Before they can be understood as *victims*, they need to be recognized as *people*.

The complex, convoluted and particular circumstances in which gay victims of Nazism were placed impacted on the ways in which these stories emerged. National Socialists obliterated liberal advances made post-World War One and new forms of persecution – both legal and social – were adopted once they were defeated. This reactionary political context meant that it was extremely difficult for a cohesive homosexual community to emerge, one that had a voice that was able to recount their experiences. Though there have been very few completed memoirs that engage with the Nazi persecution of homosexuals published, those that exist bear witness to complex stories of persecution and further marginalization in the post-war period. The narratives of Beck, Seel and Heger provide the voices of the victims / survivors themselves. The memoirs reveal quite disparate experiences of three men from three different countries. The words towards the end of Seel’s memoirs encapsulate the horrors endured by homosexuals under Nazism, the continued suppression of the memories and the desperate need to be heard; Seel writes:

I had to bear witness in order to protect the future, bear witness in order to overcome the amnesia of my contemporaries. Destroy my anonymity once and for all ... I was seething with anger ... I had to bear witness, tell everything, demand restitution for my past, a past I shared with so many others, with people who had been buried and forgotten in Europe’s darkest hours.²³²

²³² Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 128.

PART TWO

Chapter Three

AIDS, ACT UP, Activism, and the Pink Triangle as Political Symbol

This chapter considers how the long-occluded memories that were critically examined in part one provided the movement for gay liberation with a set of cultural narratives and symbols that were re-purposed and politically activated in support of the contemporary struggle for recognition and liberation. In particular, the discussion focuses on tracing the ways in which the pink triangle, the original Nazi “badge of shame,” was reclaimed and re-signified by gay activists and how it became increasingly visible over time.¹ Once a murderous motif, the Nazi inverted pink triangle was figuratively and literally turned on its head, to become an ascending emblem of activism. The chapter begins with reference to one of the more current iterations of this activism – the annual *Pink Triangle Commemoration Ceremony* in San Francisco, which took on a renewed sense of significance in the era of Trump.² Activists, volunteers and visitors are now aware both of the past iteration of the pink triangle as a symbol of oppression, and of its transformation into a symbol of solidarity for the LGBTQ+ communities. The symbol remains as relevant as ever in the current context of renewed attacks on minority groups. The chapter then moves back to trace the post-war history of the pink triangle, firstly in early-1970s West Germany, as it became adopted by emergent gay youth groups, then as it crossed the Atlantic to become the favoured symbol of their American activist counterparts.³ In the US, in the context of the 1960s cultural revolution, some (not all) gay experiences were strikingly redolent of those we encountered in part one of the thesis. The gay cultural landscape – signaled by, for example, African-American drag shows, transgender activists, and popular meeting places such as the Stonewall Inn recalled the vibrancy and eclecticism of Weimar. Making connections between pre-war Weimar and 1960s America here is productive; critical engagement with the scholarship regarding 1960s gay history reveals much that is familiar to historians of pre-Nazi Germany. Both moments were

¹ “The Pink Triangle: From Shame to Pride,” accessed 15 June 2020, https://www.thecjm.org/learn_resources/305

² “The Pink Triangle,” accessed 2 August 2019, <https://www.thepinktriangle.com/about/helping.html>

³ “Pink Triangle Legacies: Holocaust Memory and International Gay Rights Activism,” accessed 13 August 2019, <https://nursingclio.org/2017/04/20/pink-triangle-legacies-holocaust-memory- and-international-gay-rights-activism/>

marked by community tensions, contested histories, identity crises and top-down dominance and the threat of blackmail or violence from the authorities. Underneath the 1960s veneer of participation and progress was a palpable sense of trauma and tension, which would notably erupt during the Stonewall Riots in 1969. By the 1970s, Pride marches became more prevalent, and, as was happening in Germany at the same time, activists began to align themselves with the memories and the victimhood of those discriminated under Nazism.⁴ Yet, despite the publication of Heger's memoir in 1972 and the first performances of the play *Bent* in 1979, the use of the pink triangle largely took on the new meaning within grass-roots activism. The acknowledgment and remembrance of the homosexual victims of Nazism remained largely peripheral and limited to a narrow subculture. The memories remained marginalized until the AIDS crisis emboldened activists, alongside the increasing prevalence of the Holocaust in American cultural memory, which created a space for the pink triangle to be marshalled as a metaphorical motif.⁵ Groups such as the ACT-UP collective invoked a genocide rhetoric and arranged symbolic death-marches which brought coffins and ashes to the gates of the White House.⁶ Most strikingly, their iconic "SILENCE = DEATH" pink triangle poster coalesced the history and memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals with the growing culture of testimony, particularly in relation to Holocaust remembrance.⁷

The chapter positions the triangle design as the defining emblem of the AIDS crisis, focusing on activist group ACT UP, members of which created striking Holocaust-referencing imagery. The increased visibility of the pink triangle in the 1980s as part of AIDS activism and awareness-raising did not always create a space for the stories of Heger, Seel, Beck and other survivors, however. In the context of the crisis, it is notable that some activists rarely made direct or particular reference to the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. In his *Reports from the Holocaust*, Larry Kramer largely eschewed explicit reference to the Nazi persecution of homosexuals in favour of marshalling Holocaust memory. The chapter considers in detail the work of Kramer in terms of

⁴ Eric Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 152-156.

⁵ Stein, "Whose Memories? Whose Victimhood?" 198.

⁶ Jeff Goodwin & James M. Jasper eds. *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*, (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell 2014), 263.

⁷ "How Six NYC Activists Changed History With "Silence = Death"," accessed 31 August 2018, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2017/06/20/how-six-nyc-activists-changed-history-with-silence-death/>

AIDS activism, his language and legacy, and posits that, whilst he somewhat marginalized the memory of those persecuted under Nazism once more, his work is integral to this broader history.

Memories of the fate of homosexuals under the Nazis did inform the wider gay liberation movement, however. The pink triangle, as adopted first by the gay liberation movements and later ACT UP activists, functions at the blurred intersection of these two memory cultures. The chapter will also demonstrate the lasting cultural impact the symbol has had, as its usage has moved beyond badges and banners to adorn everything from street patrols to sneakers. The chapter begins and ends with contemporary examples of how the pink triangle has been commodified in recent years, yet still retains cultural and political salience, some forty years since the gay liberationists wore it on shirts and carried it on banners, and some eighty years since its genesis as a symbol of death and destruction.

“A symbol of hope and freedom”⁸ – reclaiming the pink triangle

Each year, on the last Saturday of June, on the weekend of the city’s Pride event, Eureka, the steep North Hill of San Francisco’s Twin Peaks bears “visible yet mute reminder of man’s inhumanity to man.”⁹ With the help of hundreds of volunteers, the huge hill that overlooks the city is draped with panels of pink cloth which form a huge triangle, some 200 feet wide and covering almost an acre of land. The triangle can be seen for up to 20 miles and its organizers hope that it is seen as part of the celebrations of the city’s gay community, whilst also serving as a stark reminder of gay history; of the intolerance, hatred and persecution that has been wrought upon gay people. By adopting the triangle symbol, the organizers are forming a dual function of representing both the then-contemporary usage of the triangle, largely synonymous with the AIDS crisis, as well as alluding to its historical and cultural memory as symbol of Nazi oppression. At the opening of the installation in 2018, the San Franciscan mayor, London Breed, reiterated the meanings of the symbol, both historically and in the

⁸ “Pink Triangle Symbolizes Decades of SF Pride,” accessed 18 September, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/sanfrancisco/news/sf-pride-twin-peaks-pink-triangle/>

⁹ “The Pink Triangle,” accessed 2 August 2019, <http://www.thepinktriangle.com>

Trumpian present of that moment. She told the gathered crowd that the triangle, and its installers aimed “to use something that was divisive, something that was about hatred, and turn it into a symbol of hope and freedom, and what is possible when we come together.”¹⁰

The pink triangle project first began in 1996. Initially, activists had to install the craftwork in the middle of the night in order to avoid being arrested. The work is now celebrated and commemorated each year by members of the public and city officials alike. What was once a renegade, illicit and underground enterprise is now, for many San Franciscan’s, both a timeless, and timely, representation of historic struggles for European gays under the tyranny of Nazism, and everyone affected by AIDS. Moreover, observers and activists note the contemporary relevance of the triangle, and what it represents, particularly in a time when hard-won rights are increasingly being challenged, both in the US and around the world.¹¹ Several of those in attendance at the unveiling of the pink triangle project in 2017, barely six months into the Trump presidency, alluded to the renewed sense of trepidation they were feeling in a period which saw social, legal and political advances hard-won by the LGBTQ communities come under increasing pressure from that administration. Volunteer Stuart Rosenstein notes that “It’s very ironic that we are putting up a pink triangle as we are headed into a dark space for the LGBT community. It scares me to death. Do I have to go back to my old closeted thoughts? Is it safe to hold hands in a particular space?”¹²

The triangle is not only about representing a repressive *past*, it also aims to speak truth to power, as a queer call to arms against the tyrannies of the *present*. Local reporter Sarah Ravani notes that the 2017 installation was largely informed not only by Trump but also by resistance, that those who organized it and all those who turned up that day to witness its unveiling were acutely aware of both its dark origins, and its contemporary political and visceral symbolic power.¹³ In an interview with local TV

¹⁰ “Pink Triangle, Symbol of SF Pride, Rises Again Above the City,” accessed 19 July 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHPzZv7n_II&feature=youtu.be

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “Pink Triangle rises again as symbol of pride,” accessed 18 September 2019, <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Pink-Triangle-rises-again-as-symbol-of-pride-for-11244722.php#photo-13108108>;

¹³ <http://www.thepinktriangle.com>; The site is supported by the Friends of the Pink Triangle, whose founder members included Patrick Carney, the yearly organizer of the installation since its inception

station KPIX, one of the volunteer installers proudly sports a pristine white shirt adorned with a pink triangle. He is not alone. All those who want to be involved on that early Saturday morning are told that “fashionable Pink Triangle t-shirts will be provided to all who help. Starbucks coffee, tea, snacks will be provided.”¹⁴ It is clear that we have come a long way since survivors such as Pierre Seel and Heinz Heger locked away their uniforms, their triangles, their secrets and their memories. The journey of the Pink Triangle has gone from feared and loathed emblem of brutal repression, through subversive symbol of gay activism in the 1970s, representation of the contemporary tragedy of AIDS in the 1980s, before being supplanted by a rainbow-infused symbol of hope, joy and optimism, largely free from the association with death. Whilst recognition of the pink triangle is by now quite commonplace – as both Nazi badge of shame and later emblem of activism – there is little critical evaluation of the symbol beyond a cursory chronology of its evolution. Most online resources, ranging from the grassroots level of activist website, thepinktriangle.com, to large, funded-body webpages such as the Contemporary Jewish Museum or the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, often present the history of the triangle, situating it contextually but with little intertextual analysis.

We can trace the roots of the reclaimed triangle back to a divided post-war Germany; 1969 saw the first reform of Paragraph 175, legalizing homosexual relations between men over the age of 21 (the age of consent would be lowered to 18 by 1973). With this legal shift came a degree of relaxation towards certain aspects of homosexuality. The gay publications that men had tentatively purchased and discreetly transported prior to the Nazi crackdown now began to resurface, albeit in fairly sanitized forms.¹⁵ Craig Griffiths alludes to the constant struggle between *editors* of the German gay press during the period keen to deemphasize the “sex” in homosexual, instead preferring to focus on other aspects of gay life, and *readers* who balked at lengthy political articles replacing the semi-nude photographs they had come to expect in such publications. Many argued that gay men should be able to enjoy titillation as much as any other group in the apparently more liberal 1970s, that indeed this was as much a part of the hard-

and the sole founder and yearly organizer of the annual Pink Triangle Commemoration Ceremony ‘which remembers the hatred of the past while showing how far the LGBTQ community has come.’

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Craig Griffiths, “Sex, Shame and West German Gay Liberation,” *German History*, Vol.34, No.3 (2016): 447-448.

won identity of gays as anything else. The debates raged throughout 1970s West Germany, and parallels with the United States gay movement are quite apparent. They were marked by a tension between those wanting to appear “respectable” and part of the wider society – and thus not attract the ire of the authorities – and those wanting to experience the same sexual, social and political freedoms that were enjoyed by heterosexuals.¹⁶ Scholars of the period have argued that some gay liberation activists in West Germany in the 1970s delighted in the perceptions that they were deviants, perverts and aberrant, urging one another to confirm these notions and be proud of their identities as homosexuals, rather than conforming to heterosexual social norms as a result of shame.¹⁷

The gay liberation movement in West Germany emerged with the 1971 formation of the *Homosexuelle Aktion Westberlin* (H.A.W.) – a collective of largely youthful gays inspired by the late 60s movements. They were young, radical and forward-thinking activists, who eschewed the moderate politics of their more elderly gay forbears, and were certainly not, at least initially, concerned with the experiences of homosexuals under Nazism.¹⁸ This group favoured visibility over privacy, shouting rather than silence, and the right to openly express one’s sexuality. This desire for visibility needed something visible; a symbol which would enable closeted, oppressed homosexuals to “come out,” and force the wider German society to accept them rather than continue to suppress them. When *The Men with the Pink Triangle* was published in Germany in 1972, the group found an unlikely solution to their problem. Adopting the triangle – a

¹⁶ Ibid. 448-450.

¹⁷ Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 63; Deborah Gould, “The Shame of Gay Pride in Early AIDS Activism,” in David M. Halperin, Valerie Traub, eds. *Gay Shame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 355-8; Conversely, the controversial 1971 German film *It is not the Homosexual who is Perverse but the Society in Which He Lives* (dir. Rosa von Praunheim) is often accused of attacking homosexuals for deliberately seeking out perverse relationships. Indeed, it prompted angry responses, which in turn led to an increase in activism amongst some of Germany’s gay community. See Brigitte Peucker, ed. *A Companion to Rainer Werner Fassbinder* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 559; Dominique Grisard, “Pink Prisons, Rosy Futures? The Prison Politics of the Pink Triangle,” in Elahe Haschemi Yekani, Eveline Kilian, Beatrice Michaelis, *Queer Futures: Reconsidering Ethics, Activism, and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2016), 87. Director von Praunheim would provoke further controversy more than a decade later when he invoked Kramer-like language to denounce ‘promiscuous homosexuals.’ particularly those who had fought for freedom in the 1970s, who were, he claimed, to be blamed for the escalating HIV/AIDS crisis. See *Gibt es Sex nach dem Tode? Thesen zum Thema AIDS*, *Der Spiegel*, 48, 1984, 228.

¹⁸ Herzog, *Sexuality and German Fascism*, 325-326.

motif that some three decades earlier had symbolized such horror – meant that activists could draw attention to their contemporary cause whilst the wider German society might finally address a part of their past that had been silenced for too long. Moreover, argues Herzog, the group saw a clear continuation of legal and political subjugation of homosexuals from Nazi Germany to their present.¹⁹ In the years that followed, groups across West Germany increasingly adopted the triangle as their logo. As the decade wore on, the symbol traversed the national and became international, with gay activist groups in other parts of Europe and across the United States adopting the pink triangle as the emblem for their *own* movements. What was once not only a truly pernicious emblem, but also a Nazi-specific one, began, argues W. Jake Newsome, to “represent a collective past, a history that gay activists on both sides of the Atlantic could share because they were gay.”²⁰

As West Germany’s gays railed against an administration intent on continuing to suppress and subjugate them, in late 1960s United States, gay communities, mostly confined to areas on both East and West Coasts were, like their European counterparts, also struggling. There was increased conflict between those who favoured an assimilationist approach to social, legal and political endeavours – usually older, middle-class white gay men – and the more marginalized and oppressed sections of the community. These included younger, working class or unemployed people, persons of colour, transgender persons, drag queens, butch and effeminate persons or those involved in sex work.²¹ As the 1950s wore on, attitudes towards homosexuality began to change nationally and locally as a more conservative era was ushered in throughout the United States. The so-called “Lavender Scare” witch-hunts of the early 1950s saw a gay presence in the nation’s capital decimated, and a subsequent sea-change in its opinion of largely middle-class homosexuals.²² Meanwhile, the typically working-class African-American homosexual subculture that had thrived after the war was subject to an onslaught from those intent to eradicate segregation and promote assimilation. By doing this, they felt they had to rid the communities of what white America saw as their

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Pink Triangle Legacies: Holocaust Memory and International Gay Rights Activism,” accessed 15 June 2018, <https://nursingclio.org/2017/04/20/pink-triangle-legacies-holocaust-memory-and-international-gay-rights-activism/>

²¹ Ibid.

²² David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 2004), 10; 86; 101; 189-90.

problems with deviancy. Gunnar Myrdal argued in 1944 that the expectation was that in order to be “assimilated into American culture [African Americans must learn to live by] the traits held in esteem by the dominant white Americans.”²³ This would become an increasingly popular viewpoint. America’s black, working-class, queer community had been active from the 1920s through to the 1950s, drag shows were hugely popular and outlandish and outrageous homosexual ministers commanded huge and loyal followings. Yet, vocal forces including a once-loyal black press, Baptist pastors and the fledgling civil rights movement increasingly called for an end to such deviance in order that African Americans could acquire full and fulsome citizenship.²⁴ Thus, there were tensions within diverse gay communities, usually determined by class and “race.” This agitation would inform much of the activism around the myriad battles in subsequent decades.

“Out of the closets, into the streets”²⁵ – The pink triangle and activism

“Stonewall” has become known as a pivotal political event and an influential moment in US queer history, one that has a complex, sometimes contested narrative.²⁶ It is worth revisiting these historic events in the context of my thesis, in part in terms of understanding the sociocultural milieu into which the pink triangle became symbolic. The Stonewall Inn opened in March 1967 in Greenwich Village, New York, on the site of the former Stonewall Inn Restaurant, and the large club quickly established itself as hugely popular and successful meeting place for New York’s gay crowd. Unlike many bars of the period, the Stonewall Inn was situated on a busy road rather than being tucked down a side street, though it deployed security ideas typical of the area such as windows which were both obscured to protect modesty and identities, and reinforced

²³ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American dilemma: The Negro problem and modern democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 928-9.

²⁴ James Baldwin, *The Dangerous Road Before Martin Luther King, Collected essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 638-9.

²⁵ Allen Young, Karla Jay, eds. *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* (New York: NYU Press, 1992), 6.

²⁶ The events are often referred to as the birth of the modern gay liberation movement in the United States, see, for example Martin Duberman, *Stonewall: The Definitive Story of the LGBT Rights Uprising that Changed America* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2019), xix; This claim is somewhat contested by those who say it ignores the US LGBTQ movement which had been growing throughout the 1960s, see Elizabeth A. Armstrong, and Suzanna M. Crago, “Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth,” *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 5 (2006).

to protect against the smash-happy invasions of the authorities.²⁷ David Carter evokes memories of long-gone Weimar establishments when he writes of the eclectic mixture of people who made up the clientele, the care taken to keep them safe in an environment hostile to them, and the wonderment of first-time visitors, thrilled and astonished at events that unfolded beyond the rusting sign and the mafia doormen. Patrons noted that, unlike many of the earlier bars that catered for homosexuals, The Stonewall Inn did not place emphasis solely upon sex, but instead accentuated romance and dancing. “Chris Babick [recalls]... there were men dancing with men... I had such a thrill in my stomach. It was... like an electric shock. And it was so fucking exciting.”²⁸ Yet, like the wider community in which it was situated, and indeed, emblematic of the situation nationally, things were not all romance, excitement and acceptance in the Stonewall Inn.

Just like their German counterparts in the Weimar years, the patrons of such establishments were at risk of violence, blackmail and potential denouncements. The Inn kept lists of patrons’ names under the guise of the pretence that the bar was operating as a legitimate private members’ club, yet rather than being compiled by a hostile, Gestapo-like police force the names were often used by the thugs in charge of the bar to directly blackmail their more high-profile clients. As well as these social threats to homosexuals who patronized such establishments, their livelihood and liberty was also at risk from *state* repression, as the bar was frequently targeted and raided by police, often leading to the arrest of many patrons and staff.²⁹ The subsequent riots of June 1969 are by now well-documented and need little elucidation here, other than to reiterate that the violent struggle was a ground-up rebellion by the disparate group of patrons who frequented the space. These people were tired of continual harassment by the authorities and intent on making an initial, visceral stance against the police and, afterwards, aimed to seize upon the opportunity in order to make more concrete advancement by way of picketing and demonstrating. Out of the ashes of the Stonewall Inn, the United States Gay Liberation Front was born, and with it, the Pink Triangle

²⁷ David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked a Gay Revolution* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004), 68-69.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 71.

²⁹ Duberman, *Stonewall*, 183; 193; Carter, *Stonewall*, 96-98.

crossed the Atlantic and became, for the first time, a symbol of the fledgling gay rights movement in America.³⁰

Post Stonewall, gay activism often stressed and celebrated the “otherness” of homosexuality, whilst in fledgling Pride marches, participants revered the body, and sexuality.³¹ This “otherness” eventually, largely, gave way to a focus on heteronormativity, whereby many gays would emphasize their desire to assimilate into, rather than rebel against, the American “norm.” Some gay men were increasingly keen to downplay any emphasis on carnal craving at the expense of other longings – namely being nationalistic and patriotic.³² This was, however, somewhat misguided. Martin Duberman posits that, although “late to catch the homophobia bug”³³, the United States did catch up with their European counterparts in terms of homosexual persecution. By the mid-1970s, approximately 70% of the population of the United States considered gay sex “always wrong,” even when homosexuals attempted to emulate what was typically considered the heterosexual norm of “consenting... monogamous, longstanding relationships.”³⁴ Moreover, politicians, both conservative and liberal resisted gay people partaking in regular jobs, imitating the heteronormative family unit and attending places of worship. Even when gays attempted to mimic their straight counterparts, their otherness still threatened America’s burgeoning moral majority. Little wonder then, that gay, and later queer, activists increasingly opposed conforming to the heteronormative hegemony. The GLF in particular, sought to distance themselves from such assimilationist ideology, preferring instead the more provocative tactics of other marginalized groups of the period such as the feminist and African American liberation movements.³⁵ This was a period when the gay liberation movement also began theorizing what it meant to be gay in a heteronormative society.

The 1970s saw a marked increase in events which drew increased attention to the growing gay rights movement. These included a proliferation of Pride marches, taking

³⁰ Ann Bausum, *Stonewall: Breaking Out in the Fight for Gay Rights* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 87.

³¹ Thaddeus Russell, “The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 1 (2008): 102.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Martin Duberman, “The Anita Bryant Brigade” in *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics*, Mark Blasius and Shane Phelan, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 444.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 216.

place initially in New York to commemorate the first anniversary of the uprising at Stonewall, then as the decade wore on, similar events were held in many US and Western European cities. Various groups that made up a disparate community in cities such as New York jostled for power, attention and recognition, often resulting in clashes between members of activist groups as they struggled to understand one another.³⁶ The largely-unifying symbol adopted by these activists on the early marches was the pink triangle as its historic significance quickly became to be understood.³⁷ This was part of a wider, international, politicization of the symbol, adopted from its emergence in West Germany at the start of the decade. The symbol represented a complicated relationship between the past of the 1930s and 1940s and the present of the 1970s. In the United States, the pink triangle was, argues Jensen, invoked in part, to raise awareness of state injustice towards homosexuals and solicit a government response, which was the opposite of how the symbol was utilized in West Germany, “to *protest* such intervention.”³⁸ The use of the symbol in this moment, illustrates the ways in which the memory of homosexual persecution under the Nazis was operative in gay liberation politics prior to the ways in which the wider Holocaust frame comes to shape the later AIDS crisis protests. Reclaiming a “forgotten” past that speaks to the present is an important aspect of the development of a movement. In the case of the pink triangle in the 1970s, it spoke to both the past, as activists attempted for the first time to raise awareness of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, and to its then-present iteration as an activism emblem.

In June 1973, *Gay Sunshine*, a San Francisco journal printed one of the first-known suggestions that the pink triangle be used as a form of remembrance and mobilization.³⁹ A year later in 1974, *The Body Politic*, at the time Canada’s foremost gay activism periodical, published a similar article, encouraging its readers to adopt “the symbol as a memorial to the victims of homophobia.”⁴⁰ By 1975 the pink triangle entered more

³⁶ Eric Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 152-156.

³⁷ John Arthur Maddux, *Triangles and Rainbow Dreams: Essays about Being Gay in the Real World* (Raleigh: Bitingduck Press, 2006), 8.

³⁸ Erik N. Jensen, “The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness,” 342.

³⁹ Beatrice Michaelis, Elahe Haschemi Yekani, Eveline Kilian, eds. *Queer Futures: Reconsidering Ethics, Activism, and the Political* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 88.

⁴⁰ James Thomas Sears, ed. *Youth, Education, and Sexualities* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005). 623.

fully into the American consciousness as it was the emblem of a fraught battle between New York gay liberationists intent on ending statutory discrimination and Orthodox Jews, who opposed the proposed amendments to various laws. Gay supporters were encouraged to wear the pink triangle as both a marker of their support for the proposals, and a means to publicly acknowledge the memory of gays persecuted by Nazism.⁴¹

Despite, or even due to, its growing significance in gay communities, the pink triangle remained a marginal, misunderstood, and sometimes contentious symbol to non-LGBTQ people. In 1977, when young activist Gregory Woods attempted to place a pink triangle wreath at a UK war memorial to remember the gay victims of Nazism, local (presumably) straight people were enraged.⁴² In the same year in Miami, local activists trying to repeal discriminatory statutes against homosexuals, attached pink triangles to their clothing to highlight their cause. It was, according to *Time* magazine, a “tactic [that] backfired badly.”⁴³ The report claims that, with this symbolic stunt the gay activists “overdramatized their case ... [wearing pink triangles] reminiscent of the yellow star that Jews were forced to wear in Hitler’s Germany.”⁴⁴ This response is notable in its complete avoidance of any reference to the meaning of the pink triangle, other than in relation to the Nazi insignia for Jews. At this time the symbol still had little symbolic resonance outside of relatively narrow cultural usage. Yet, argues Arlene Stein, from the 1970s the adoption of the pink triangle by gay liberationists in both Europe and the United States was significant for a number of reasons. These include - as a form of remembrance to those persecuted by the Nazis and forced to wear it; as a continuation of the pre-Nazi Weimar movement and culture; and as part of the contemporary efforts at ending stigmatization.⁴⁵ Indeed, she argues, it was precisely *because of* the subjugation of minorities such as homosexuals, that contemporary activists utilized Nazi tropes as metaphors for contemporary battles. They aimed to make the past more visible in the present, to make people more aware of what happened to gays under Nazism, whilst using that past to support the present, by aligning themselves with the victimhood of their European forebears. These activists in both

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Interview with Gregory Woods,” accessed 5 March 2019, <https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/professor-gregory-woods-speaks-about-pierre-seel/>; this is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

⁴³ “Not yet equal under the law,” *Time*, June 20, 1977, Vol. 109, No. 25, 60.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Stein, “Whose Memories? Whose Victimhood?” 523-4.

Western Europe and especially the United States, were utilizing the iconography of the pink triangle both as a symbol for contemporary struggle, and as a means to attempt to inform the wider public of the suffering wrought upon homosexuals under Nazism. The increasing cultural presence of the pink triangle was “creating” a memory for these men – both dead and alive – within a context that seemingly had little cause to remember them.

The following decade saw the emergence of the AIDS crisis, and with it, the pink triangle symbol would take on a new significance. Activists would begin to imbue the emblem with a concordant narrative, producing striking imagery, provoking the ire of detractors, and engendering a debate about the appropriateness of appropriation. The Americanization of Holocaust memory brought the Shoah into the consciousness of the American public, and this wider cultural political shift meant that AIDS activists such as Larry Kramer wove Holocaust meanings and referents into his spoken and written polemic. This was often done at the expense of the cultural memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, which had begun to develop as a result of the gay liberation movement of the 1970s, but risked being marginalized again. My focus now shifts to the 1980s, to contextualize the crisis that was about to engulf gay communities, and critically examine the responses from Larry Kramer and ACT UP, and how this began to reshape the meaning and memory of the pink triangle.

“AIDS is our Holocaust”⁴⁶ –Metaphor and Rhetoric in a Time of Crisis

This section engages with Larry Kramer’s text *Reports from the Holocaust* (1989/94) to explore the ways in which the activist invoked literary tropes, representations, and iconography usually associated with Holocaust memory to draw attention to the AIDS crisis and to mobilize activists. I consider the ways in which an “Americanised” memory of the Holocaust provided a useful frame via which to understand *how* the Jewish genocide of the 1940s became the cultural touchstone for some AIDS activists in the 1980s. These seemingly incongruent historical events became linked by means of verbal and visual culture, as campaigners, protestors, lawyers and authors invoked

⁴⁶ Larry Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, 173.

traumatic past events to understand and represent a present-day crisis. A considerable scholarship has developed which analyzes why and how the Holocaust has been increasingly understood through an Americanized paradigm.⁴⁷ The ways in which the Holocaust has been rendered and remembered by, and for, Americans is often marked by a nationalistic tone, an emphasis on optimistic, bombastic narrative, and invokes tropes of hope, freedom, nation and democracy.⁴⁸ The Holocaust steadily gained cultural salience in the United States, and notable cultural events included the publication of Anne Frank's diary in 1952, the screening of NBC's *Holocaust* series in 1978, and the release of the film *Schindler's List* in 1993 as well as more state-sponsored activities such as the inauguration of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993. By globalizing "local" memories, subjugated groups in the US also began to understand and represent their own traumatic events through a Holocaust paradigm.⁴⁹ I argue that marginalized groups in the US began to shape and define their identities based on suffering and subjugation rather than nation and nationalism.

Many have questioned why the United States seemed to be quasi-obsessed with remembrance of a traumatic event such as the Holocaust with which it had little direct involvement, at the expense of tragedies in which it *was* implicated, such as the Native American genocide, or the transatlantic slave trade and the institution of enslavement.⁵⁰ It arguably suited the US political and cultural narrative to present themselves as witness-bearers, liberators and saviours in terms of Holocaust remembrance and memorialisation.⁵¹ The debate around the Americanization of the Holocaust is fiery and

⁴⁷ See, for example, Hilene Flanzbaum, "The Americanization of the Holocaust," *Journal of Genocidal Research*, 1:1 (1999); Hilene Flanzbaum, ed. *The Americanization of the Holocaust* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press (1999); Alison Landsberg, "America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory: Towards a Radical Politics of Empathy," *New German Critique*, No. 71, Memories of Germany, Spring – Summer (1997); James E. Young, "The Americanization of the Holocaust," *English and Judaic Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, May 24 (1998).

⁴⁸ Natan Sznajder, "The Americanization of Memory: The Case of the Holocaust in Global America?" in *The Cultural Consequences of Globalization*, Ulrich Beck, Natan Sznajder, Rainer Winter, eds. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 174-175; Flanzbaum. *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, 1-4; Flanzbaum, "The Americanization of the Holocaust," 92-92

⁴⁹ Ulrich Beck, Natan Sznajder, Rainer Winter, eds. *Global America? The Cultural Consequences of Globalization* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press), 178.

⁵⁰ Young, "The Americanization of the Holocaust," (NP).

⁵¹ Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 30-32.

fluid, evoking passionate, and fluctuating arguments. It has been criticized and condemned by many scholars and historians as inauthentic and manipulative, yet it has allowed for the Holocaust to resonate with multitudinous masses.⁵² By reaching such a vast, disparate audience, the Holocaust becomes so accessible as to seem appropriate for appropriation from other subjugated groups seeking to renegotiate Holocaust memory to represent their own traumatic events. In other words, the ubiquity of the Holocaust in contemporary American memory allowed it to resonate with other groups who attempted “to define themselves through a moral identity of suffering.”⁵³ In the 1980s and 1990s, one such group utilized a paradigm of collective, prosthetic, globalised memory in order to invoke a Holocaust metaphor to make the wider American public comprehend the enormity of the AIDS crisis, most notably by Jewish gay activist Larry Kramer. Though it was the frame of Americanization that created space for Kramer to invoke the Holocaust, he certainly did not adopt a heroic, optimistic narrative. Instead, his rhetoric was visceral, challenging, often pessimistic, and always angry. We can begin to draw some comparisons here with how homosexuals persecuted under Nazism, and gays now being decimated by AIDS negotiated their suffering and silencing. Notably for Heger and Seel, and later Kramer, their subjugation was understood in terms of the Holocaust. For the homosexual survivors of Nazism, as we have seen, this understanding was often *in relation to* other victim groups, and how this relationship shaped their memories. The continued suppression of the survivors informed their collective memory, which was distinguished by misremembering, hyperbole and a hierarchy of victimhood. Despite the exaggerated claims of numbers of victims, there did largely seem to be a cognizance of *intent*, and awareness that, despite the atrocities they endured and were witness to, the form of persecution faced by homosexuals under Nazism, it was not a “Holocaust.” For Kramer, as AIDS ravaged gay communities, there was, purposefully, no such nuance, and a holocaust is, he claimed, precisely what was being engendered. Much of Kramer’s polemic is highly personal, indeed his detractors claim that he often placed far too much emphasis on *Kramer*. I will consider the identity that Kramer developed in relation to his AIDS activism, and the responses to it, including what was seen as his puritanical, anti-sex, internalized homophobia, and the effect that being a middle-class, white male had on

⁵² Hilene Flanzbaum, “The Americanization of the Holocaust,” 93-95.

⁵³ Beck, Sznajder, Winter, eds. *Global America?* 178.

his work. I will then go on to examine Kramer's text, considering his use of such visceral language, the purposes of invoking a Holocaust frame, and the point of speaking out.

So much of the history with which this thesis is concerned is defined by *identity*. Chapter two illustrated how each of the memoirists considered their identity – gay, Jewish, French, German, – and how they negotiated these various identities within a framework of trauma and tragedy, often in conflict or competition with the “other.” Similarly, Kramer – a gay, Jewish man living with HIV – worked through his often-conflicting identities in terms of the unfolding AIDS crisis, and was a controversial figure amongst his peers. Close textual analysis of *Reports from the Holocaust* reveals how the dominant cultural memory of the *Holocaust*, rather than a specific focus on gay victims of the Nazis, is writ large in Kramer's lexicon. In order to provoke responses and produce results, the author infuses his text with reference to gas-chambers and genocide, cites Primo Levi and compares President Reagan to Hitler.⁵⁴ I am interested in how Kramer invoked a genocide frame to help people make sense of the plight of those living with, and dying from, AIDS, and, pertinently, how this focus on the Holocaust was largely at the expense of the memory of homosexuals persecuted under Nazism. This latter collective memory was instead foregrounded in the broader gay liberation movement from the 1970s, and the burgeoning memorialization culture from the 1990s, with which the final chapter of this study is concerned.

The HIV virus, initially referred to as GRID, or Gay-Related Immune Deficiency, began to emerge both medically and politically in 1981.⁵⁵ Transmitted through bodily fluids, it attacks the immune system, often destroying the body's cells to the extent that it cannot fight infections. US deaths from the virus rose sharply in the 1980s and 1990s, fueled by a combination of ignorance, lack of information and an ineffective public health response. In its early years, the virus disproportionately affected homosexual men, leading many media and political commentators to dub the virus a “gay plague.”⁵⁶ David Caron argues that by associating the disease with marginalized groups, the US

⁵⁴ Larry Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, 173; 263.

⁵⁵ Raymond A. Smith, ed. *Encyclopedia of AIDS: A Social, Political, Cultural, and Scientific Record*. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 123; 203; 335.

⁵⁶ Michael VerMeulen, *The Gay Plague*, New York Magazine, May 31, 1982.

government were hesitant to react.⁵⁷ As a result of this perceived inaction by the state, activists, particularly Kramer, increasingly began to invoke a genocide frame as a protest, arguing that by doing nothing, by largely ignoring the crisis and the subsequent deaths of thousands of men, the government were in fact enacting a “holocaust.”

Larry Kramer’s *Reports from the Holocaust* is a key publication that illustrates the ways on which tropes associated with Holocaust representation were mobilized in the service of AIDS activism. The text was first published in 1989, a year when AIDS killed over 14,500 Americans, around the total number of homosexuals commonly believed to have been interned in concentration camps throughout the entire Third Reich. It was revisited and revised in 1994 (AIDS deaths that year were over 32,000).⁵⁸ Kramer’s work is constituted of a very particular form. It is a collection of speeches, articles, letters and polemic documenting the AIDS crisis and Kramer’s involvement in both the GMHC (Gay Men’s Health Crisis) and later the direct-action activist group, ACT UP. It is highly critical of the response to the crisis by three presidential administrations, the Center for Disease Control and the national media. As the title explicitly suggests, Kramer insisted that willful passivism and inaction by these various organizations caused the rapid escalation of the AIDS crisis, in a manner similar to the events that lead to the Holocaust.⁵⁹ Before I go on to critically analyze Kramer’s text and consider its place – if any – in the developing cultural memory of the pink triangle, I turn first to trace the development of the so-called Americanization of the Holocaust, and how this created a framework for Kramer to invoke its meanings and memories for his contemporary cause.

⁵⁷ David Caron, “Tactful Encounters: AIDS, the Holocaust, and the Problematics of Bearing Witness,” *Yale French Studies* No. 118/119, *Noeuds de mémoire: Multidirectional Memory in Postwar French and Francophone Culture*, Yale University Press (2010): 155.

⁵⁸ Statistics available at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, whose motto is ‘Saving Lives and Protecting People’, and towards whom Kramer directs much of his vitriol as being culpable for its ineptitude in dealing with the disease, particularly in the early years of its emergence - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed 8 May 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov>

⁵⁹ Larry Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, xxviii.

“All victims have turned into Jews”⁶⁰ - The Americanization of the Holocaust

Hilene Flanzbaum argues that universalizing and Americanizing the Holocaust with notions of spirit, strength and positivity diluted its horror in a way that other, more “authentic” representations did not.⁶¹ The particular forms of appropriation I am concerned with here are Larry Kramer’s invocation of the more visceral Holocaust tropes. These stand in direct opposition, both tonally and intentionally, to some of the earlier Americanized uses and representations of Holocaust narratives, described, variously, as “manipulative, dreadful and banal.”⁶² Whilst the memories of Nazism were largely being subdued in Europe, the aforementioned significant cultural events in the US, including the publication of Anne Frank’s diary in the 1950s, the 1961 Eichmann trial and the broadcast of the mini-series *Holocaust* in 1978, were not only bringing the Holocaust increasingly to the fore, they were making space for a form of collective, and perhaps prosthetic, memory to develop.

This growing awareness of the Holocaust which, broadly, affected very few American citizens, save for a minority of émigrés and their second-generation relatives, allowed for forums in which to superimpose present struggles onto a traumatic past, as well as engendering a broader discourse about what constituted American history, memory, remembrance and commemoration. In an evaluation of post-war attempts to recognize and remember the Holocaust in the United States, James E. Young points to the dichotomy of the history of America and the history of *Americans*. The former is often bound by hegemonic, nationalistic and geographical constraints, whereas the latter might attempt, for example, to incorporate the memories of immigrants – in this case, Holocaust survivors – and by doing so incorporates this narrative into American history and memory.⁶³

⁶⁰ Beck, Sznajder, Winter, eds. *Global America?* 181.

⁶¹ Hilene Flanzbaum, *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, 3.

⁶² Hilene Flanzbaum, “The Americanization of the Holocaust,” 93.

⁶³ Such cultural texts may not be wholly “authentic” but were for most people the “only access to the Holocaust” – Landsberg, “America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory,” 71; James E. Young, *Memory and the Politics of Identity*, in Flanzbaum, *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, 70-71.

Attempts to utilize one group's traumatic events as a framework with which to understand the suffering of another group who were not involved in, or affected by those events can be considered both morally dubious and intellectually problematic. America's "self-inherited" role as the witness-bearer to a uniquely Jewish tragedy was troubling to those who considered themselves more legitimate "rememberers."⁶⁴ Yet there are a variety of ways in which groups are established and developed, and this process in turn can create a sense of collective identity. The mutability of memories and identities can become ripe for appropriation. Szbaider argues that "global culture does not erase local memories, but rather mixes with them."⁶⁵ Indeed, as Benedict Anderson has notably claimed, nations are essentially socially constructed, imagined communities, based on myth and representation, and are in a state of constant flux, reinvention and hybridization.⁶⁶ From this standpoint, we can begin to understand not only how the Holocaust began to seep into American consciousness through various cultural means, but also how the Americanization of the event comes to be understood as a signifier for, or representation of, "universal suffering," through which other subjugated groups could understand and represent their own traumatic events.⁶⁷

One of the primary effects of this process on the formation and sustenance of a collective memory is to shift emphasis from the hegemonic national to the local, to society, to the "unheard" individuals and groups.⁶⁸ Many modern group identities arise from, and centre on, traumatic events. These events often pose a direct threat to those groups, both literally, in the form of violence and subjugation, and figuratively, by disrupting their cultural memories and collective identities. This is particularly the case in the United States with the brutal oppression of Native Americans, the destruction of African American families through slavery and the dislocation of those who fled to the US to escape the Holocaust.⁶⁹ Mass-mediation has meant that not only are the narratives of these groups more widely accessible as historical events, they are ripe for appropriation from other groups.⁷⁰ For Landsberg, universalizing trauma performs

⁶⁴ Beck, Sznaider, Winter, eds. *Global America?* 180.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 176-177.

⁶⁶ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6–7.

⁶⁷ Beck, Sznaider, Winter, eds. *Global America?* 178.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 186.

⁶⁹ Landsberg, "America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory," 10.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 11.

several, seemingly opposing functions; it enables groups to empathize with other groups' traumatic events, whilst augmenting understanding of their own; it helps groups to create and maintain a particular identity at the same time as integrating them into an American narrative; and for some, it allows remembrance of a catastrophic past that is not theirs, and upon which no blame can be laid, at the expense of one that is, and for which their nation was culpable.⁷¹ This is true also of homosexuals who would be ravaged not only by AIDS as a disease but by a complicit and neglectful State.

Flanzbaum notes that "most Americans seem so well acquainted with at least some version of the Holocaust that they freely invoke it in metaphor, and often with inflammatory casualness."⁷² This is certainly the case with Kramer, writing some forty years after the war, in the eye of the storm of a new battle. Yet whilst he was certainly inflammatory in his rhetoric, there was little casualness. Instead, Kramer conjured his Holocaust analogies with a furious deliberateness, wholly cognizant of the power of his comparisons. For Kramer, aligning the cultural memory of the Holocaust, and all its attendant horrors, with the catastrophe being enabled for present-day homosexuals, was the most effective way to get the media, the government, the health system, and – crucially – the *community* to take notice and act. Identities of minority groups are often aligned with suffering, and the Americanized Holocaust narrative has allowed many disparate groups in the US to claim this victimhood and voice their oppression.⁷³ Landsberg goes further, suggesting that cultural texts affect people in such a way as to effectively suggest a relationship to events through which they did not live. They do this, in part, by transcending testimony and employing more affective, visceral means of representation. By ostensibly occupying memories of events that did not directly affect a person or group, they can begin to get a sense of the political potential of such "prosthetic memories."⁷⁴ For Landsberg

Prosthetic memory emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past ... In this moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history ... The

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. 7.

⁷³ Hilene Flanzbaum, "The Americanization of the Holocaust," 101.

⁷⁴ Landsberg, "America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory," 66; 73-74.

resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person's subjectivity and politics.⁷⁵

This is precisely what Kramer began to do; realizing the potential of the collective memory of the Holocaust, he utilized its more notorious tropes as metaphors for this new struggle. But more than that, Kramer's narrative appears to place him, his readers, and all those affected (or willfully unaffected) by the AIDS crisis, into a new genocide. Kramer did not live through or experience the Holocaust, but his rhetoric strongly suggests that its imagery and narrative has entirely shaped how he negotiated and represented this new catastrophe – as a “holocaust.”

The emergence and effectiveness of such prosthetic memories are reliant on the increasing dominance of mass-culture.⁷⁶ Forms of popular culture, from film and television to museums and memorials, make memory accessible to the public, as well as highlighting its inherent political nature.⁷⁷ Its ubiquity in American culture brings with it a debate about the extent to which the Holocaust might be hijacked by an Americanized interpretation of it. Memory is employed both as a means with which to negotiate with the past and to form an identity in the present. It is passed on through generations and transmitted from group to group, creating social frameworks and forging collective memories. Such representation by popular culture is sometimes scorned in favour of scholarly treatises, yet it is arguably the former which might produce the greatest, most emotional response, and which evokes people's “memories” of the Holocaust.⁷⁸ These mediated memories are, argues Landsberg, “interchangeable” and “exchangeable,” and their imagery and narratives often reinforce a sense that a person has experienced an event, or at least can identify with some of its attendant representations. As a result, these memories, which appear to the “rememberer” to be authentic, help that person make sense of themselves and the world, influence their politics, and “produce empathy and social responsibility.”⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Ibid. 2.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 23.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 135-136.

⁷⁹ Landsberg, “America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory,” 20-21.

Levy and Sznajder contend that increasing globalization signaled a shift away from collective memories based on nationalism, towards more mediated, “global” memories. Post-World War Two narratives, they argue, represented Germans as perpetrators, Jews as victims and Americans as liberators. At the same time as the Holocaust – the event – receded into history, to be replaced by the *memory* of the Holocaust, the changing national and global political climate altered how its various “players” are remembered and represented. In this context, given the US response to a largely minority-affecting tragedy, it is not that remarkable that Larry Kramer developed an analogy between the Holocaust and the AIDS crisis. Levy and Sznajder argue that not only is the Holocaust itself open to cultural appropriation, the survivor status of the Jews who endured and lived through it is increasingly being challenged and renegotiated by other individuals and groups who identify as victims of traumatic events.⁸⁰ Landsberg argues that “to experience, if only for a flash, the way it feels to have your personhood or agency stripped away, may be the grounds for understanding or for having empathy for something totally other and cognitively unimaginable.”⁸¹

Thus, I argue part of Kramer’s mission was to make the wider American public comprehend the enormity of AIDS by utilizing a paradigm of collective, prosthetic, globalized memory. He invoked a Holocaust narrative as a metaphor for representing the impact of AIDS. We can usefully utilize this notion of multiple memories in another continent, to explain how conditions might allow a hegemonic rendering of the Holocaust in the US to be appropriated in order to represent contemporary marginalized struggles. Henry Greenspan maintains that the Holocaust in America – and by which we can perhaps infer, the first stage of the Americanization of the Holocaust – was, initially, defined by “suppression and stigmatization.”⁸² As early post-war Europe aimed to obfuscate its understanding, remembrance and representation of the Holocaust, survivors who had made it to the US were also silenced and censored, segregated and shunned.⁸³ Survivors attempted to adapt to American ideologies of survival and individualism rather than overemphasizing their grief and ongoing

⁸⁰ Levy and Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, 139.

⁸¹ Landsberg, “America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory,” 85.

⁸² Henry Greenspan, “Testimony and the Rise of the Holocaust Consciousness,” in Flanzbaum, *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, 50.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

struggle.⁸⁴ Moreover, as evidenced by the memoirs analyzed in part one, in the US, the heroic narrative of survivors became more emphasized. Kramer adopted no such heroic, optimistic narrative, instead emphasizing the suppression and stigmatization that gays with AIDS were facing. Kramer wrote within the context of Americanization and certainly did not dilute or simplify his rhetoric, but instead furiously heightened it. For Kramer, Americanizing the Holocaust meant Americanizing the AIDS crisis, and for him, this was a narrative without the comfort of “survival.”

‘God or the Devil’⁸⁵ – The Identities of ‘Prophet’ Kramer

Due in part, no doubt, to his quite particular, personable style – which many dismissed as narcissistic and self-serving – much analysis of Kramer’s work has tended to focus on Kramer himself. These critical evaluations were very much informed by his persona and the fact that *Reports* drew attention to its author as an embodied and delineated individual. John D’Emilio has argued that as a male, middle-class, educated, eloquent New Yorker, Kramer was arguably in a favourable position when it came to having the resources with which to attempt to tackle those who were not tackling AIDS.⁸⁶ More so than, for example, than many of the marginalized voices for whom he was speaking. Critical evaluation of the AIDS literature that emerged early on reveals a tension between the need to identify the movements with those most affected by the crisis (both ACT UP and GHMC were created and run predominantly by gay men), and a cognizance of the fact that the disease was not discriminatory in regards to class, race, location, sex or sexual orientation.⁸⁷ As Kramer’s rhetoric became angrier, as more officials were caught in his crosshairs, and as his tactics for getting his message across became ever more extreme, he found himself increasingly ostracized not only by the groups he helped create and run, but by the people with power from whom he sought action. Kramer claims this is large part due to class; whilst he was to all intents a Yale-educated, middle-class white gay man, the polemic he espoused and the strategies he employed were those disruptive, rowdy, guerrilla-style tactics more commonly

⁸⁴ Ibid. 55

⁸⁵ Maxine Wolfe, “The Mother of Us All,” in Lawrence D. Mass, ed. *We Must Love One Another or Die: The Life and Legacies of Larry Kramer* (London: Cassell, 1997), 284.

⁸⁶ John D’Emilio, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 80.

⁸⁷ Arnie Kantrowitz, “An Enemy of the People,” in Mass, 104.

associated with working-class street activism. Such behaviour precludes its protagonists from a seat at the table of power, with officials dividing movements by only associating with those who engage in more middle-class endeavours.⁸⁸ By dint of sheer dogged perseverance, Kramer was able to transcend these unwritten rules that he was unwilling to follow, and his work – and its subsequent results – demonstrate that anger “within a culture that [traditionally] demands order, could be of immense value in disrupting the status quo and shifting public debate.”⁸⁹ Yet, as Rodger McFarlane argues, as white middle-class gay men, Kramer and his activist peers, *were* clearly at an advantage, having access to the medical, legal and political professions. Even these kinds of privileges, though, would prove ultimately futile, as nothing could seemingly stem the onslaught of the disease.⁹⁰ Bersani was critical of the assumption that gays on the whole would have any lasting impact on either the disease itself, or indeed any decisions made about them in its regard, writing that homosexuals were “frequently on the side of power, but powerless; frequently affluent, but politically destitute; frequently articulate, but with *nothing but a moral argument*... to keep themselves in the protected white enclaves and out of the quarantine camps.”⁹¹

On occasion, Kramer’s consideration of class, social status and standing within the community is muddled and somewhat problematic. In an interview for *The Advocate* in 1992, Kramer overemphasized the power that homosexuals could theoretically wield, particularly because “gays are rich.”⁹² Yet this broad, sweeping generalization – Kramer’s literary, and literal, stock in trade, according to his critics – ignored, for example, hustlers, addicts, those on welfare or simply people who did not reside in the east or west coast metropolises, and thus did not have the concomitant access to services, events and other opportunities this afforded.⁹³ Bonnie J Dow argues that Kramer implied that “for superficial and hedonistic motives, gay’s political and financial power is focused outward rather than inward, reflecting their disregard for

⁸⁸ Wolfe, “The Mother of Us All,” 285-286; See also William Greider, *Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 126;163

⁸⁹ Michelangelo Signorile, “A Legacy of Anger,” in *Mass*, ed. 274.

⁹⁰ Rodger McFarlane, “We Must Love One Another Or Die,” in *Mass*, ed. 222.

⁹¹ Leo Bersani, ‘Is the Rectum a Grave?’ *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, The MIT Press, October, Vol.43, Winter (1987): 10.

⁹² Victor Zonana, *Kramer vs the world*, *The Advocate*, issue 617, December 1 (1992): 43.

⁹³ Canaan Parker, “Notes on Black and Larry Kramer,” in *Mass*, ed. 298-299.

their own community,”⁹⁴ Kramer lambasted his fellow gays who would rather attend lavish black tie straight charity events than get involved with, and support those afflicted with AIDS.⁹⁵ Again, the effect Kramer has here is to homogenize homosexual lifestyles, assuming that all gays have access to sumptuous balls, or the ability to make substantial charitable donations.

Kramer’s politics of identity were often in stark contrast to that of many urban gay men, whose identity was largely based on their sexual conduct, which they considered a result of the hard-won gay liberation fight.⁹⁶ Many gay men, for so long the victims of subjugation, abuse, ignorance, and willful neglect, were now faced with the spectre of AIDS and with Larry Kramer’s challenge to them to re-evaluate their values, and, thus their identities.⁹⁷ The critical appraisals of Kramer and his work concentrate on the social and political contradictions of his narrative voice and the often-hostile reactions this evoked. So, for example, his peers comment upon his passionate love alongside his deep antagonism, his thick skin and rage belying a vulnerability, or his purported “anti-sexual... internalized homophobia.”⁹⁸ Students of Kramer have described him as “a fine writer and a sensitive (if abrasive) human being”⁹⁹ whilst Maxine Wolfe goes as far as to claim that many of his contemporaries considered Kramer to be either “God or the Devil.”¹⁰⁰ Critical analyzes of his work suggest that, in truth, Kramer was considered somewhere in the middle of these two beings; many who were harangued, abused, accused and cajoled by him throughout the years often came to consider this just Kramer’s way, and came to respect and admire him as the crisis wore on and he began to get results.¹⁰¹

Kramer’s identity is constituted of contrariety; writer and activist Arnie Kantrowitz noted in 1997 that Kramer:

⁹⁴ Bonnie J. Dow, “AIDS, Perspective by Incongruity, and Gay Identity in Larry Kramer’s “1,112 and Counting,”” *Communication Studies*, 45, 3-4, ProQuest (1994/ 1995): 235.

⁹⁵ Larry Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, 45.

⁹⁶ Dow, “AIDS, Perspective by Incongruity,” 227.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 228-229.

⁹⁸ D’Emilio, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 74-75.

⁹⁹ Kimberley Christensen, “Teaching Undergraduates About AIDS: An Action-Oriented Approach,” *Harvard Educational Review*, 61, 3 (1991): 350.

¹⁰⁰ Wolfe, “The Mother of Us All,” in Mass, ed. 284.

¹⁰¹ Anthony S. Fauci, “Friendship and Antagonism: The Passionate Tactics of Larry Kramer,” in Mass, ed. 302-305.

has made himself an outsider at odds with every community he belongs to. As a gay man at the height of the sexual revolution in the 1970s, he called for the end of promiscuity. As a political activist, he excoriated his own constituents as harshly as he assailed unresponsive government agencies. As a Jew, he upbraided and satirized Jews ... He stands apart from the crowd he writes about, choosing his own perspective from which he can judge others.¹⁰²

Indeed, argues Katrowitz, once the crisis became too big to ignore, many disregarded the tone of Kramer's earlier moralistic, judgmental and gay-baiting rhetoric, as it was felt that the "prophet" – as those who once critiqued him began to now think of Kramer – had been right all along.¹⁰³ What Kramer "predicted" as far back as his 1978 novel *Faggots* – the danger of favouring licentiousness over love, multiple men over monogamy – and the vitriolic hyperbole he had espoused against this ever since, had all come to pass.¹⁰⁴ Yet, despite this, and though he was integral to the formation and continuation of ACT UP, which I consider later in the chapter, Kramer's conservatism and sometimes hectoring moralism stands in stark contrast to much of the activism centred around the pink triangle. Though also motivated by anger, speaking out, visibility and action, ACT UP also, via the pink triangle, did invoke symbolism of hope and positivity, and increasingly foregrounded the memory of the homosexuals persecuted under Nazism. Kramer's predominant cultural reference, particularly throughout *Reports* remained the Holocaust, and this was often informed by his identity as a gay Jew.

Though not always foregrounded, themes of religion and faith run throughout Kramer's work. He often references his Jewish heritage and his relationship with God in the era of AIDS, echoing Holocaust survivors such as Elie Wiesel who famously asked "For God's sake, where is God?"¹⁰⁵ Moreover, those who witnessed first-hand Kramer's

¹⁰² Kantrowitz, "An Enemy of the People," in *Mass*, 73.

¹⁰³ D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 81.

¹⁰⁴ Kantrowitz, "An Enemy of the People," in *Mass*, 104.

¹⁰⁵ Elie Wiesel, Marion Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006). Holocaust testimonies and secondary texts often engage with theological inquiry, questioning how God could have "allowed" the Holocaust, see Remkes Kooistra, *Where was God?: Lives and Thoughts of Holocaust and World War II Survivors* (Ontario: Mosaic Press, 2001); Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Holocaust Theology: A Reader* (New York: NYU Press, 2002); Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, Gershon Greenberg, *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses during and after the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

activism, and those who have studied his work since, often liken Kramer to a “saint,” especially given the prescient nature of his early work in relation to the unfolding AIDS crisis.¹⁰⁶ Michael Denny is more forthright in his biblical analogies – which might be considered peculiar, and indeed inappropriate, given Kramer’s problematic relationship with many of his fellow Jews. Denny likens Kramer to an old testament prophet, one who speaks uncomfortable truths to an indifferent, unappreciative audience.¹⁰⁷ There were meetings about AIDS in which Kramer cried “intentional genocide” and insisted that half of the audience in the room would be dead within years, and whilst few believed him at the time, he was eerily, depressingly accurate.¹⁰⁸ Kramer often felt that he had failed in his fight; despite his years of rabble-rousing rhetoric, no cure for AIDS was forthcoming and the numbers of dead increased – though at a lesser rate. Yet his achievements were considerable. He helped facilitate manifest public accomplishments with AIDS-related drugs and helped finally get the US administration to sit up and act. Roger McFarlane notes that Kramer’s ‘most lasting gift to humanity is his prophetic and highly moral voice. While millions of others turned away, Larry spoke the truth as he knew it as dramatically and as compellingly and as often and as well as he could.’¹⁰⁹ The “prophet and saint” narrative that has developed around Kramer, his activism, and his achievements around AIDS, sits in stark contrast to that which was foregrounded in much of the testimonies of the homosexual survivors of Nazism in chapter two. There they argued that there would be no “heroic tales about our kind.”¹¹⁰ Yet, despite his seemingly unique ability to provoke and antagonize, Kramer became increasingly heroized. Responses to his work acknowledged his obstreperousness yet admitted that his way was the only way to get anyone to act.¹¹¹

For many, Kramer was, eventually, the hero of the hour and this paragon persona manifested itself, somewhat problematically, in Kramer’s work, which often featured at its centre a gay “hero.” This idealized protagonist usually piously rejected

¹⁰⁶ Simon Watney, “Foreword: The Persistence of Memory,” in Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, xv-xxix, Victor Zonana, *Kramer vs the world*, The Advocate, issues 617, December 1 1992, 26;

¹⁰⁷ Denny, “A Mouthful of Air,” in Mass, ed. 179;

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 180.

¹⁰⁹ McFarlane, “We Must Love One Another Or Die,” 281.

¹¹⁰ Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 15.

¹¹¹ “In Defense of Larry Kramer,” accessed 11 April 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/14/books/l-in-defense-of-larry-kramer-752089.html>

promiscuity and embraced what might be termed a heteronormative approach to homosexuality, and was often based on facets of Kramer himself.¹¹² Bonnie J. Dow argues that, as *Reports from the Holocaust* progresses, Kramer's identity begins to metamorphosize, as he anticipates his fellow gays' identities shifting too, from what he considered self-obsessed promiscuity to politically active and sexually sensible.¹¹³ Yet the post-Stonewall gay liberation movement of the 1970s was one that celebrated (homo)sexuality, whilst critiquing the dominant political ideology as "capitalist ... patriarchal ... exploitative, hierarchical and oppressive."¹¹⁴ Moreover, the movement embraced promiscuity as an opposition to heteronormative monogamy; for them, unlike Kramer perhaps, strength, survival and self-worth was not connected to being "sexually sensible." By the time Kramer published his controversial novel, *Faggots*, in 1978, and certainly once he was having to scream loudly and vociferously about a new gay cancer in the early 1980s, activism had led to a degree of increased visibility and acceptance of homosexuality, regardless of men such as Kramer (over?)emphasizing their lasciviousness.¹¹⁵ Moreover, such judgmental conservatism did not take into account those for whom clandestine encounters and a sense of sexual illegitimacy was celebrated, enjoyed, willfully oppositional and key to a gay politics which explicitly criticized heteronormativity. Aligning with social norms as the answer to AIDS risked removing this hard-fought distinctiveness.¹¹⁶ This distinctiveness speaks back to the social spaces cultivated in Weimar and the sense of gay identity as radical and different from heterosexist norms. Kramer face accusations by his detractors (and these were often other gay men) of deliberately controversial writing, internalized homophobia and, more specifically, being anti-sex.¹¹⁷ Many critiques of Kramer and his work cite

¹¹² Douglas Crimp, "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, October, Vol.43, Winter (1987): 248.

¹¹³ Dow, "AIDS, Perspective by Incongruity," 237.

¹¹⁴ D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 77.

¹¹⁵ Ibid; This 'acceptability', however, extended for the most part to middle-class, white gay men and largely ignored lesbians, people of colour and transgender people, and certainly – in the case of the AIDS crisis – roundly rejected any links with intravenous drug-users.

¹¹⁶ Kantrowitz, "An Enemy of the People," in Mass, 102-103; Christensen, "Teaching Undergraduates About AIDS," 351; Douglas Crimp is also useful here in his condemnation of the homogenization of homosexuals into a non-threatening, "positive," media-friendly image. He cites the 1989 novelized 'sequel' to *And the Band Played On – After the Ball* – which, he argues, marginalized community differences, effectively "purging our community of "fringe" gay groups" - Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy," *The MIT Press*, October, Vol.51, Winter (1989): 6; see also Kirk Marshall, and Hunter Madsen, *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the '90s* (New York: Doubleday, 1989).

¹¹⁷ Howard Markel argued that "a requirement of the journalist, and certainly the historian... is to explain human society, rather than to point fingers." - Howard Markel, "Journals of the Plague Years: Documenting the History of the AIDS Epidemic in the United States," *American Journal of Public*

playwright Robert Chesley's assertion to "read anything by Kramer closely, I think you'll find the subtext is always: the wages of gay sin are death."¹¹⁸ Kramer's near-obsession with what he considered the gay pre-occupation with sex was met with disdain from his fellow gay men who accused his conservatism as seeking to enforce homosexuality to adapt to the "norms" of Western society.¹¹⁹ Moreover, many objected to what they saw as his prudish attempts at atrophying the sexual freedoms hard-won by his forebears.¹²⁰ Kramer's dismissive response to Chesley's oft-quoted maligning, far from refuting, actively reinforced his position. Countering what Chesley considered his homosexual self-loathing, which often manifested as anti-promiscuity rhetoric and victim-blaming, Kramer retorted that "there must be a heavy burden of shame underpinning this. And it's time to expunge the shame ... If we're not doing anything we're ashamed of, then no one should object to the book."¹²¹ Yet, it has been argued that Kramer's attacks on sex were made, in large part, to place the emphasis on gay love, friendship and monogamy.¹²² Indeed some critics argue that Kramer's attempts to join sex with love were made in the name of conserving life. For example, Stephen G. Post argues that Kramer rejects the libertarian image of casual sex unrestrained by the absence of love. He offers a romantic notion of love that provides sex with a necessary and essential context.¹²³ Douglas Crimp is highly critical of activists such as Kramer and Randy Shilts, author of *And the Band Played On*, particularly with regards to their moralizing, judgmental views on sex.¹²⁴ Specifically, he is highly disdainful of their tendency to homogenize a "homosexual experience," one that implied that all gay men had wanted to be promiscuous before AIDS, then all began to abruptly fear sex once they knew of the crisis.¹²⁵ Furthermore, by ignoring the heterogeneous nature of gay life, Kramer was contributing to a damaging narrative, one

Health, 91 (7), July (2001): 1025; Leo Bersani is also scathing in his evaluation of writers such as Kramer and Shilts, who aligned themselves with heteronormative practices, and condemned what they considered too overtly (homo)sexual – "In Debate, Gay Men Aim to Find Middle Path; Homophobia Redux," accessed 8 July 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/12/16/opinion/1-in-debate-gay-men-aim-to-find-middle-path-homophobia-redux-636428.html>

¹¹⁸ Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, 10; D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 79.

¹¹⁹ Kantrowitz, "An Enemy of the People," in Mass, 101.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 98-99; 101.

¹²¹ Robert Chesley, *It's Hard to Walk Away from a Good Blowjob*, *Gaysweek*, January 1, 1979, 13; Kantrowitz, "An Enemy of the People," in Mass, 107.

¹²² Denny, "A Mouthful of Air," 180.

¹²³ Stephen G Post, "Journal of Medical Ethics," *Book Reviews* (1995): 250-251.

¹²⁴ Douglas Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (London: MIT, 2002), 286-287.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 242.

that would be co-opted by right-wing and religious organizations as a means of subjugating gays and victim-blaming. Crimp asserts that this narrative often implies an extremely narrow definition of sexual practice and is frequently dehumanizing and oppressive.¹²⁶ Indeed, we can draw parallels with the sort of thinking that would be used to form Nazi ideology half a century earlier.

“Gay history” can often be analogous to “gay white men’s history,” whether in the form of ignoring the plights of lesbians or misrepresenting the role of trans people and people of colour in the gay liberation movement. It is a criticism also levelled at AIDS writers such as Kramer, both in the naming of the first AIDS service organization the Gay Men’s Health Crisis, and the assumption that lesbians would not be politically active or concerned about AIDS.¹²⁷ Kramer remained a deeply controversial and challenging figure because of messianic moralism and this was exacerbated by both his visceral writing style and his divisive Holocaust analogies. I turn now to analyze and evaluate both what Kramer said, and how he said it.

“Your voice is your power.”¹²⁸ – Writing as Fighting

Both the AIDS crisis, and speaking about it, increased the public visibility of homosexuality. Kramer in particular acknowledges that he “uses words as fighting tools [hoping that] ... people will hear them and respond.”¹²⁹ He demonstrates how the GMHC attempted to organize and rally, in order to get officials to listen and (re)act. For Kramer and his peers, this activism, in the early stages of the crisis, was used as a measure to educate, research, assist and legislate.¹³⁰ Kramer wanted to write stories that were not being written, tell tales that were not being told, and confront a system that rejected homosexuals. And he framed these desires strikingly in terms of the ways in which many survivors of Nazism felt post-war.¹³¹ In *Reports* Kramer berates non-political homosexuals, content with their comfortable, capitalist life under the Reagan

¹²⁶ Ibid. 254; 257; 261.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 251.

¹²⁸ Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, 350.

¹²⁹ Ibid. xx; xxvi, 48; 145.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 52-60.

¹³¹ Ibid. 186; 222; 227; 255; Primo Levi, *Survival In Auschwitz: the Nazi Assault on Humanity*, (New York: Collier Books, 1993), 9.

administration via a comparison with the rise of Nazism, arguing that “there appears to be a margin of acceptance, and tolerance enough; no one is yet coming to haul us, as a group, into the streets or march us off to camps. This is comfort enough for most.”¹³² Kramer claims that a group who is economically comfortable, gay and educated have little or no reason not to speak up and demand their rights are recognized.¹³³

Kramer himself repeatedly uses deliberately inflammatory rhetoric to emphasize his points. His 1983 piece in the *New York Native* is particularly illustrative of this strategy:

I am sick of “men” who say, “We’ve got to keep quiet or *they* will do such and such.” *They* usually means the straight majority, the “Moral” Majority, or similarly perceived representatives of *them*. Okay, you “men” – be my guests: You can march off now to the gas chambers; just get right in line.¹³⁴

His derisory emphasis of the word “men” implies that his definition differs greatly to those who sit idly by whilst their detractors vilify and subjugate them. His closing sentence seems to evoke Polish camp survivor Tadeusz Borowski's 1976 collection *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*.¹³⁵ Borowski's text itself implicitly suggests the passivity of “ordinary people” in the face of evil and the helplessness engendered by such abhorrent circumstances.¹³⁶ Kramer's use of the term “gas chamber” at the end, is intentionally provocative, and a direct conflation of the Jewish Holocaust and what Kramer considers to be a gay genocide.¹³⁷ *Reports* utilizes such deliberately inflammatory language and challenging analogies, drawing repeatedly on Holocaust imagery and rhetoric to emphasize his points. Kramer argues that:

It is not too early to see AIDS as the homosexual holocaust. I have come reluctantly to believe that genocide is occurring: that we are witnessing – or *not* witnessing – the systematic, planned annihilation of some by others with the purpose of eradicating an undesirable portion of the population.¹³⁸

¹³² Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, 256.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 46.

¹³⁵ Jan Kott, Michael Kandel, Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1976).

¹³⁶ Alan L. Berger, Gloria L. Cronin, “Jewish American and Holocaust Literature: Representation in the Postmodern World,” *SUNY Press*, 1 Feb (2012): 72; Primo Levi, Philip Roth, *Survival in Auschwitz*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 150; the suggestion of Holocaust passivity is discussed further below.

¹³⁷ Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, 148.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 263.

Kramer noted that the vehement opposition from many Jews (and others) to his consideration of the AIDS crisis as in any way genocidal or a “holocaust” and that such hyperbolic narrative was often considered highly offensive. Kramer’s response to these charges was that in order for the memory of the dead he had lost, and awareness of those still living with AIDS, to remain foregrounded, a certain level of bombastic narrative was imperative. Kramer writes “If I use gross language – go ahead, be offended – I don’t know how else to reach you, how to reach everybody.”¹³⁹ As part of his strategy to get results by being reprehensible, Kramer invoked literal and historical Holocaust metaphors to support his argument. Moreover, he steadfastly defended that he should be permitted to use provocative prose to describe the contemporary situation. Kramer cites Primo Levi’s argument that in order for the memory of the Holocaust to survive, “a certain dose of rhetoric is perhaps indispensable.”¹⁴⁰

In a 1990 article in *OutWeek* magazine, unsubtly titled “*A Call to Riot*,” Kramer again invoked imagery of the Holocaust and used incendiary language when he wrote

We are being INTENTIONALLY ALLOWED TO DIE. This is no longer hyperbole, exaggeration, opinion – it is fact. WE HAVE BEEN LINED UP IN FRONT OF A FIRING SQUAD AND IT IS CALLED AIDS. WE MUST RIOT! I AM CALLING FOR A FUCKING RIOT!¹⁴¹

Kramer was acutely aware of his role as AIDS agitator-in-chief and was unapologetic about his own “certain dose of rhetoric.” Despite what charges his critics levelled at him, Kramer insisted on the necessity of “hysteria and hyperbole.”¹⁴²

James E. Van Buskirk noted in 1989 that Kramer’s “pieces are passionately angry and, because his warnings have gone largely unheeded, use increasingly scathing language.”¹⁴³ His work was concurrently cultural and political, he used plays, novels, speeches and polemic to address a public with a shrewd understanding of the media, in

¹³⁹ Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, 171.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 263; see also Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 9.

¹⁴¹ Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, 317 (emphasis in original).

¹⁴² Ibid. 263.

¹⁴³ James E. Van Buskirk, *Book Review Digest*. H.W. Wilson Company, Volume 85 (1989): 929.

order to make socio-political points and achieve demonstrable results.¹⁴⁴ His work was also incredibly personalized, focusing on key players (or rather those who resolutely refused to ‘play’) and his own particular interactions with, and opinions of, them. Denenny argues that it is precisely this meshing of the personal – or perhaps the private – with the political – the public – that makes *Reports* so effective.¹⁴⁵ Kramer’s use of language – angry, urgent, visceral and abusive – was considered authentic and potent and, as a result, Kramer’s polemic skill eventually, partially translated into political impact.¹⁴⁶ According to Bonnie J. Dow by disrupting those who read or listened to him, Kramer was able to shock many of them into “a willingness to examine [their] fundamental beliefs and values.”¹⁴⁷ She further argues that *Reports* acts as a tool for bearing witness and for resisting, for Kramer knew more than most that if silence equals death, then speaking equals salvation.¹⁴⁸

Yet Kramer’s caustic style may indeed have hampered as well as enhanced his efforts; for whilst many people were actuated by his polemic calls-to-arms, many more were alienated by his rambunctious rhetoric, within both the gay community and medical and political spheres.¹⁴⁹ In speeches, Kramer would frequently address his gay audience as “sissies... faggots and queers,” and if they did not balk at these names, he would dial up the distaste and refer to them simply as “murderers.”¹⁵⁰ His audiences, far from being jolted into a sense of outrage at the inaction of the government and the medical profession, instead directed much of their anger at Kramer, who they felt was derogatory, accusatory and “on an ego trip of monumental proportions.”¹⁵¹ Indeed,

¹⁴⁴ John D’Emilio, “A Meaning for All Those Words: Sex, Politics, History and Larry Kramer,” in Mass, ed. 73.

¹⁴⁵ “Interview with Michael Denenny,” accessed 4 June 2019, http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2014/10/27/an_interview_with_michael_denenny_about_the_hi_story_of_gay_publishing.html

¹⁴⁶ Judith Laurence Pastore, ed. *Confronting AIDS Through Literature: The Responsibilities of Representation*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 41-42.

¹⁴⁷ Dow, “AIDS, Perspective by Incongruity,” 226.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. see also Denenny, “A Mouthful of Air,” 186-187; Lawrence D. Mass, *Larry versus Larry*, in Mass, ed. 11; I am invoking here the slogan created by the collective who would form ACT-UP, and whom I shall turn to later in the chapter.

¹⁴⁹ D’Emilio, “A Meaning for All Those Words,” 85. This alienation was not only felt in medical and political environments; as part of a university study of *Reports*, Kimberley Christenson notes that students and tutors questioned the use of Kramer as a text, and, moreover, the appropriateness of his analogous reading of the Holocaust and the AIDS crisis. Many echoed scholarly and political criticism of Kramer’s – and Indeed Shilts’ – texts as being divisive when they should instead have been unifying. See Kimberley Christensen, “Teaching Undergraduates About AIDS,” 351.

¹⁵⁰ Kantrowitz, “An Enemy of the People,” in Mass, 109.

¹⁵¹ Denenny, “A Mouthful of Air,” 184.

critics have claimed that Kramer's bellicose style was often inimical to garnering sympathy or support, and that by not exercising care and restraint in what he said and how he said it, Kramer ran the risk of alienating those who otherwise might have advanced his cause.¹⁵² Crimp is not only ferociously critical of Kramer's moralising, he questions his eligibility to pass comment, going as far as to suggest that Kramer was ignorant of gay "history, its complexities, its theory and practice... [and] did not participate in the gay movement."¹⁵³ On a surface level this is too stark and simplistic an assessment, however. Kramer, for his often-questionable stylistic narrative and use of challenging language can hardly stand accused of being uninvolved in a "gay movement." Rather, as noted above, Kramer was central to the formation of both the Gay Men's Health Crisis in 1982 and ACT UP in 1987, activist groups created as a response to AIDS. However, Crimp's concern with Kramer is his moralising stance on gay sexual activity in a time of crisis, one that, argues Crimp, ignores the particular nuances of gay identity and the pivotal role that hard-won sexual freedom played in establishing this identity.¹⁵⁴

The complex nature of the crisis, and the myriad responses to it are apparent in Kramer's life and legacy, his words and his actions. Before publishing his renowned 1983 essay, *I, 112 and Counting*, the GMHC insisted he include a disclaimer, making it clear that his opinions were not shared by the organization. Kramer's rage and rhetoric were not shared by many in the GMHC who favoured actions that were less confrontational. Yet there can be little denying that Kramer's methods worked, as subsequent demonstrations replete with provocative placards and incendiary imagery ensured that, slowly, people began to take notice of the emerging crisis.¹⁵⁵ Kramer himself noted in a 1992 interview in *The Advocate*, "Of course I speak in hyperbole. Of course, I speak in broad strokes. If I didn't, no one would have heard a thing I have said over all of these years."¹⁵⁶ Kramer's writing tone in *Reports*, his use of uppercase letters and multiple exclamation points, repetition, expletives and colloquialisms sometimes feels incongruous in a text that one would normally expect to take the form of a more

¹⁵² Markel, "Journals of the Plague Years," 1025.

¹⁵³ Crimp, "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," 247.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Patrick Merla, "A Normal Heart," in Mass, ed. 39-40.

¹⁵⁶ Victor Zonana, *Kramer vs the world*, *The Advocate*, issue 617, December 1 (1992): 48.

traditional historical record. Yet Kramer's caustic, virtually hysterical style is the point, it is designed to invoke shock, encourage action and initiate change.¹⁵⁷

More problematic than 'style' is the fact that much of Kramer's hectoring rhetoric was directed at homosexuals themselves, whom he thought were actively negligent in organizing, protesting, consciousness-raising and fighting. He often lambasted those gays who were more concerned with candle-lit vigils or quiet reflection at funerals. This antagonism to mourning over militancy might partly stem from the accusation that AIDS was an epidemic that was being willfully, hegemonically enabled.¹⁵⁸ His acerbic, often jarring writing style was employed precisely to accentuate his message. And the meaning behind that message – that the AIDS crisis represents a gay holocaust – was not a lone, crank theory. Arnie Kantrowitz's analogous reading of Jewish and homosexual history, written a year before Kramer's *Reports*, notes:

Instead of sympathizing with us as the victims of a disease, those who wish us dead will accuse us of having invented AIDS and will . . . accuse us of being unclean. 'Unclean' is what they called the Jews of Germany before the racial purity laws made it illegal to have sex with them.¹⁵⁹

For activists such as Kramer and Kantrowitz the conflation of the Holocaust with AIDS was an effective mechanism to counter state inaction and repression. The Holocaust in American culture had come to signify horror untethered to particular history, and in order for the horror of the inaction over AIDS to be communicable the Holocaust metaphor was seen as necessary. Yet to many of their critics, it was unthinkable.¹⁶⁰

“AIDS is our Holocaust... New York City is our Auschwitz.” – Kramer and the genocide frame

In the last chapter I presented a case for using Holocaust memory in order to critically analyze the memoirs of gay survivors of Nazism. The use of this framework was not meant to relativize the memory of the Holocaust, nor engage in a form of Holocaust

¹⁵⁷ E.J. Rand, “An Inflammatory Fag and a Queer Form: Larry Kramer, Polemics and Rhetorical Agency,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (93:3): 298.

¹⁵⁸ Douglas Crimp, “Mourning and Militancy,” *The MIT Press*, October, Vol.51, Winter (1989): 6.

¹⁵⁹ “AIDS and the Holocaust,” accessed 1 October 2018,

<http://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/23/books/1-aids-and-the-holocaust-156488.html?mcubz=0>

¹⁶⁰ Gould, “The Shame of Gay Pride in Early AIDS Activism,” 168.

denial. My argument was that theories of trauma and testimony usually associated with Jewish Holocaust victims/survivors can be useful when considering other victim groups, provided we acknowledge the specificity of the Shoah and the intent behind it. Larry Kramer's invocation of the Holocaust in terms of the response to the AIDS crisis was more explicit. Kramer was not merely suggesting that, as I did with my reading of gay memoirs in terms of Holocaust testimony, there might be strategies inherent in Holocaust memory that might help with AIDS awareness and activism. Kramer drew upon the cultural memory of the Holocaust in order to make specific comparisons with the AIDS epidemic.

David Caron notes in his study of AIDS activism in France but which is applicable to the American context, that activists posited "AIDS as a historical turning point in gay history and relied on the cultural memory of the Holocaust to help shape the relationship between disaster, community formation, and political legitimacy."¹⁶¹ He argues that communities trying to cope with AIDS used "structural similarities" to the Holocaust to energize, politicize and galvanize, even going as far as to demand trials similar to Nuremberg. Caron explains how we might understand why AIDS activists might appropriate the Holocaust in order to make sense of their own plight, not least in that both groups of people were dehumanized to the extent that they were effectively reduced to bodies.¹⁶²

In the United States AIDS was increasingly seen as an affliction brought on by gays themselves, one which posed a threat to the American public at large. Kramer wrote "we are being blamed for AIDS, for this epidemic; we are being called its perpetrators, through our blood, through our "promiscuity," through just being the gay men so much of the rest of the world has learned to hate."¹⁶³ Moreover, Kramer made the claim that the horrors being faced by gays in the form of AIDS were every bit as atrocious as anything that happened under Nazism and he explicitly compares the enemies of US homosexuals to Hitler.¹⁶⁴ Kramer opined that "AIDS is our Holocaust. Tens of thousands of our precious men are dying. Soon it will be hundreds of thousands. AIDS

¹⁶¹ Caron, "Tactful Encounters," 156.

¹⁶² Ibid. 170.

¹⁶³ Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, 48 (my emphasis).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 96; 146.

is our Holocaust and Reagan is our Hitler. New York City is our Auschwitz.”¹⁶⁵ Aware of the transgressive nature of using the words such as holocaust and genocide, Kramer qualifies his assertions by explaining that he believes there is both a purposeful ignorance of what is happening to homosexuals, as well as a very deliberate set of measures designed to eradicate them. These include, Kramer argues, mandatory testing of gays, deliberate lack of sex education for young people and banning contraceptive advertising.¹⁶⁶ He goes on to compare a leading doctor’s inaction on AIDS to Adolf Eichmann following orders during WWII, and the lack of imagination on how to deal with the crisis equitable to the banality of evil that allowed Nazism to flourish.¹⁶⁷

Kramer continued these analogies not just in relation to AIDS but also in relation to his estrangement from the groups he co-founded.¹⁶⁸ He was specifically critical of the “gay response” to AIDS, describing his former colleagues, counterparts and the national press as “equal to murderers” for not doing more, or as he would have it, barely anything, to combat the disease. Kramer goes further than simply accusing them of being bystanders, a defence invoked by many Germans post-war.¹⁶⁹ He claimed that gay men almost willingly participated in the attempted genocide of themselves by indifferently accepting the fate decided for them by the US government. He proffers a version of what might be described as *Reagan’s Willing Executioners*¹⁷⁰ when he writes that:

many people don’t believe me when I say that AIDS is a genocide being intentionally inflicted upon gay people and other minorities and marginalized populations. We are being *allowed* to die. Genocide ... need not be intentional ... He who looks the other way is just as guilty as he who kills his brother.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 173.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 197; For more on this, see Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994); Randy Shilts also demonstrates the use of similar rhetoric by AIDS activists when gay men in San Francisco’s invoked Holocaust imagery in an attempt to halt the planned closure of the bath houses. They demonstrated at City Hall, holding signs that controversially read ‘Out of the Baths, Into the Ovens.’ See Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 442.

¹⁶⁸ Kramer was ousted from GMHC in 1983 largely due to his abrasive style.

¹⁶⁹ Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, 75-77; see also David Cesarani, Paul A. Levin, *Bystanders to the Holocaust: A Re-evaluation* (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁷⁰ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996).

¹⁷¹ Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, 440.

He placed strong emphasis on why gays, in his estimation, did not fight back, but merely passively allowed the US administration to effectively “murder them” as a way of trying to provoke collective protest. Kramer asks: “Why is our community so impotent and lethargic? Is everything *too* good for us? Do we need Dunkirks before we can organize and fight back?”¹⁷² This mode of address too has echoes of the apparent silence that preceded the Nazi genocide, his use of “Dunkirk” calling again on World War II analogies. Most contentiously, Kramer was mobilizing the established myth of “Jewish passivity” - a myth that has been comprehensively challenged ¹⁷³

Kramer continued to actively campaign for AIDS awareness and action and his Holocaust analogies endured. For example, he often mobilized grotesque Holocaust imagery. He writes: “... we lie down and die and our bodies pile up higher and higher in hospitals and homes and hospices and streets and doorways.”¹⁷⁴ He also invokes a term most often associated with the Holocaust – *Never Again* – when he writes of the government’s inability to deal with the crisis; “We must find ways of making sure these atrocities never, never happen again.”¹⁷⁵ Moreover, when berating the national press and other media for their prolonged refusal to cover the epidemic, Kramer likened them to perpetrators in the new gay “Final Solution.”¹⁷⁶ He also said of the US president’s continuing, willful neglect of the disease: “there’s only one word to describe his monumental disdain for the dead and dying: genocide.”¹⁷⁷

Laurence D. Mass notes that despite the widespread criticism levelled at Kramer for his “Holocaust” metaphor, its use served to elicit a galvanized response. As he puts it, shock and anger develop into dialogue and discussion, awareness is preceded by activism.¹⁷⁸ Yet as has been noted previously, fellow activists at the time were often furious at Kramer’s Holocaust analogies, arguing that despite his Jewish identity,

¹⁷² Ibid. 22.

¹⁷³ Yehuda Bauer, *Unanswered Questions: Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews, Jewish Resistance and Passivity in the Face of the Holocaust* (New York: Schocken, 1989), 174; Patrick Henry, editor, *Jewish Resistance Against the Nazis* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 8-9, 16, 21.

¹⁷⁴ Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, 195.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 61.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 97.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 158.

¹⁷⁸ Mass, *We Must Love One Another or Die*, 11.

Kramer ought not to enter the murky waters of Holocaust appropriation or make ignorant and insensitive comments and comparisons. Maxine Wolfe notes that, during an ACT UP meeting, many were incensed when Kramer implored “Are you going to be like the Jews and let yourselves be led into concentration camps?”¹⁷⁹

It is important to note that, as AIDS activists employed Holocaust rhetoric in order to raise awareness of the crisis, conservatives invoked similar imagery in order to stigmatize its victims. Whilst to activists and allies, silence equaled death, to conservative America AIDS equaled social deviance. Homosexuals were often associated with promiscuity and drug-taking.¹⁸⁰ As Sturken notes, “each person with AIDS was marked by association with the figure of the narcissistic and reckless gay man”¹⁸¹ For some, it became impossible to distinguish the disease from the “diseased,” and AIDS became synonymous with the “perverse”, the “deviant” and an “entire community.” This set of powerful associations lead to moral panic, which in turn allowed those in authority to feel enabled to act in order to quell fears, stem spread and, by subterfuge, blame, and then subjugate a group of people.¹⁸² In 1986, conservative writer William Buckley recalled the memory of the concentration camps in an article in the *New York Times*, when he advocated that “everyone detected with AIDS should be tattooed in the upper forearm, to protect common-needle users, and on the buttocks, to prevent the victimization of other homosexuals.”¹⁸³ A year later the same newspaper reported that “a hasty step toward detention camps ... might one day be seen as brave.”¹⁸⁴ Gould points out that such language, coupled with gruesome imagery goes some way to explaining how the understanding of AIDS as a “holocaust” became generalized; “Concentration camps and tattooing as a means of identifying and separating people was being considered, sometimes even advocated... [whilst] the use of genocide rhetoric [amongst] street AIDS activists... also directed people’s thoughts to the Nazi holocaust [citing] the rising number of deaths... and the PWA ‘look.’”¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁹ Wolfe, “The Mother of Us All,” 284.

¹⁸⁰ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the Aids Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 145.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* 15.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* 149.

¹⁸³ “Crucial Steps in Combating the Aids Epidemic; Identify All the Carriers,” *The New York Times*, March 18, 1986.

¹⁸⁴ “Forced AIDS tests: Then What,” *The New York Times*, June 7, 1987.

¹⁸⁵ Gould, “The Shame of Gay Pride in Early AIDS Activism,” 169; The term PWA is the abbreviation for Person with/Person living with AIDS, its etymology lies with the early activist groups in the United States.

Various scholars claim that attempting to understand AIDS means one needs to engage with discourses of morality and metaphor; that the disease is more than the sum of its medical parts.¹⁸⁶ Jason Tougow notes that, contrary to what some activists and scholars have implied “AIDS does not ‘transport’ most of its ‘victims’ to literal concentration camps.”¹⁸⁷ Yet it was the case that threats of imprisonment and annihilation were levied against People with AIDS. The credibility of these threats is debatable, yet it is notable that such language and imagery entered the dominant American cultural narrative during the 1980s.¹⁸⁸

In this context the cultural history and collective memory of homosexuals and Jews under Nazism is inexorably tied together. The Holocaust is mobilized here in a way which maintains the marginalization of Nazi persecution of gay men. These interlinked, often-competing cultural memories surface in AIDS narratives too, not least in Larry Kramer’s work. Goshert argues that American Jews who submit AIDS testimonies often imbue their narratives with the collective memory of the Holocaust that has been transmitted to them. These testimonies demonstrate how the experiences of each ‘event’ resonates with the other.¹⁸⁹ Goshert notes that:

the polemics of Kramer’s work, and especially his challenge to activists and artists, set the stage for later, highly nuanced treatments of the AIDS-Holocaust relationships: not of the events themselves, but rather of the narratives produced by the tenuous linking of experiences.¹⁹⁰

Kramer made many comparisons between the Jewish experience of Nazism and the genocide he claimed was happening to gays in the 1980s. His analogous reading of Jewish and gay history is well exemplified by his 1987 speech upon receiving a human rights award.¹⁹¹ He emphasized that many Jews felt German above anything else until

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 60; see also Paula A. Treichler, “AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification,” *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, Winter (1987): 34; Inge B. Corless, Mary Pittman (eds.), *AIDS: Principles, Practices & Politics* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1988).

¹⁸⁷ Jason Tougow, “Testimony and the Subject of AIDS Memoirs,” *Auto/Biography Studies* Volume 13, Issue 2, (1998): 240.

¹⁸⁸ John C. Goshert, “The Aporia of AIDS and/as Holocaust,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 23 no. 3 (2005): 52.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 52.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 53.

¹⁹¹ Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, 186.

the German state – under the Nazis - rejected then pilloried them. This “memory” framed his claim that US gays were surprised at the extent to which the administration turned on them during the early AIDS years, particularly given the socio-political strides they had made in the preceding years. Kramer pointed to the post-war organization of Jews, who spoke out, in order to ensure “never again” and he stated that he hoped that gays would similarly mobilize to ensure the same imperative.

Just as there are extensive debates about the appropriateness of including other victims of Nazism alongside the Jewish Shoah, so too were there strong reactions to the adoption of the genocide frame in order to understand the AIDS crisis. Invoking a holocaust /genocide frame did enable activists to do several things; by use of visceral and provocative language and imagery it brought the crisis to the public’s attention and engendered furious debate. To Kramer the Americanized cultural memory of the Holocaust and the US response to the AIDS crisis were inexorably intertwined. David Caron notes that “comparing AIDS to the Holocaust appeared acceptable inasmuch as it constructed a certain image of AIDS sufferers as politically passive, essentially other, and soon to be dead.”¹⁹² By stigmatizing the disease that was disproportionately affecting them and ostracizing them from their historic allies, it is not difficult to see how activists such as Larry Kramer believed there was a right-wing attempt to effectively destroy homosexuals, not unlike a genocide. As the decade wore on and the crisis continued, the symbolism of the pink triangle became more prevalent, and with its heightened politicization, so too did awareness of the memory of the homosexuals persecuted under Nazism. This manifested in a developing cultural memory of that period, as well as a means by which to deploy these memories to speak to a contemporary crisis.

‘SILENCE = DEATH’ – The pink triangle as symbol of solidarity and strength

By 1987, AIDS had killed more than 48,000 people in the United States.¹⁹³ That year six gay activists from New York formed a collective that would yield firstly the *Silence = Death* campaign, then latterly the activist group ACT UP, with the explicit aim of

¹⁹² Caron, “Tactful Encounters,” 157.

¹⁹³ “HIV and AIDS - United States, 1981—2000,” accessed 15 December 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5021a2.htm>

bringing the AIDS crisis to an end by means of education, protestation and demonstration.¹⁹⁴ The group met with health officials, government bodies, organized marches and events, disseminated information to communities about drug use and safe sex, and aimed to give a loud, vocal, angry voice to those very people being wilfully ignored by much of society.¹⁹⁵ Activism by ACT UP made manifest the anger of the gay community like never before. The years after its inception were marked by escalated political activity which increasingly adopted genocidal motifs that recalled Nazi persecution and its aftermath; “death marches” were organized; imagery was mobilized that included mock funerals, and deliberately strong and emotive language was employed. Leaflets calling for a march on the White House in 1992 insisted they had endured “twelve years of genocidal AIDS policy.”¹⁹⁶ Participants spoke of a murderous administration that had “turned our loved ones into ashes and bones.”¹⁹⁷ This was not just empty rhetoric or bombastic prose; ACT UP member Avram Finkelstein recalls how part of the march included an “ashes action,” in which the ashes of the dead were symbolically thrown over the White House gates and floated through the grounds.¹⁹⁸ No longer content with stitching their deceased loved ones “lives” onto a giant quilt, these activists literally ditched their “deaths” at the door of their purported murderer whilst participants angrily chanted the message: “Bring the dead to your door, we won’t take it anymore.”¹⁹⁹ Hence, the message of ACT UP was clear – to make visible the invisible, and to ensure that these countless deaths were thrust into the consciousness of the living.²⁰⁰ The pink triangle was present throughout all of ACT UP’s activism, serving as the instantly recognizable emblem of the entire collective.

The pink triangle as AIDS activism slogan is a coalescence of art and politics. The work of ACT UP and their deceptively simple slogans became ubiquitous with the AIDS

¹⁹⁴ These activists were Avram Finklestein, Brian Howard, Oliver Johnston, Charles Kreloff, Chris Lione, and Jorge Soccaras. Heike Munder, Raphael Gyax, eds. *United by AIDS: An Anthology on Art in Response to HIV/AIDS* (Zurich: Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess, 2019), 176.

¹⁹⁵ “ACT UP Archive,” accessed 18 January 2019, <http://www.actupny.org>

¹⁹⁶ Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and Act Up's Fight against Aids* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009), 230.

¹⁹⁷ “ACT UP Archive,” accessed 13 November 2018, <http://www.actupny.org/nypl/wentzy.html>

¹⁹⁸ Goodwin & Jasper, eds. *The Social Movements Reader*, 263.

¹⁹⁹ “ACT UP Archive,” accessed 13 November 2018, <http://www.actupny.org/nypl/wentzy.html>

²⁰⁰ Goodwin & Jasper, eds. 263.

activist movement and were powerful examples of successful political art.²⁰¹ In early 1986, Finkelstein wrote a to-do list in his journal which included the following: “Research direction of triangle, printing prices (3 estimates) ... typefaces, cut paper + triangle... wheat paste... van rental.”²⁰² From this scrawled note arose the poster that displayed the pink triangle and the words, “Silence = Death.” The poster was made up of a black background and featured a pink triangle at its centre, though inverted to face upwards as a symbol of hope and positivity, rather than its traditional downturned positioning from its more negative former incarnation. At the bottom of the poster, the words read:

Why is Reagan silent about AIDS? What is really going on at the Center for Disease Control, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Vatican? Gays and lesbians are not expendable...Use your power...Vote...Boycott...Defend yourselves...Turn anger, fear, grief into action.²⁰³

Under the triangle itself, the coda ‘Silence = Death’, drew explicit parallels between the AIDS crisis and the catastrophe faced by gays under Nazism. Finkelstein recalls that the group chose the triangle precisely because it was recognizable as an emblem of the early gay rights movement as well as being increasingly remembered for its original Nazi intent. He claimed “We were trying to figure out what kind of coded image gay people would look at and immediately know we were talking to them... [the pink triangle] fit because of its historical significance.”²⁰⁴ Finkelstein was talking here in 2016, some three decades after ACT UP reintroduced the pink triangle into public and political consciousness. Despite its existence on the margins as part of the gay liberation movement in the 1970s, Finkelstein supposed that the pink triangle was, by the time they created the poster and plastered it across New York, imbued with enough cultural meaning so as to make it effective.

That the poster conveyed multiple associated meanings added to its power. As Sember and Gere note,

²⁰¹ “After Orlando, the Iconic Silence = Death Image Is Back. Meet One of the Artists Who Created It,” accessed 15 September 2019, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2016/07/silence-death-artist-avram-finkelstein-on-history-of-queer-art-and-activism.html>

²⁰² “How Six NYC Activists Changed History with Silence = Death,” accessed 15 September 2019, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2017/06/20/how-six-nyc-activists-changed-history-with-silence-death/>

²⁰³ See figure seven.

²⁰⁴ “After Orlando,” accessed 15 September 2019, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2016/07/silence-death-artist-avram-finkelstein-on-history-of-queer-art-and-activism.html>

The simplicity of the SILENCE= DEATH logo belies the complexity of its provocation... the sign's logic may be applied to state-level failures to address the epidemic adequately as well as to the silence of individuals who deny that they are implicated in the epidemic. The logo may also be read as a call to those living with AIDS to announce their status and mobilize in solidarity with others ... In the 1960s, gay activists claimed the pink triangle as the emblem of the struggle for sexual rights, and its inclusion in the SILENCE=DEATH image creates continuity between that movement and ACT UP's mobilization against AIDS. The inclusion of the pink triangle also advances the position that the failure to act to end the epidemic, particularly on the part of state officials, is a form of genocide.²⁰⁵

The image was the precursor to an entire genre of protest graphics which used similar slogans such as 'ACTION = LIFE' and 'IGNORANCE = FEAR.'²⁰⁶ With its emphasis on positivity, preservation of life, and political and sexual education, the movement, and its symbol became the very antithesis of what the triangle had represented historically. No longer a "badge of shame"²⁰⁷ to be mutely worn without challenge, the pink triangle now carried an entirely different message; "We protest and demonstrate; we are not silent."²⁰⁸ The triangle emblem became part of the "uniform" for America's AIDS activists. In his 1988 speech *Why We Fight*, Vito Russo wore a pink triangle pin on his shirt, and the rapt audience were surrounded by 'silence = death' barriers.²⁰⁹ At a 1989 ACT UP demonstration, Russo, wore a pink triangle shirt. The following year, Russo was dead, and activists were speaking at funerals just like his, making them into political events, waving placards, chanting slogans, and wearing the triangle.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ Robert Sember and David Gere, "'Let the Record Show . . .': Art Activism and the AIDS Epidemic," *The American Journal of Public Health*, 96(6): June (2006): 967.

²⁰⁶ "ACT UP Archive," accessed 4 April 2019, <http://www.actupny.org/reports/silencedeath.html>

²⁰⁷ "The Pink Triangle: From Shame to Pride," accessed 4 April 2019, https://www.thecjm.org/learn_resources/305

²⁰⁸ Mark Blasius and Shane Phelan, eds. *An ACT UP / NY Portfolio*, in *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 622. It is interesting to note the differing use of language used in the debates between established institutions that used more measured and nuanced narratives, and fledgling, reactionary groups such as ACT UP, whose language was urgent and angry. Tactics deployed by groups such as ACT UP were divisive amongst the gay community though, with some activists insisting that they might alienate moderate potential allies and lose sympathy and others countering contemptuously that they never had any in the first place, see Blasius and Phelan, eds. 628, 631.

²⁰⁹ "Vito Russo Why We Fight speech," accessed 18 April 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0Q8p0HCQEs>

²¹⁰ "Fight Back, Fight AIDS: 15 Years of ACT UP," accessed 10 February 2020, <http://www.actupny.org/divatv/netcasts/index.html>

A defiant gay liberation symbol in the 1970s, an activist insignia in the 1980s, by the 1990s, the pink triangle served as a symbol for more militant movements. Firstly, it became the logo of choice for a new movement called *The Pink Panthers*. The group was a New York-based patrol collective, founded by members of a group called “Queer Nation” (which was itself an offshoot of ACT UP).²¹¹ The Pink Panthers would patrol the streets of New York with the aim of combatting the escalation of violence against gay people on the city’s streets. Their symbolism, like that of their activist forebears, was significant as was their nod to Black self-defence activists in their chosen name; a reporter for *The Washington Post* noting:

They could have called themselves something more prosaic, neighbourhood anti-crime patrols being nothing new, after all, and street assaults on gay men and lesbians being nothing to giggle about. The previous weekend, gay-bashings in midtown and right here on Christopher Street put two men in St. Vincent's Hospital with serious injuries. But gay activism, New York-style, requires a certain ironic panache. This summer, at a meeting called to discuss community foot patrols as a response to rising anti-gay violence, recruits came up with names like the Lavender Berets (“just didn’t click,” says a guy who was there) and the Stonewall Brigade (too soberly lefty, perhaps). The Pink Panthers title, with its echoes both of '60s politicization and silver-screen camp, won swift approval. The group's logo -- an inverted pink triangle bearing a paw print -- was invented that very night.²¹²

From 1990, the group helped to safeguard the city’s streets, wearing their pink triangle uniforms, making them a visible and recognizable presence. They drew a mixed response from the city’s inhabitants, some praising the group and wishing to join up, other’s spotting their triangles and shouting abuse.²¹³ The group exists until this day, with chapters all over the US organizing protests, promoting grassroots activism, and offering support to LGBTQ communities. Its ethos is radical, inclusive and left-wing and its choice of language and symbolism is entirely redolent of the activism of ACT UP and the pink triangle politics of the 1980s and 1990s.²¹⁴ Today, at the other end of

²¹¹ “The Pink Panthers Movement,” accessed 12 February 2020,

<https://www.thepinkpanthersmovement.com>

²¹² “Patrol of the Pink Panthers,” accessed 14 May 2019,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1990/09/19/patrol-of-the-pink-panthers/54b667cd-6265-44af-99a3-f0aaa4ecae36/> See figure 8.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ “The Pink Panthers Movement,” accessed 12 February 2020,

<https://www.thepinkpanthersmovement.com>

the political spectrum, another “activist group” continues to use symbolism based on the triangle. *The Pink Pistols* are a pro-gun movement established in 2000 whose chapters in the US outnumber the Pink Panthers 5 to 1.²¹⁵ Like the Panthers, the Pistols mission is the self-protection of LGBTQ people, but through the carrying of firearms. Their iconography is almost entirely pink triangle-based and their slogans deliberately provocative – ‘Armed Gays Don’t Get Bashed’; ‘Pick on Someone Your Own Calibre’. They march with a creative banner emblazoned with the legend, ‘Suck My Glock.’²¹⁶ This angry, forceful rhetoric is part of the group’s strategy to dispel the myth that homosexuals are weak and easy targets.

Over the decades, the triangle motif has been adopted and adapted by many disparate groups, and, pseudo vigilante pro-gun groups notwithstanding, the triangle has been variously mobilized as a symbol of solidarity and defiance. Yet this mobilization is contested and has been subject to criticism. These critiques were often based on an uneasiness that the pink triangle was being used for purposes that obscured its original intent. Andrew Ramer recalls his formative years as a gay, Jewish American man who was aware of the events of 1969 at Stonewall and the publication of Heinz Heger’s memoir in 1972 and Richard Plant’s *The Pink Triangle* in the 1980s. Whilst both impacted upon him as a young man, he balked at identifying with the newly reclaimed pink triangle as symbol of gay liberation and later as an emblem for the AIDS crisis. Ramer questioned the focus on silence and death, arguing instead that it would be more appropriate for the cause to highlight communication and life.²¹⁷ Stuart Marshall was also critical of the “SILENCE = DEATH” slogan, explicitly in terms of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, for whom, he noted silence would have actually equaled survival.²¹⁸ R. Amy Elman has been particularly vociferous in her criticism of the appropriation of the pink triangle, writing:

Is it not unethical to suggest that a symbol whose horrific use has denoted the destruction of a group of people be claimed as a symbol of liberation? And, what might it be like for survivors to witness the sight of what to them is so

²¹⁵ “The Pink Pistols,” accessed 20 July 2019, <http://www.pinkpistols.org>

²¹⁶ See figures 9-11.

²¹⁷ “The Pink Triangle: From Shame to Pride,” accessed 4 April 2019, https://www.thecjm.org/learn_resources/305

²¹⁸ Stuart Marshall, “The Contemporary Political Use of Gay History: The Third Reich,” in Bad Object-Choices, eds. *How do I look?: queer film and video* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 69-70.

brutal a symbol? While young gay men and lesbians have the luxury to put on and take off the symbol of hatred that the pink and black triangles represent to many of us, those who have survived the camps cannot erase the tattooed numbers from their skins. They are as permanent and painful as the memories that cannot be extinguished.²¹⁹

These generalized comparisons are highly charged and somewhat problematic. They overlook gay Jews for example, many of whom would have been made to wear the pink triangle *and* the yellow star and who would have also been tattooed. German Jews were forced to wear a yellow star as means of identification and segregation. These forced markings were anathema to assimilation and allowed the Nazis to subject Jews to constant surveillance and subjugation, and ultimately, deportation and extermination. In her critical analysis of the pink triangle, Elman argues that it is unthinkable that the Jewish community would wear yellow stars in the present day, and moreover, she argues, gay men are the only group that lay claim to the symbol of their servitude as a badge of resistance and pride. Whilst she acknowledges that this claim is, in part, due to the ongoing lack of acknowledgement of them as victims of Nazism, Elman argues that adopting the triangle to highlight contemporary plights and fights positions gay men as effectively obscuring the original intent of such symbols. She claims that by disassociating it from its original meaning(s), those who appropriate the triangle betray their willful ignorance. She states that “many who wear and/or display the triangles possess little, if any, accurate information about the Holocaust. Still fewer appear to know about the particular history of the triangles.”²²⁰ Of course, the gay women and men who marched for equality and an end to brutal repression in the 1970s, and then for their lives and deaths in the 1980s and 1990s, cannot hope to ever comprehend life in a Nazi concentration camp, but to claim, as Elman does that they had the “luxury” to pull them on and off does a massive disservice to those who wore or carried the triangle. In the 1970s, many activists were aware of the triangle’s origins, which was, in large part, why they were appropriating it in the first place. Certainly, by the time of its adoption by ACT UP in the late 1980s, many of those who wore and bore the triangle knew quite well what its historic symbolism was, and how, they felt this spoke to their present plight.

²¹⁹ R. Amy Elman, “Triangles and Tribulations: The Politics of Nazi Symbols,” *Journal of Homosexuality*, Volume 30, Issue 3,(1996), not paginated.

²²⁰ Ibid.

Yet some of Elman's criticisms in 1996 were entirely reasonable and form part of the broader cultural narrative that has built up around the politicization of the pink triangle over much of the last century. Gay liberation marchers and AIDS activists were geographically focused on both coasts and politically focused on causes that directly affected them. In the mid-1990s, when Elman published her article, the origins of the pink triangle still meant little to most Americans. It had been a significant signifier in terms of raising awareness of AIDS, yet for some key figures such as Kramer, it was largely marginalized in favour of references to the Holocaust. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum had opened in 1993, carrying information about the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, and this will be considered in chapter four. Pierre Seel's book had only just been translated into English, whilst Beck's book was still three years away from being published, and the testimonies gathered for *Paragraph 175* would not be released until the start of the new millennium. It is precisely this silence that informed much of the activists' thinking around the triangle. Its use had as much to do with making space for remembering the past as to do with highlighting issues in the present.

Elman and others have also gone on to decry the subsequent commercialization of the symbol. Elman argued in 1996 that "the pink triangle is now used as an artsy back-drop to promote gay owned and operated businesses."²²¹ Elman might be astonished at one of its more recent iterations, as part of a clothing range for Nike, which featured the pink triangle on a number of sportswear items, as part of an initiative to create an inclusive relationship between sport and the LGBT community. Using the slogan "reclaiming the past, empowering the future", the 2018 collection integrated "colours and symbols that have been reclaimed and historically repurposed by the LGBTQ community," according to Nike. The updated collection featured a pink triangle, which Nike describes as "a shape that has a complex past in LGBTQ culture."²²² However, the use of the pink triangle for financial gain by Nike has been met with criticism from ACT UP, who decried the corporation for usurping political symbolism for monetary gain. As they argue, "This is why the queer community has a murky

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² "Nike Be True Collection," accessed 14 November 2019, <https://news.nike.com/news/nike-betrue-2018-collection>

relationship with corps. They appropriate our messaging for profit. We deserve better [than] to have our work be exploited by corporations that profiteer off grassroots resistance imagery”²²³ This further complicates the narrative around the pink triangle – brands such as Nike stand accused of appropriating imagery that in turn ACT UP appropriated from the gay victims/survivors of Nazism. We can situate such uses and abuses of the pink triangle as part of the wider culture of Holocaust commodification. This practice of the Holocaust being treated as a profit-making commodity “degrades and exploits the historical events, denuding them of meaning in the quest for profit.”²²⁴ Of course, every cultural artefact that makes money from the Holocaust, or indeed the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, can be considered commodification, yet, unlike sneakers and sportswear, or Starbucks in San Francisco, many of the representations of the pink triangle are largely about bearing witness.

The pink triangle endures not only as a political symbol but also as a contemporary cultural reference point. Originally associated with misery and death, the symbol has partly been transformed by a rejection of homonormativity, a refusal to internalize a heteronormative model and dominant heterosexual values. In contrast to embracing a symbol such as the contemporary rainbow flag, with its message of positivity and hope, and its claim to be *the* symbol of gay identity, gay activists who appropriated the triangle were actively repudiating the drive for gays to assimilate into a neoliberal hetero/homonormative paradigm and demanding instead that they embrace the alternative.²²⁵ Meg-John Barker & Julia Scheele argue that “instead of claiming gay pride we should celebrate queer shame.”²²⁶ That is, queers should not necessarily reject the shame that they have historically been made to feel, that difference should be celebrated, and that past struggle form an important part of a present identity. The pink triangle proudly represents both the shame inherent in its past iteration and makes a strong political statement and still endures, particularly in marches and protests. Since its first appearance during the post-Stonewall gay liberation marches of the 1970s, it

²²³ “LGBTQ Advocacy Group Calls Out Nike,” accessed 14 November 2019, <https://mic.com/articles/189624/lgbtq-advocacy-group-act-up-calls-out-nike-for-appropriating-its-pink-triangle-logo-for-profit#.2rINRBLcA>

²²⁴ Nicola Morris, *The Golem in Jewish American Literature: Risks and Responsibilities in the Fiction of Thane Rosenbaum, Nomi Eve and Steve Stern* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 51.

²²⁵ Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 151.

²²⁶ Meg-John Barker & Julia Scheele, *Queer: A Graphic History* (London: Icon Books, 2016), 160.

has been a visible symbol at countless pivotal moments in post-war gay activism, from UK pride marches, to French AIDS protests. It was proudly worn by campaigners for Harvey Milk, and it adorned angry placards protesting the death of legendary queer activist Marsha P. Johnson.²²⁷ By the 1980s, with communities devastated by AIDS, the triangle moved beyond “merely” demanding freedom and equality, to angrily pleading for life. Its adoption and inversion by ACT UP suggested a rejection of the negative Nazi connotations of death and destruction and instead a focus on positivity and hope. The triangle served as a recognizable, powerful and unifying emblem. Activists emphasized an insistence on visibility, both to the “straight enemy” and to one another. If the triangle historically represented subjugation, segregation and silence, on the bodies of AIDS activists it was transformed into strength, solidarity and shouting. Yet, perhaps cognizant of the fact that the symbol alone might not carry the contemporary resonance that it may have had in the past, ACT UP appropriated more than the Nazi’s symbol of subjugation; they literally verbalized the original effect it had upon Europe’s homosexuals and explicitly suggested a parallel with the fate facing America’s gays decades later. In both cases, silence meant death, though, as suggested by US activists, unlike their 1940s counterparts, in the 1980s, they the opportunity, and thus felt an obligation to speak out, and act up.

In this chapter, I have traced how a marginalized memory became increasingly public through changing socio-political contexts. This meant that a (hitherto absent) cultural memory began to develop, in the process of political struggle. I have further traced the debates that have been engendered by the politicization of the pink triangle, particularly when it specifically draws upon, or actively marginalizes, the cultural memory of the original men with the pink triangle. The critiques of the way the pink triangle has been appropriated and its origins partially obscured, are part of the wider consequences of the politicization of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. Arguably, the memory of the survivors who I critically examined in chapter two was largely absent from the cultural memory of the pink triangle I have traced in this chapter. Heger’s story had only been translated into English for a year when the New York Times ran its first story in 1981 about a “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals.”²²⁸ Yet the pink triangle had been

²²⁷ *The Death and Life of Martha P. Johnson*. Film. United States: David France, 2017.

²²⁸ “AIDS Timeline,” accessed 25 September 2020, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/national/science/aids/timeline80-87.html?scp=7&sq=aids%252520pandemic&st=Search>

increasingly important to gay activism since shortly after Heger's book was originally published in 1972. Growing awareness of the cultural memory of those once forced to wear the pink triangle, alongside increasing interest in the stories of survivors, meant that there would soon be more permanent edifices to the history and memory of the homosexual victims of Nazism. In the "post-AIDS world," remembrance and memorialization have continued apace, from monuments to memoirs, and from stories to stone, all of which now contributing to a developing body of texts that represent and remember the victims and survivors of catastrophe.

Chapter Four
Monuments, Museums, and Marshalling Memory
- The Pink Triangle Memorialized

In June 1995, *The New York Times* ran a front-page story about the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's plan to expand their exhibition recognizing and representing homosexual victims of Nazism.¹ One of the key artefacts that would be displayed as part of the museum's new multi-million dollar exploration of this history was the frail piece of cloth containing a prison number and a pink triangle that once adorned Josef Kahout's (Heinz Heger) concentration camp clothing, its small and frayed form belying the enormous and absolute impact it had on those forced to wear it.² Metaphorically, the threads of this thesis meet here, and may be woven together to form their ultimate shape. That shape is akin to a pink triangle and the threads that constitute it are made up of many disparate parts; the hustlers and cabaret stars of Weimar Germany, the homosexuals persecuted by Nazism and forgotten after the war, the gay liberationists, who sought solidarity with their forebears and who adopted and adapted their symbols of oppression, those ravaged by a disease considered by some to be a new Holocaust, and the latent remembrance of those who perished and those who survived these atrocities. This inclusion of an *actual* pink triangle in a memorial museum dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust is the starting point for considering how and why those who wore it have come to be recognized, not just by the grass-roots activists and agitators of the gay liberation movement or the AIDS crisis, but by governments and states. Such recognition did not simply "happen;" it came as a result of decades-long struggles for acknowledgment. Triangle-shaped memorials began to be included in various memorial sites in concentration camps, recognizing the homosexual victims of Nazism, the result of years of campaigning from activist groups, lawyers, scholars and curators. This led to broader memorialization, as similar public monuments were unveiled in a number of cities which were often situated within the wider narratives of contemporary gay history, including the gay liberation movement and the devastation of AIDS. Beginning with the pink triangle memorial plaque, unveiled in Mauthausen in 1984, these attempts at securing permanent, lasting edifices

¹ "Personalizing Nazis' Homosexual Victims," accessed 18 April 2018, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/06/26/us/personalizing-nazis-homosexual-victims.html>

² See figure twelve

to the histories and memories of those afflicted by the pink triangle coalesced with some of the defining moments – and movements – that this thesis has engaged with. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as AIDS ravaged communities and homophobia persisted, these monuments and memorials finally began to appear alongside the written memoirs and oral memories that latently emerged. These plaques, sculptures, stones and stories all contributed to the emerging and expanding collective memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals – the very recognition that survivors such as Heger, Seel and Beck thought would never come.

The plan to include gay victims into a planned *Holocaust museum* in the United States came at a time of increasing awareness of this “alternative history.” At the start of the 1980s, as plans got underway for such a museum, Heger’s memoirs were translated into English, Sherman’s *Bent* was first performed, and there were the initial rumblings of a new virus that had begun to disproportionately affect homosexuals. Meanwhile, across Europe, gay activists from the 1970s onwards were increasingly looking to their history, adopting the pink triangle and its attendant meanings as a metaphor for their liberation movement, then later lobbying states to create memorials to the memories of the victims. By the time a public monument speaking to this particular history finally appeared in Germany, in 2008, the memoirs of all three of the survivors focused on in this thesis had been published around the world, and two of them had died. The museum in the United States had been exhibiting artefacts and information for a decade-and-a-half, and scores of memorials had been erected across Europe and beyond marking the Nazi persecution of homosexuals.

On May 17th 2002, the German justice minister Hertha Daeubler-Gmelin officially pardoned the tens of thousands of homosexual men who were persecuted by the Nazis, saying “we all know that our decisions today are more than 50 years late. They are necessary nonetheless. We owe it to the victims of wrongful Nazi justice”³ The previous chapter presented the context of gay activism and the rhetoric around AIDS and the Holocaust which arguably created a space for the inclusion of gay victims of

³ *The Advocate*, June 2002, 20; Marnie Rorholm, “Cultural Visibility of the Pink Triangle: Examining Gay Germany through a Global Leadership Lens,” *Journal of Contemporary Humanism*, Issue 7, Winter (2018):5. This statement followed a 1998 German law which cleared the names of hundreds of thousands of victims of Nazism and an apology in December 2000 for the continued prosecution of homosexuals post-1949. It is pertinent to note that it is the latency that is foreshadowed here.

the Nazis. This final chapter will explore how this history, for so long “forgotten,” went on to be commemorated and memorialized. It will focus on two sites of memory; the 2008 *Denkmal für die zur NS-Zeit verfolgten Homosexuellen* (The Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted Under Nazism) in Berlin, and the exhibitions from 1993 devoted to the persecution of homosexuals under Nazism, curated by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. I argue in relation to the Berlin memorial, that whilst well-intentioned, aesthetically striking, and incorporating a design intended to complement the nearby Jewish memorial, its meaning, like its location, is somewhat opaque. The exhibition based in the USHMM is less abstract in its design and more “traditional” in its execution. It consists of a series of information panels, a few physical artefacts, a travelling exhibition, and a small collection of identity cards which feature biographies of gay victims and survivors, as part of a larger collection. The debate around the *inception* of the exhibition echoes arguments that epitomize the wider narrative of the persecution of homosexuals under Nazism. It was marked by debate and division between various parties in terms of the appropriateness of its acknowledgment, and inclusion into, a site of memory dedicated to the Jewish Holocaust. Moreover, the events surrounding the museum’s eventual *inauguration* crystalize many aspects of this thesis, and of the histories and memories it has engaged. The USHMM opened on the same weekend that the 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation took place, and the event was marked by activism, speeches, and pink triangle iconography.

The choice of two distinct and, in many ways, oppositional memory-sites as the focus for this chapter is deliberate; their forms are distinct and represent the history and memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals in quite different ways. The Berlin memorial is, at first glance, abstract and avant-garde. It appears as an anonymous shell aimed at representing a “hidden history” and though its meaning(s) are not immediately overt, critical engagement with it can reveal significance in both its form and its location. As a situated object, it refers the viewer/visitor to a history that happened here and that it must be remembered and memorialized. Moreover, the monument’s similarity in design, and its proximity to, the nearby *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* insists that, rather than distinguishing its memorial function from the genocide of the Jews, we can and should remember other victims *alongside* them. The USHMM exhibition to homosexual victims of Nazism was part of the museum’s launch in April

1993, and might be lauded for bringing the story of the Nazi's gay victims to a hitherto largely ignorant general public, and much sooner than happened in mainland Europe, where the atrocities actually took place. Yet, of equal interest in terms of the framework of this thesis is the manner in which the memorial in Washington came about and was inaugurated. The struggle to include gay victims in any form of remembrance in this American edifice speaks to the wider battles that gay survivors fought in post-war Europe. Significantly, the realization and dedication of the museum coincided with a pivotal moment in gay activism – the 1993 March on Washington – that served to coalesce the narratives of Heger and Seel with those of AIDS activists and the wider queer struggles of the period. The Holocaust met AIDS, met gay outrage, at the same time as America prepared to unveil a Holocaust site of memory that included other victims of Nazism, including homosexuals. The narratives of genocide and oppression were writ large on the weekend of the march.⁴ Over three days, Holocaust survivors, the US president, and dissident activist groups converged on the capital city of the free world to remember, memorialize and march. And for many, the weekend was marked by one ubiquitous symbol – the pink triangle.

Memorials and museums preserve memory, represent histories, and make sites for remembrance. Paul Williams argues that a memorial can be considered a catch-all term to denote something, in whatever form, that serves to remember persons or events. He notes a functional distinction between *memorials*, often signifiers of grief and lamentation, and *monuments*, typically more “positive” edifices of power, though concurs that these are not mutually exclusive.⁵ This is further complicated when we consider the form and function of *museums*; Daniel J. Sherman argues that these take a more *objective*, as opposed to *commemorative*, approach to the representation of particular histories and memories.⁶ Finally, since the 1990s we have seen the emergence and increasing cultural significance of memorial museums, which tend to be “dedicated to a historic event commemorating mass suffering of some kind.”⁷

⁴ Both the opening of the museum and the March on Washington were major media events that weekend, each getting considerable, often headline coverage in all of the networks' news output, see “Vanderbilt News Archive April 1993 Broadcast Index,” accessed 18 June 2018, <https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/siteindex/1993-4>

⁵ Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums* (Oxford; Berg, 2007), 7-8.

⁶ Daniel J. Sherman, “Objects of Memory: History and Narrative in French War Museums,” *French Historical Studies* 19, no. 1 (1995):52.

⁷ Williams, 8.

Increasingly, sites of memory have placed emphasis on absence, silence, gaps, inclusivity and trauma, and are based on “experience” as well as, or as opposed to, housing artefacts or being a monolith to victory.⁸ Though vastly different in size and design, both the sites I am critically examining are designed to be interactive and invite viewers/visitors to see oppression, experience trauma and “feel” history. The USHMM’s use of narrative structure is perhaps more obvious while the Berlin memorial is more abstract in its design, location and meaning but both are intended to represent homosexuals as a repressed and persecuted group. Whilst much has been written about these sites, particularly the USHMM, these memorials have not been extensively critically engaged with in relation to the history that this thesis has examined, namely the victims and survivors of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, and their ongoing struggle for recognition, and their place within the wider context of the politicization of the pink triangle. The sites are ones which, through their location, form and narrative structures, illuminate the arguments presented in the thesis, and speak to the memory and trauma of the victims and survivors. Moreover, they address the issue of *representation*, and a historic lack thereof, though not always entirely successfully, and in quite different ways. The two sites of memory are certainly divergent, yet both were selected in part for their topography. They exist either in a specific space, or in a politically-charged place, that have been examined throughout the thesis as culturally and historically significant. The initial USHMM collection originated in the United States some decade-and-a-half before there was official recognition of this history in the country of the “perpetrators.” This is pertinent, given my focus on how an Americanized Holocaust paradigm has informed much of the remembrance of these victims and survivors. This project has been looking at memory and its mobilization in relation to memoirs of victims of the Nazis and in relation to the mobilization of how that experience is signified, through the pink triangle, and the Holocaust frame, in gay politics. The two forms of memorialization addressed here speak to both of those moments.

⁸ Amy Sodaro, *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: The Creation of a “Living Memorial” in Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 24.

The two disparate sites of memory and memorialization of gay victims of Nazism upon which this chapter focusses are both bound to the memory of the Holocaust by way of form, function, location and intent. The Holocaust frame, so useful thus far in understanding where, how and why memories are invoked, shared and appropriated, is crucial here too in analyzing how the narrative is marked and commemorated. The frame has been adopted in order to think about the memories at work in the survivor memoirs, the appropriation of the pink triangle-as-gay-rights-motif, and how it was politicized as an analogy for AIDS. That same frame is, holistically, crucial in understanding the inception, design and critical evaluation, of memorials to gay victims of Nazism. Over recent years, the monuments, plaques and exhibitions that seek to memorialize the gay victims of Nazi persecution have been situated close to sites that mark and remember the Holocaust. They also often have a certain, deliberate aesthetic kinship with Holocaust memorials. They frequently invoke a variation of the pink triangle form, and many of the memorials are located in sites significant to gay history and culture, and these sites are sometimes intertwined with the memory of how AIDS impacted on the local community. There are a number of stone plaques which commemorate gay victims of Nazism at several former concentration camp sites, including Mauthausen, Dachau, Neuengamme, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Risiera San Sabba, and Natzweiler-Struthof.⁹ The pink triangle-as-memorial concept has transcended actual sites of Nazi atrocities and can now be found in cities across the world, many with direct links to the history of the pink triangle. For example, there are monuments in Berlin, Cologne and Frankfurt in Germany, Trieste in Italy, Amsterdam in the Netherlands, and Paris, France, yet even here they were often hard-won and long-overdue. The far-reaching impact of this iconography is evident in some of the other locations where pink triangle memorials have been erected, including the US, Canada, Israel and Uruguay.¹⁰

Those who conceptualize, design, erect and dedicate such monuments often seek to emphasize the inextricable links between the memory of the Jewish Holocaust, the persecution of homosexuals under Nazism, and the need to recognize the ongoing struggles faced by LGBTQ people in “the present.”¹¹ Moreover, their use of the pink

⁹ “The Memorial Hall,” accessed 10 May 2019, <http://andrejkoymasky.com/mem/holocaust/ho08.html>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ This is particularly the case with the Berlin memorial which will be examined in detail below.

triangle is both an indicator of the significance of its dark origins, and its latterly, transformed meaning, as a symbol of defiance, resistance, and reflection. In 2001, one such memorial was unveiled in Stonewall Gardens in Sydney, Australia. *The Gay and Lesbian Holocaust Memorial* is significant here for a multitude of reasons; its designers Jennifer Gamble and Russell Rodrigo chose explicitly to name the *Holocaust* in its title rather than the more oblique reference to a group persecuted by Nazis; its pink and black triangle forms seek to represent gay and lesbian victims of this – and other – oppressions; and the memorial is located close to the city’s Jewish Holocaust Museum.¹² Linking the two by geographical proximity was not an arbitrary decision. At the dedication ceremony, Australian Federal Judge Marcus Enfield noted that,

This memorial’s proximity to the Sydney Jewish Museum on the other corner there ... is also a matter of some importance. To my mind, the juxtaposition of two of these commemorative symbols today, one a Jewish record of the Holocaust and its impact, and the other a Gay and Lesbian memorial, in my mind actually reinforces the horror as it serves to highlight the sorrows of each community. To focus exclusively on but one aspect of these past horrors – albeit the most horrific aspect of all – would not do justice to the striving for this goal.¹³

For Enfield, the Sydney memorial to – and, thus, the memory of – the gay and lesbian victims of Nazism is inextricably linked to the Holocaust. His address goes on to contextualize the monument’s inauguration in terms of the contemporary social, cultural, and political events around which it was conceived and executed, namely a rise in populist, right-wing politics, and a resurgence of intolerance towards minority groups. As with the edifices erected in other parts of the world, he insists the Sydney memorial looks to the past *and* the future, marking the persecution of gays and lesbians under Nazism, and beyond.¹⁴

¹² “Gay and Lesbian Holocaust Memorial,” accessed 19 August 2017,

<https://www.cityartsydney.com.au/artwork/gay-lesbian-holocaust-memorial/>

¹³ “Dedication of the Gay and Lesbian Holocaust Memorial,” accessed 6 August 2017,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140207230330/http://nswcccl.org.au/docs/pdf/Marcus%20Einfeld%20Speech%20G%26L%20Memorial%202001.pdf>

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

“I’m part of the whole story, but I’m also different”¹⁵

- The Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime in Berlin (2008)

Across the way from a street named in honour of the philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt, and in a park adjacent to the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, (2005) part shrouded by bushes, at once urban and suburban, sits a large grey concrete box. A small explanatory information plaque nearby reveals that this is a memorial to those persecuted from 1933 to 1945 by the Nazis for being homosexual. Somewhat incongruous and incoherent, the structure appears out of place in terms of its immediate surroundings, its austere aesthetic at odds with the winding paths and children’s play areas that surround it.¹⁶ In 1994, an elderly Pierre Seel lamented “When will I succeed in having the overall Nazi deportation of homosexuals recognized?”¹⁷ His call for recognition was echoed by others who survived Nazi persecution only to be faced with decades of continued subjugation. As we have seen, these survivors were denied official acknowledgment of their experiences. The Berlin monument – erected in 2008 – attempted to redress this imbalance by memorializing this history in a historically significant location. Early efforts at memorializing homosexual victims of Nazism were thwarted in both Germanys. In the early 1980s German Democratic Republic, for example, gays activists were permitted to lay a wreath at the sites of former concentration camps, yet were forbidden from mentioning homosexual victims explicitly.¹⁸ Fledgling grass-roots attempts at recognizing the gay victims of Nazism were precursors to the “official” memorials that began to appear in cities in Europe – and beyond – by the mid-1980s. Such occasions included activists staging their own ceremonies and creating makeshift monuments, often acting illegally and outside the realms of “accepted” remembrance events.¹⁹ Long before any plaques or plinths were erected to commemorate those who were persecuted under Nazism for homosexuality, small gestures of remembrance were being attempted. In 1977, Gregory Woods, then a

¹⁵ Imke Girßmann, “Sites that Matter: Current Developments of Urban Holocaust Commemoration in Berlin and Munich,” in Tanja Schult and Diana I. Popescu, eds. *Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-Witness Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 59.

¹⁶ See figure fifteen

¹⁷ Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, 140.

¹⁸ McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 124-5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

student in Norwich, was part of an activist group who had begun to take an interest in the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, as part of the wider research on the subject that was emerging and developing in Europe and the United States. On that year's Remembrance Sunday, the group attempted to lay a small pink triangle wreath at the local war memorial to remember the gay victims, but were prevented from doing so by members of The British Legion. Later, an altercation between the students and a group of protestors led to the former being accused of being unpatriotic and the latter throwing the triangle wreath off the memorial. For Woods, though this was an unpleasant encounter it was not entirely unfamiliar; other British university gay liberation groups were performing similar memorialization events, often under adverse conditions, at the same time as historians and academics were increasingly researching this history. These acts of rebellious, bottom-up memorialization were crucial events in the protracted process of seeking official, permanent, state-sponsored recognition. They are part of a wider cultural process of change that has been charted thus far in this thesis; ground-level acts including protests and politicizing the pink triangle.

One of the first *official* memorials to commemorate homosexuals persecuted under Nazism was unveiled in Amsterdam in 1987, over two decades prior to the monument that was finally erected in Berlin. The *Homomonument* is constituted of a large triangle with three smaller pink triangles, one at each corner, to represent the past, present and future.²⁰ As well as this more abstract use of the triumvirate, the *Homomonument's* location is more portentous, with each corner of the triangle pointing towards sites of historical and cultural significance; one points to the National War Memorial, another towards Anne Frank's House and the third faces the headquarters of a gay rights group.²¹ This memorial is situated at an intersection of various strands of memory, all of which have, over time, informed or obscured the memory of the pink triangle – Holocaust memory, gay activism, and the narrative of the nation. Oren Baruch Stier argues that the monument's form and location can be read as a metaphor for the larger cultural memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, defined by transgression,

²⁰ Jason Goldman, *Homomonument*, GLTQ Encyclopaedia, 2002, p.1; Martin Zebracki, "Homomonument as Queer Micropublic: An Emotional Geography of Sexual Citizenship," *Journal of Economic & Social Geography*, July (2016.): 356.

²¹ "7 Gay Holocaust Memorials Around The World," accessed 18 July 2019, <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2015/01/27/pictures-7-gay-holocaust-memorials-around-the-world/>

invisibility, and the politicization of the triangle in order to “access power and get noticed.”²² The *Homomonument* laid the literal foundations for the many memorials that would follow, including the triangle plaque in Nollendorfplatz, Berlin–Schöneberg in 1989, a commemorative tablet in Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum, Oranienburg, in 1992 and the *Frankfurter Engel* in Platz Schäfergasse/Alte Gasse, Frankfurt in 1994. Many would utilize the triangle design and reference the significance of the symbol. Just as it was unequivocally invoked as a signifier of gay liberation and AIDS activism, the choice of the pink triangle as the basis of many memorials is deliberate; it is literally *shaping* commemorative design.²³

As well as utilizing similar symbolic designs, many official gay memorials, just like the one in Amsterdam, link past atrocities to present injustices. For example, the *Frankfurt Angel* was placed in the city’s gay district close to the Aids memorial, *Damaged Love* and faces towards the nearby courthouse. This positioning ensures that the statue performs the dual function of recognizing the gay community, and the historic struggles wrought upon it, whilst underscoring the *legal* persecution of homosexuals during and after the war by making the court literally ‘face’ the past.²⁴ The accompanying inscription both reinforces the meaning behind its location, and places emphasis on the present being informed by the past. It reads:

Homosexual men and women were persecuted and murdered during National Socialism. The crimes were denied, the murders hidden, the survivors judged and despised. This we wish to call to mind, knowing that men who love men and women who love women could be persecuted again at any time.²⁵

The tense and complex relationship between “the past and the present” registered in the Frankfurt monument is by no means unique. It informs many of Germany’s post-war memorials and can be read as representative of the wider political and cultural milieu. James E. Young noted in 1992 that there was a constant clamor for more memorials in the country; monuments to advocate for peace and against war; memorials that stood

²² Oren Baruch Stier, *Holocaust Icons: Symbolizing the Shoah in History and Memory* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 217.

²³ “The Memorial Hall,” accessed 12 May 2019, <http://andrejkoymasky.com/mem/holocaust/ho08.html>

²⁴ Jensen, “The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness,” 337.

²⁵ “Memorial to the persecution of homosexuals or Angel of Frankfurt,” accessed 2 June 2019, <https://www.kunst-im-oeffentlichen-raum-frankfurt.de/de/page182.html>

on sites of significance, and those who undertook symbolic pilgrimages to former Nazi sites of atrocities.²⁶ Young argues that there was still a tension around those who wished to preserve memory, and how they did so given that the monumental form had been exploited so successfully by the Nazi regime. Indeed, he is critical of certain traditional forms of memorialization in terms of their form, and an aesthetic link to a Nazi past.²⁷

In the light of the cultural politics shaping Germany's developing commemorative landscape, and more general shifts in commemorative practice, monuments to the Holocaust for example became less about simply looking at inscriptions on stone monoliths and more about interacting with spaces and engaging with narratives.²⁸ They often invited visitors to walk through, and thus *work through*, a traumatic topography, one which attempted to represent the trauma of the Holocaust. So, for instance, the architecture of the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* in Berlin, with its slightly oblique rows of concrete stelae, rising and falling on an uneven floor are designed to evoke an array of responses from visitors.²⁹ The memorial acts as a sort of "memory-maze," one that forces those that interact with it to navigate in and then out again not just physically, but mentally, intellectually, and spiritually.³⁰ The design is purposefully disorienting, and isolating, and the journey through it can result in separation from fellow visitors. At points, one is almost trapped within the edifice, obscured from light and noise, which brings with it all the attendant meanings this has in terms of the Holocaust – separation, ghettoization, removal, annihilation. To some, the monument's structure resembles a cemetery, to others it represents the scale, rigidity and organization of the Nazi regime. To many, the complete absence of victims' names, obscures the meaning of the monument. More still balk at its epithet; a Holocaust

²⁶ James E Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1992):268-70.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Peter Carrier, *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory Cultures in France and Germany Since 1989: The Origins and Political Function of the Val' D'Hiv' in Paris and the Holocaust Monument in Berlin* (New York: Berghahan Books, 2006), 6.

²⁹ See figures 13 and 14

³⁰ James E. Young, "Reflections on the Dedication of Berlin's "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,"" *The Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust*, conference proceedings, Stockholm, January 26-28, 2000.

memorial whose name literally omitted the word *Holocaust*.³¹ For his part, Peter Eisenman, the designer of the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, articulated his vision for the memorial as “a place of loss and contemplation... [where] the illusion of order and security [is shattered].”³²

The *Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted Under Nazism* in Berlin reflects, and intervenes, in the heavily laden commemorative landscape of the city. As Young notes, the reunification of Germany was based on ‘memory of its crimes... [and made] commemoration of its crimes the topographical centre of gravity in its capital.’³³ On the one hand, the monument “fits” with the specifically German, post-Holocaust commemorative context. It is a shrine to victims being remembered and memorialized by their perpetrators, rather than a monument for victims located in a victimized nation.³⁴ It was the realization of the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* in 1999, and the subsequent national commitment to commemorate other groups of victims that emboldened and energized the efforts of gay activist groups to secure memorial recognition of their own. Activists had campaigned for years for a memorial for the gay victims of Nazism; as early as 1992, groups were advocating there should be such a monument, and as the Jewish memorial was given the go-ahead, the German parliament noted the “obligation to commemorate other victims of National Socialism

³¹ See Quentin Stevens, “Visitor Responses at Berlin's Holocaust Memorial: Contrary to Conventions, Expectations and Rules,” *Public Art Dialogue* (2012): 34-59; James E. Young, “Germany's Holocaust Memorial Problem—and Mine,” *The Public Historian*, vol. 24, no. 4 (2002); Andrew S. Gross, “Holocaust Tourism in Berlin: Global Memory, Trauma and the 'Negative Sublime,’” *Berghahn Journals*, Volume 7, Issue 2, Dec (2006). The accompanying subterranean Information Centre at the eastern edge of the Jewish memorial *does* contain some three million victims’ names (see <https://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/en/exhibitions/information-centre/yad-vashem-portal.html#c968>) accessed 12/10/20, yet this too has been criticized by some for being inauspicious and inadequate, (see <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-inadequacy-of-berlins-memorial-to-the-murdered-jews-of-europe>). Accessed 12/10/20. Similarly, the Jewish Museum in Berlin bears some semblance to a countermemorial in its non-traditional design and aesthetic, ‘invisible’ entrance, and emphasis on absence and voids – both of the Jewish population and, thus, of Jewish memory. See Esra Akcan, “Apology and Triumph: Memory Transference, Erasure, and a Rereading of the Berlin Jewish Museum,” *New German Critique*, no. 110 (2010), 159; Rebeka Vidrih, “Death as the Murder and the Void and How to Remember It: Libeskind’s Museum and Eisenman’s Memorial in Berlin,” *IKON Journal of Iconographic Studies* (2011): 282.

³² Stiftung Denkmal, *Materials on the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2005), 11.

³³ James E Young, “Berlin's Holocaust memorial: A report to the Bundestag committee on media and culture,” *German Politics and Society* (1999): 56.

³⁴ Young, “The Counter-Monument,” 271.

appropriately.”³⁵ Buoyed by this hegemonic endorsement, activists redoubled their efforts to secure a memorial and by 2003 it was formally agreed;

that that the Federal Republic of Germany shall erect a memorial in Berlin to the homosexuals persecuted under the National Socialist regime. With this memorial, we [the Federal Republic of Germany] intend to honor the victims of persecution and murder, to keep the memory of this injustice alive, and to create a lasting symbol of opposition to enmity, intolerance and the exclusion of gay men and lesbians.³⁶

By 2006, following a competition to realize the memorial plan, artists Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset’s design was approved.³⁷ The memorial was inaugurated on 27 May 2008 by the capital’s gay mayor, Klaus Wowereit. Wowereit noted that the belatedness of the erection of such a monument was unsurprising, given the country’s war and post-war attitudes to homosexuality in general, and the gay victims of Nazism in particular. He said that this was “symptomatic for a society... that did not abolish unjust verdicts, but partially continued to implement them; a society which did not acknowledge a group of people as victims, only because they chose another way of life.”³⁸ Along with the fillip given to the memorial by the decision to erect the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, the chronological, locational and intentional proximity of the *Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted Under Nazism* meant that the two monuments were intimately related to each other. For example, opponents of the proposed gay monument argued that the design itself too closely represented an offshoot of its Jewish forebear. The single block, argued Andreas Pretzel, suggests it is a literal Holocaust offshoot, rather than a representation of a particular history all of its own. The danger with this, Pretzel goes on to say, risked perpetuating the problematic myth of a “gay Holocaust.”³⁹

³⁵ Anika Oettler, “The Berlin Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime: Ambivalent responses to homosexual visibility,” *Memory Studies* (2019): 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Jennifer Evans, “Harmless Kisses and Infinite Loops: Making space for queer place in twenty-first century Berlin,” in Jennifer V. Evans, Matt Cook, *Queer Cities, Queer Cultures: Europe since 1945* (London: A&C Black, 2014), 78.

³⁸ “Berlin remembers persecuted gays,” accessed 19 June 2019, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7422826.stm>

³⁹ Evans, “Harmless Kisses and Infinite Loops,” 85.

The tension and contested narratives around the memorialization of the gay victims of Nazism in relation to the Holocaust is precisely why its designers chose its location and its form. Imke Girßmann notes that:

With the permission of [the Jewish Holocaust memorial designer] Peter Eisenman... Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, took and alienated a piece of his design... just across the street. Michael Elmgreen stated: “It is as if one of the slabs of the Holocaust Memorial had walked across the street at night, stood up in the forest and now says: “Hey, look, I’m part of the whole story, but I’m also different. I’m gay.” By this artistic strategy, they managed to show that although homosexuals were not exposed to genocide, their persecution was part of the same ideological concept.⁴⁰

The designers’ vision, and the memorial itself, thus exemplifies the shifting post-war contexts shaping the nature of the relationship between Holocaust and other victims of Nazism. We might remember that Gad Beck struggled to reconcile his homosexuality and his Jewishness – as did, much later, Larry Kramer. Elmgreen and Dragset were acutely aware of the fraught debates around the recognition of homosexual victims of Nazism in terms of the Holocaust, and sought to address them through tenuous links and disconnections, in relation to the design, size and location of the memorial. The gay memorial references the Jewish memorial just enough to suggest that there is some form of shared history. Elmgreen and Dragset noted that they “wanted to use the same visual language... in order to make the connection between our monument and other victim groups.”⁴¹ Yet it also differs enough to demonstrate that its designers, and hopefully its audience, can distinguish between the two in terms of their respective fates. The connections – and indeed the distinctions – between the adjacent memorials are largely clear; the monuments face one another and are of similar construction, yet the topography of each is dramatically distinct, with the Jewish memorial open and urban, the gay memorial more secluded in a park. Moreover, the difference of scale between the two is immense. The *Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime* is composed of one concrete block as opposed to the two

⁴⁰ Girßmann, “Sites that Matter,” 59.

⁴¹ “Remembering Different Histories,” accessed 19 July 2019, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/remembering-different-histories-monument-to-homosexual-holocaust-victims-opens-in-berlin-a-555665.html>

thousand, seven hundred and eleven that comprise the Jewish memorial.⁴² Choosing to design one simple structure to represent the gay victims of Nazism speaks to the narrative that has emerged post-war around the comparatively small scale of this particular history.⁴³ The gay memorial may be dwarfed in stature by its Jewish neighbour, but, argues Shelley Hornstein, when we consider its meaning, its location and its execution, its impact is “monumental.”⁴⁴

The *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* is situated on a specifically symbolic – and somewhat controversial – historical site adjacent to the former location of the Reich Chancellery and later the Berlin Wall “death strip.”⁴⁵ The geographical location of the *Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime* is also historically pertinent. My decision to focus on this particular memorial, rather than the many that were inaugurated earlier, is, in part, precisely due to the “sacredness” of the location, in terms of the histories and memories associated with its topography. Tiergarten, the park in which it is located had, and continues to have, an “historical and authentic” significance, in that it was/is a locale in which gay men met, and continue to, meet to initiate sexual encounters.⁴⁶ Yet, whilst the semi-hidden location is meaningful to the designers and is significant to many homosexuals, it runs the risk of rendering the memorial marginal and inconsequential. The memorial appears to be both oppositional and contradictory. It is at once conspicuous and inconspicuous, public and private, and it is this tension between visibility and invisibility that largely defines not only the monument’s location but also its design.⁴⁷ It sits off a well-trodden pathway in Berlin’s busiest city park, yet is part-shrouded by shrubbery. Its large concrete structure, so redolent of the nearby Jewish memorial, is seemingly impenetrable, and mostly resembles a dormant, lifeless structure, devoid of form, function and meaning.

⁴² “How many more monuments for Berlin?” accessed 29 July 2019,

<https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/remembering-the-holocaust-how-many-more-monuments-for-berlin-a-531865.html>

⁴³ As has been demonstrated throughout the thesis, there has been a preoccupation with the varying scale of the Nazi’s atrocities; some critics minimizing the impact of the persecution due to the relatively low number of victims, at the same time that survivors, starved of information and cooperation overemphasized the vastness of victimhood.

⁴⁴ Shelley Hornstein, *Losing Site: Architecture, Memory and Place* (Farnham: Ashgate 2013), 52-53.

⁴⁵ Young, “The Counter-Monument,” 274; see also Huyssen, “The Voids of Berlin,” 57–81.

⁴⁶ Prickett, “We will show you Berlin,” 153.

⁴⁷ Thomas O. Haakenson, “(In)Visible Trauma: Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset’s Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime,” in Bill Niven, Chloe Paver, eds, *Memorialization in Germany since 1945* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 146-152.

Moreover, the memorial symbolizes not only ‘the past’ in terms of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, but also the continuation of struggles with acceptance in the present. As Thomas O. Haakenson notes in his study of the memorial, “the destructive violence that creates the wreckage of history is still with us.”⁴⁸ This violence is most explicit in the inscription on the information plaque adjacent to the memorial, which echoes the Bundestag’s promise to both *recall* history and act as a *reminder* for the future. Following a three-paragraph potted history of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, the plaque concludes with the following text:

Because of its history, Germany has a special responsibility to actively oppose the violation of gay men’s and lesbians’ human rights. In many parts of the world, people continue to be persecuted for their sexuality, homosexual love remains illegal and a kiss can be dangerous. With this memorial, the Federal Republic of Germany intends to honour the victims of persecution and murder, to keep alive the memory of this injustice, and to create a lasting symbol of opposition to enmity, intolerance and the exclusion of gay men and lesbians.⁴⁹

The inscription attests to the ultimate aim of inclusion trumping oppression, however, a key element of the memorial was initially criticized for precisely for its lack of inclusivity.

In one of its corners of the concrete box, there is a crack in the frame, in the form of a viewing window. The apparently sealed-off structure has a portal; a point of access that belies its drab, inaccessible exterior. Following its inauguration in 2008, those who initially peered inside were faced with a looped film of an encounter between two men kissing and whispering a secret to one another.⁵⁰ The film, like all else about the memorial in which it is housed, evoked multiple meanings; the men were *publicly* kissing in the park yet were *privately* sharing words. The monument represents a place where men once met quite *overtly*, before they were abruptly forced to act *covertly*. This original film reinvigorated divisions between gays and lesbians. Lesbian activists felt that the looping video of two men kissing once again marginalized gay women,

⁴⁸ Ibid. 146.

⁴⁹ “Memorial to the homosexuals persecuted under the Nazi regime,” accessed 18 April 2019, <https://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/en/memorials/memorial-to-the-homosexuals-persecuted-under-the-national-socialist-regime/history-of-the-memorial-to-the-homosexuals.html>

⁵⁰ See figure 17.

both in terms of their contemporary struggles, and the silencing of their past experiences at the hands of the Nazis.⁵¹ It was argued that by focusing on a singular narrative that repeated endlessly and never changed, the designers continued the Nazi practice of marginalizing women in general, and lesbian women in particular.⁵² On the one hand, the video was defended by the artists, the jury who approved it, and the then-mayor of Berlin, as being representative of the disproportionate oppression and persecution of gay *men* in German history. Conversely, efforts to ensure lesbian visibility were undertaken by activists' groups and even a member of the European Parliament. This appeal for a more inclusive memory prompted a member of the initiative to resign, claiming that including a narrative of lesbian oppression "under the flag of apparent 'political correctness'... [meant] the ideologically motivated myth of a Nazi persecution of lesbians as being cast in stone."⁵³ As the furore grew, so did concerns that the memorialization of gay victims of Nazism was being marginalized in favour of contemporary clashes.⁵⁴ Gay male activists in Berlin were determined to secure a suitable memorial to those persecuted under Nazism, one which also spoke to contemporary struggles. Lesbian activists and supporters were insistent that any memorial should be inclusive of gay women who were oppressed under National Socialism, and who continue to be overlooked in the present. The memorial addressed the issue of inclusivity in 2012 when the original film was changed. The new video, by artists Gerald Backhaus, Bernd Fischer and Ibrahim Gülnar, still centred on the original memorial's message that "a simple kiss could land you in trouble," but this time it featured an enlarged cast of "characters."⁵⁵ The kissing couples were now gay men *and* women, young and old, alone or with families. The film expanded its scope from a short, looping scene to an extended set of encounters that took place not just in the confined topography of the memorial itself, but throughout the city. Moreover, whereas in the original version, the person peering into the screen was the solitary voyeur, in the new film, the video itself featured filmed reactions to the "simple kisses." This quasi-metanarrative was in some respects a narrative within a narrative; viewers *of* the film

⁵¹ "Emma criticizes gay memorial," accessed 23 August, 2019, <https://www.artforum.com/news/-11637>

⁵² Klaus Muller, *Introduction*, in Heger, *The Men with The Pink Triangle*, 11-12.

⁵³ Heinrich Böll Stiftung, ed. *Der homosexuellen NS-Opfer gedenken* (Berlin: Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 1999), 119.

⁵⁴ Evans, "Harmless Kisses and Infinite Loops," 82.

⁵⁵ Schult, Popescu, *Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-Witness Era*, 60.

could react to the reactions *within* the film, which ranged from discomfort and indifference to marked hostility.⁵⁶

The cumulative research, understanding and enduring significance of Nazi persecution has produced a context in which questions of how to represent its victims and survivors publicly are complex and charged. Any memorial to a group runs the risk of collapsing disparate identities into a simplistic, homogenous collective. As we have seen, the identities of individuals and groups are interchangeable and complex. For example, it is now understood that women killed in concentration camps who were listed as both Jewish and lesbian, were often “selected” because of their sexuality.⁵⁷ Those who oppose lesbian inclusion in the gay monument, however, stress that it is more likely their *Jewishness* that was the reason for their extermination. Such tensions raise the question; on which side of the road should these victims be remembered?⁵⁸ The promenades and straßen of Berlin dissect memorials and memory. This disaggregation of distinctiveness disallows consideration of intersectional identities; for example, how and where do *gay Jews* remember? How do identities connect and disjoin, and how are these complex identity relationships to be represented in memorials?⁵⁹

On May 10th 2008, an attempt to transcend divided memories and to address the question of how to represent intersectional identities was addressed just weeks before the Tiergarten monument was inaugurated when a Berlin promenade along the river Spree was renamed to honour Hirschfeld, seventy-five years to the day that Nazis ransacked his institute and began their book-burning.⁶⁰ At the opening of the promenade, chairperson of the Jewish Community in Berlin, Lala Süsskind, emphasized interconnected identities, telling the crowd that ‘homophobia and anti-

⁵⁶ “New film for Berlin’s memorial to commemorate persecuted homosexuals,” accessed 18 May 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/new-film-for-berlins-memorial-to-commemorate-persecuted-homosexuals/a-42124314>;

“Memorial to the homosexuals persecuted under National Socialism,” accessed 19 June 2019, <https://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/en/memorials/memorial-to-the-homosexuals-persecuted-under-the-national-socialist-regime/film-inside-the-memorial.html>; Girßmann, “Sites that Matter,” 60.

⁵⁷ Claudia Schoppmann, *Days of masquerade: life stories of lesbians during the Third Reich* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 41.

⁵⁸ Christiane Wilke, “Remembering Complexity? Memorials for Nazi Victims in Berlin,” *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 7: 1 (2013): 28.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 4.

⁶⁰ “Gay Pioneer,” accessed 9 July 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/berlin-pays-tribute-to-gay-rights-activist-persecuted-by-nazis/a-3318048>

Semitism went hand in hand.’⁶¹ Later, Susskind was one of the key supporters of an official monument for the first homosexual emancipation movement, the *Magnus Hirschfeld Monument*, which opened in Berlin in 2017.⁶² As she had done at the inauguration of the *Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime* in 2008, Susskind stressed both Hirschfeld’s Jewishness *as well as* his homosexuality, arguing that “A monument to Magnus Hirschfeld belongs in a cosmopolitan city like Berlin!”⁶³ Such auspicious acknowledgement of gay victims of Nazism from a prominent figure in the German Jewish community was notable, but not wholly representative of a diverse set of reactions to the memorial. There was still plenty of vocal opposition to the recognition of homosexuals as victims of Nazism, both in Germany and further afield.⁶⁴ Despite explicit permission having been given, there was criticism from certain Jewish quarters of the similarity of design with, proximity to, and implied similarity of victimhood with the Jewish memorial. Holocaust survivor and scholar Israel Gutman, of the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem, criticized almost every aspect of the gay memorial in the Tiergarten, from its location to its intent. He remarked that:

For many years after the war I had the impression that the Germans understood the immense scope of the crime of the Holocaust which they had committed ... But this time, they made an error... The location was particularly poorly chosen for this monument. If visitors have the impression that there was not a great difference between the suffering of Jews and those of homosexuals, it’s a scandal.⁶⁵

Thus, there were tensions between various groups who were invested in the memorialization of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. These often-fraught debates transcended an incongruous concrete stele in the corner of a park, and spoke to the larger, broader cultural memory of these groups and how they interact with each other. These interactions – anger, opposition, obfuscation, compromise, alteration and

⁶¹ Christiane Wilke, 2013, p.12

⁶² “Denkmal für die erste homosexuelle Emanzipationsbewegung Das "Magnus-Hirschfeld-Denkmal,” accessed 15 May 2020, <https://berlin.lsvd.de/projekte/denkmal-fuer-die-erste-homosexuelle-emanzipationsbewegung/>

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Régis Schlagdenhauffen-Maika, “The New Holocaust History Museum of Yad Vashem and the Commemoration of Homosexuals as Victims of Nazism,” *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem*, 16 (2005): 253-9.

⁶⁵ “Holocaust Academic Pans Monument to Nazis' Gay Victims,” accessed 28 May 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/holocaust-academic-pans-monument-to-nazis-gay-victims/a-3368183>

acceptance – are as much as part of the long history of this subjugated group, as they are the memorial itself.

Many monuments often explicitly invite interaction, for example, the way in which visitors navigate, and behave in, the disorienting physicality of the Jewish Memorial. The *Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism* is another example of a memorial inviting interaction. It features a triangle motif, a reflecting pool, poetry, and a constantly-changing form built around a sinking platform.⁶⁶ One of the key features of the Hamburg *Monument against Fascism, War and Violence – and for Peace and Human Rights* was the way in which the public interacted with it by defacing it.⁶⁷ The Berlin gay memorial would be vandalized more than once in its first years, acts that the mayor described as “clearly directed against homosexuals, [demonstrating] intolerance and homophobia.”⁶⁸ The edifice has been daubed with paint and the viewing window has been smashed several times.⁶⁹ Such attacks could be read as simple vandalism that might occur in any urban environment, not least as they tend to target the most easily damaged area of the memorial – the glass viewing panel. However, they could also be considered as specific assaults on memory, perpetuating the ill-treatment of an already subjugated group. The viewing panel is, after all, the sole focal point of the monument, and one which is inviting a response from whomever interacts with it. Its designers were hoping to enlighten and inform the viewer of past and present injustices towards homosexuals, but like some of the responses to the film inside the glass panel itself, there can be little mitigation against the person(s) who might be affronted by the memorial’s visual messages of tolerance and acceptance. In part one of this thesis, I noted that for Pink Triangle survivor, Rudolf Brazda, pictures helped him remember the past and, enabled him to share enough stories so that his testimony could finally be told. He was thrilled that the memorial had finally been

⁶⁶ “Monument to Sinti and Roma Murdered in the Holocaust Opens in Berlin,” accessed 20 April 2020, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/monument-to-sinti-and-roma-murdered-in-the-holocaust-opens-in-berlin-a-863212.html>

⁶⁷ Quoted in Michael Gibson, *Hamburg: Sinking Feelings*, ARTnews 86, Summer, 1997: 106-7, in Neil Levi & Michael Rothberg, *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings*, Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2003, p.436

⁶⁸ “An act of intolerance,” accessed 28 July, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/an-act-of-intolerance-and-homophobia-berlin-mayor-condemns-attack-on-gay-memorial-a-572829.html>

⁶⁹ Cher Krause Knight, Harriet F. Senie, eds. *A Companion to Public Art* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 408; Mary Fulbrook, *Reckonings: Legacies of Nazi Persecution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 504; “Berlin Memorial to Gay Victims of the Holocaust Vandalized for Second Time,” accessed 19 June 2020, <https://hyperallergic.com/482860/berlin-memorial-to-gay-victims-of-the-holocaust-vandalized-for-second-time/>

erected, and that it used visual images not dissimilar to those that aided his own memory work. He was distraught that it was the subject of an attack. Brazda – by now in his 90s – lamented: “I had feared something like this would happen. People don't learn ... Because they don't want to understand that there is such a thing as homosexuality. Because they don't want to accept that there are people who are naturally different from them.”⁷⁰

However we read and understand the acts of vandalism directed at the memorial, it seems that wider public reaction to the it was somewhat ambivalent. A 2015 study by a team headed by Anika Oettler, from the Institute for Sociology, Philipps-Universität Marburg illuminates the ways in which visitors have tended to interpret the monument. The team's research consists of a mixture of covert observations of public interaction with the memorial, and short interviews about their opinions of it. Many agreed that its location is problematic; respondents said it is “secret.... hidden... isolated... all on its own... lost in a park.”⁷¹ More troubling is the large number of participants for whom the meaning of the monument is as obfuscated as its position; one respondent commented “I am not sure what it's for... I mean it's obviously a memorial for something because there are flowers there,” whilst another remarked that the structure was “nice, solemn, but I don't really know what it is.”⁷² These responses are telling in terms of the memories that are being marshalled and represented at the memorial, and how they are – and indeed are not – translating into meaningful encounters. In her study, Oettler notes that most people's encounters with the memorial are ‘brief’.⁷³ Indeed, unlike museums, memorials tend to elicit much more cursory engagement. They are often only briefly glimpsed as one walks by.⁷⁴ Many of the participants in the study noted the aesthetic similarity with the nearby Jewish memorial, observing that the gay memorial was “smaller, simpler, less thrilling.”⁷⁵ Others still remarked that there was a disconnection between the “big, ugly, strong” exterior and the small, tender video

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Anika Oettler, “The Berlin Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime: Ambivalent responses to homosexual visibility,” *Memory Studies* (2019): 8-9.

⁷² Ibid. 9.

⁷³ Ibid. 7.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 6.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 7-8.

screen of the interior.⁷⁶ Indeed, the looped film provoked many diverse reactions from those who viewed it, ranging from “pure, emotional, intimate, moving, affective, human... [to] aggressive, basic [and one visitor who remarked] “I don’t know if you have to see them kissing like that.””⁷⁷ Reactions from, and indeed behaviours by, visitors to such monuments will of course differ markedly.⁷⁸ The range of responses is interesting, yet hardly revelatory; some appreciated the memorial’s form and function, others balked at the public display of same-sex affection. What is notable here is the dearth of understanding about the monument’s meaning, in terms of its attempt to memorialize the gay victims of Nazism. Oettler notes that “most respondents made no reference to the historical dimension of persecution.”⁷⁹

On my own visits to the Tiergarten, in 2012 and 2015, I observed several interactions between the public and the memorial. Although of course this was not a formal study like that of Oettler and her team, I saw similar encounters; many simply walked by the memorial, some stopped briefly to peer into the viewing panel, there was some shrugs and the occasional, embarrassed laugh. As a meaning-making site of memory, it does not convey the history of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals in as clear a manner as the many pink triangle plaques which are specific in their meaning. As a place of reflection and remembrance, it arguably does not provide an aesthetically traditional form at which to be solemn and deferential. Its effectiveness as a memorial to this history does – I would suggest – depend largely on context; missing the nearby information panel risks obscuring the meaning, and thus, hiding these histories all over again. Yet, a critical analysis of the memorial is useful in terms of the history I have been tracing, the politics of its realization, and how it does – and does not – contribute to the wider cultural memory of these victims. The analogous aesthetics of the Jewish and gay memorials and their geographic contiguity references one of the complex themes structuring this thesis, namely the tension between the representation of the Holocaust and the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. It is a tension woven into the fabric

⁷⁶ Ibid. 8.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 8.

⁷⁸ For further analysis on behavior at Holocaust memorials, see Quentin Stevens, “Visitor Responses at Berlin’s Holocaust Memorial: Contrary to Conventions, Expectations and Rules,” *Public Art Dialogue*, 2:1 (2012); Thomas R. Dunn, “Grinding against Genocide: Rhetorics of Shame, Sex, and Memory at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, Volume 49, Issue 4 (2019).

⁷⁹ Oettler, “The Berlin Memorial,” 8.

of the pink triangle as a political symbol for the cultural memory of these victims/survivors. It is a tension that has informed much of the way the memoirists understood their experiences, their continued silencing, and their struggle for recognition. It is a tension evident in the broader sense of memorialization and remembrance, in terms of whose victimhood can be acknowledged, when, and where.

“Rightfully intertwined”⁸⁰ – The March on Washington and the marshalling of memory in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

In 2008, the year that the Berlin memorial was finally unveiled, Erika Doss wrote that “contemporary America is deeply engaged in ‘memorial mania’, a national obsession with issues of memory and history and an urgent, excessive desire to secure those issues with various forms of public commemoration.”⁸¹ One such site of memory that might be said to reference this “mania” is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Though it is largely dedicated to the Jewish Shoah, it does house exhibitions to other groups of victims of Nazism, including homosexuals. Unlike the memorials in Berlin and other European cities, the museum is located in Washington D.C, “where no concentration camps stood and which was not the primary arena for the Holocaust.”⁸² As with the previous discussion of the Berlin memorial, my interest here lies with the museum’s exhibition to gay victims of Nazism understood in terms of the cultural context around the inception and inauguration of the museum itself.

In 1979, the President’s Commission on the Holocaust, set up by President Carter a year earlier and chaired by author and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, recommended a memorial museum should be built in the nation’s capital.⁸³ The report argued that whilst it should focus primarily on the Jewish Holocaust, the museum should also recognize other persecuted groups. Moreover, it should incorporate the perspective of

⁸⁰ “A Sacred Obligation,” accessed 18 July 2019, <http://www.glaa.org/archive/1993/brickushmm0423.shtml>

⁸¹ Erika Doss, “War, memory, and the public mediation of affect: The National World War II Memorial and American imperialism,” *Memory Studies*, 1:2 (2008): 27.

⁸² Michael Bernard-Donals, *Figures of Memory: The Rhetoric of Displacement at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016), 81.

⁸³ The President’s Commission on the Holocaust, accessed 15 August 2019, <https://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum/presidents-commission>

the US in terms of its role as liberators, whilst remaining cognizant of the nation's failure to effectively intervene sooner.⁸⁴ The USHMM was envisaged and designed as a departure from a traditional historical museum, one which might simply have displayed artefacts from various periods. Instead, it was intended to work as a “narrative museum,” one which attempted to tell – in linear, chronological fashion – the “story” of the Holocaust. The museum designers wanted this story to represent the various groups involved; victims, perpetrators, bystanders and “liberators,” in order to honour the dead and the survivors. Furthermore, it wanted to ensure that, despite the best efforts of the Nazi instigators, the world would know what had happened.⁸⁵

The dedication ceremony for the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was held on Thursday 22nd August 1993. As the video footage of the day attests, it was a suitably bleak spring day as Elie Wiesel took to the stage to make his speech; the wind howled around the flags that surrounded him, and the rain lashed down on the Holocaust survivors who made up much of the audience.⁸⁶ As he spoke, Wiesel maintained that the museum's primary purpose, from its inception in the late 1970s, to its dedication in the mid-1990s, was, for the dead and the living, to bear witness. He argued that remembering should facilitate reconciliation, suggesting that

... A museum is a place, I believe, that should bring people together, a place that should not set people apart. People who come from different horizons, who belong to different spheres, who speak different languages—they should feel united in memory.⁸⁷

Though he did not explicitly reference specific groups of victims of Nazism, and, as a Jewish survivor, his speech was largely concerned with the genocide of the Jews, Wiesel had played an integral role in gathering support for inclusion of gay victims of Nazism in the planning stages of the museum, alongside gay activist groups such as the Gay Activists Alliance of Washington (GAA).⁸⁸ Later that day, when President Bill

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli, *The Holocaust Museum in Washington* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, INC. 1995), 17.

⁸⁶ “Holocaust Memorial Museum Dedication,” accessed 18 August 2019, <https://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events/after-1945/holocaust-memorial-museum-dedication>

⁸⁷ “Elie Wiesel's Remarks at the Dedication Ceremonies for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, April 22, 1993,” accessed 19 August 2019, <https://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum/mission-and-history/wiesel>

⁸⁸ “The President's Commission on the Holocaust,” accessed 29 June 2019, <https://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum/presidents-commission>; “Behind the Exhibits,” accessed 29 June 2019, <http://www.glaa.org/archive/2003/howellbehindtheexhibits1103.shtml>

Clinton addressed the gathered dignitaries and survivors, he was more explicit in his inclusion of the vast array of those who fell prey to the Nazi regime, stating that “Millions died for who they were, how they worshiped, what they believed, and who they loved.”⁸⁹ Though he went on to stress the specificity of the Jewish Shoah, Clinton’s inclusive words were significant. By the time the US President stood before this assembled crowd to inaugurate an American Holocaust museum, the “story” of gay victims of Nazism had been unfolding, and contracting, for over sixty years, a history overwhelmingly marked by silence, secrecy, invisibility and indifference. Clinton’s remarks came a year before Pierre Seel published his memoir, which, as we have seen, climaxed with Seel decrying the lack of recognition of homosexual victims of Nazism. Yet here, however succinct, was tacit acknowledgment of this history by a US President. Small vindication, perhaps, for the victims, the survivors, and their memories, but just one part of the wider narrative of recognition, remembrance and representation of this history and its legacy that would come to characterize that April weekend.

The museum itself opened to the general public the following Monday 26th April. In a portentous moment of cultural alignment, two further events in the US capital were sandwiched between the dedication and opening of the Holocaust Museum. On Friday 23rd April, a local community ceremony was held to mark the inclusion of gay victims into the permanent exhibition of the USHMM, and two days later, up to 100,000 people took part in the *March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation*. These were grass-roots events that spoke, both implicitly and explicitly, to the Holocaust, the gay victims of Nazism, the pink triangle, and the AIDS crisis.

The opening of the museum was a major news story over that April weekend in 1993. Every US network carried reports of the inauguration of a space that *The New York Times* called “a museum for all Americans.”⁹⁰ Jostling for headlines that weekend was the other big news story in the US – the march. The event saw up to one million people

⁸⁹ “Remarks of President William J. Clinton at the Dedication Ceremonies for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, April 22, 1993,” accessed 19 July 2019, <https://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum/mission-and-history/clinton>

⁹⁰ “Museum opens with firm grip on the emotions,” accessed 8 August, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/04/27/us/museum-opens-with-firm-grip-on-the-emotions.html>; For television schedules of reports on both the museum inauguration and the March on Washington see “Vanderbilt News Archive April 1993 Broadcast Index,” accessed 18 June 2018, <https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/siteindex/1993-4>

take part in a political rally in the nation's capital. Key demands included passage of a LGBT civil rights bill, increased funding for AIDS education, research, and patient care, universal access to health care, anti-discrimination legislation, educational and curricula reform, and an end to sexist, racial and ethnic discrimination.⁹¹ On that sunny Sunday in 1993, the pink triangle was ubiquitous. It appeared on everything from badges to banners, hats to face-paints. It was worn by boy scout leaders indignant at being marginalized, and on the shirts of the lesbian motorcycle group 'Dykes on Bikes', whose own campaign to reclaim the term 'dyke' as a positive and unifying means of self-identification mirrors the reclamation of the pink triangle itself.⁹² Protestors sporting the symbol mounted buildings in visible protest, whilst marching civil rights campaigner groups adopted it as their slogan. At a mass commitment ceremony during the event, grooms wore the symbol on their hats and it adorned the veils of brides. If here it was a symbol of hope and love, it was also one of grief, expressed in the form of triangle wreaths made of pink roses. It was seen on the signs of 'proud parents' and the pins of their young children. It featured frequently in the march and was prominent on the official uniform of the marshals, who formed a protective barrier between the participants and protestors. The marching throng's collective riposte of "SHAME, SHAME" showed that they were unfazed and undaunted by the interlopers but the significance of seeing a wall of pink triangles cannot be underestimated. This symbol, once a visual metaphor for the other, those perceived as weak and degenerate, was here transformed into a unifying, mighty, omnipresent emblem of solidarity. Yet, unlike its original and narrow incarnation as a homogeneous badge of hate, here, its symbolism was manifold.

The pink triangle was omnipresent as the people marched on Washington that Sunday in 1993. It was an historical coalescence of the symbolism, resonance and impact of the sign critically examined in the previous chapter – from the grassroots underground gay liberation movements in the 1970s through to the defiance-in-the-face-of-death

⁹¹ Craig A. Rimmerman, *From Identity to Politics: The Lesbian and Gay Movements in the United States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 187-194;
A simple matter of justice: the 1993 march on Washington for lesbian, gay & bi equal rights & liberation. Film. Joan E. Biren, Frameline. United States, 1993.

⁹² "LGBTQ Community Change Makers," accessed 22 August 2019,
<https://www.ebar.com/news/news//261500>

marches and mobilization of the AIDS-crisis 1980s.⁹³ It continued to provoke intense debate about the appropriateness of its usage to denote contemporary gay identity, remembrance and activism, but, by 1993, it had become, for many, a symbol of the “political consciousness of gays and lesbians... [compelling them] to take action against homophobic trends such as current attempts to pass antigay initiatives throughout the country.”⁹⁴ More broadly, the march itself came at a pivotal moment in US gay history, with activists securing a significant audience with the president on the issue of homosexuals in the military, whilst the country itself was in the midst of a second wave of the AIDS pandemic. Equally momentous was the pre-digital nature of this enormous mobilization.⁹⁵ The 1993 March was the latest in a series of similar political protests in the capital, stretching back to the late-1970s. Its legacy in part, was that, from this grassroots event, activists and campaigners were inspired to fight for significant social, legal and political change, from the local to the national, including the abolition of discriminatory laws, and the enshrinement of civil rights legislation, wider cultural and political representation, and advances in care and research around AIDS.⁹⁶

The pink triangle and its use as a symbol of grass-roots, bottom-up activism since the 1970s coalesced here with official acknowledgment of its history and lasting memorialization of these men and their memories. The remainder of this chapter considers these events in terms of crystallizing the themes of this study. It also critically examines the exhibition in the USHMM that memorializes the memories of the gay victims and survivors.

Like Wiesel, Barrett L. Brick and the Gay Activists Alliance of Washington (GAA) were crucial to the history of the USHMM’s inclusion of gay victims of Nazism.⁹⁷

⁹³ “Today in Pride Month history: Homosexuals in Holocaust first publicly recognized,” accessed 12 June 2020, <http://www.peoplesworld.org/article/today-in-pride-month-history-homosexuals-in-holocaust-first-publicly-recognized/>; Jensen, “The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness,” 324; Barker & Scheele, *Queer: A Graphic History*, 66-67; 87; Blasius and Phelan, *An ACT UP / NY Portfolio*, 622.

⁹⁴ Jensen, “The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness,” 319-20.

⁹⁵ “Remembering the 1993 March on Washington,” accessed 28 December 2018, <https://www.losangelesblade.com/2018/09/20/remembering-the-1993-march-on-washington/>

⁹⁶ “Reflections on the 1993 March on Washington,” accessed 28 December 2018, <https://www.thetaskforce.org/reflections-on-the-1993-march-on-washington/>

⁹⁷ “Behind the Exhibits,” accessed 6 July 2019, <http://www.glaa.org/archive/2003/howellbehindtheexhibits1103.shtml>

Barrett L. Brick was a lawyer in Washington D.C. for thirty years and, much like Kramer's tireless crusade to mobilize in terms of the AIDS crisis, Brick was foremost in a lengthy campaign for LGBT recognition in terms of human rights violations throughout the world. He also served as president of the Washington D.C. LGBT Jewish congregation.⁹⁸ The day *after* Wiesel, Clinton and other notables such as the Israeli president and the chairman of the United States Holocaust Council spoke at the official dedication ceremony of the USHMM, Brick also delivered a speech. Yet, despite having been involved in advocating for the inclusion of other victims into the museum, Brick was not invited to the official event. Other groups of victims, whilst name-checked, were likewise not represented at the formal event.⁹⁹ Instead, Brick spoke to a gay community event the following day; his speech, *A Sacred Obligation*, honours the memory of those persecuted under National Socialism, their inclusion in the USHMM, and the threat of continued silence and subjugation in the present. For Brick this was "an obligation of memory. To remember, and to bear witness. To pierce a silence that, too often, still seeks to enshroud us."¹⁰⁰ He identified the extraordinary convergence of a number of events that were of such significance in terms of homosexual history, remembrance and activism, telling those listening:

We come together at a juxtaposition of events that are rightfully intertwined: the dedication of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the National March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation. The March, a clarion call for justice. The Museum, described by one writer as "a place of terrible beauty," standing as a reminder of the consequences of the failure of justice — of cowardice, indifference, appeasement, and silence, the fertile soils in which evil can flourish.¹⁰¹

Brick's powerful address demonstrated to those listening *why* it was crucial to speak and bear witness. Just as survivors and activists had been trying to do for many years,

⁹⁸ "Remembering Barrett Brick, accessed 8 June 2019,

<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/remembering-lgbt-legal-activist-barrett-brick>

⁹⁹ Harvey Meyerhoff, Chairman of the Council, at the Dedication Ceremonies commented that "the story of the Holocaust is not simply a story about the evil people did to people: the unspeakable acts perpetrated by the Nazis upon six million Jews, and millions of others—Poles, Gypsies, Soviet prisoners of war, homosexuals, the handicapped and political and religious dissidents." — "Remarks of Harvey Meyerhoff, Chairman of the Council, at the Dedication Ceremonies for the USHMM, April 22, 1993," accessed 17 July 2019, <https://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum/mission-and-history/meyerhoff>; conversely, President Herzog's speech made no reference to any other victim groups — "Greetings by the President of Israel, Mr. Chaim Herzog, at the Dedication of the USHMM, April 22, 1993" accessed 22 June 2019, <https://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum/mission-and-history/herzog>

¹⁰⁰ "A Sacred Obligation," accessed 18 July 2019,

<http://www.glaa.org/archive/1993/brickushmm0423.shtml>

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Brick warned against indifference, ignorance and injustice. He lauded the inclusion of gay victims into the new museum and noted the President's words from the previous day's (official) speech, lamenting those killed for "whom they loved."¹⁰² Moreover, his speech alluded to continued persecution post-war, when he proclaimed "it was not enough to beat, torture, and burn our bodies. When liberation came, they tried still to keep shackled our memory, our history, our souls. And yet, we endured. And yet, we spoke." He identifies the continued subjugation, emerging realization and memorialization in Europe and the pink triangle with its attendant memories and meanings.¹⁰³ Like his fellow activists, Brick made, and stressed, the link between the past and the present. He argued that remembrance was crucial to keep alive the memory of those who suffered and perished and were, for so long, airbrushed from history. He drew parallels with present-day injustices and he warned about the need to safeguard against any future regressions. Drawing on both the history of those persecuted by the Nazis and the more recent battles in the context of AIDS he pronounced:

A taboo of silence truly does equal death. Silence completes the work of Hitler. Yet as we prove here today, as this Museum bears witness, the silence will endure no longer, but crumbles before the simple truth of our voices. For the living and for the dead, for ourselves and for future generations, we and this Museum bear witness to the truth of our heritage and our history: of community and survival, of terror and death, of love and resistance. We preserve our stories, and we tell them . . . each time we fulfil our sacred obligation of memory . . . each time we tell the truth of our history and our heritage . . . we demonstrate our commitment that indifference shall not stand, and that silence shall not descend ever again.¹⁰⁴

Here, Brick explicitly conflated the histories I have been concerned with throughout this study, using 'silence = death' to refer to the Nazi past as well as its inauguration as a term in relation to AIDS. He articulates what the survivors have often insisted on – an end to silence, the acknowledgment of victimhood, the need to bear witness, and the preservation of memory. Ironically, despite its focus on silence, little has been written about this locally-organized event that supported, but was not endorsed by, the museum monolith. This marginalized meeting can be read a metaphor for the diminishing of these memories on an (inter)national scale, in no small part by the museum itself.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Paul Williams contends out that memorial museums “often maintain a clientele who have a special relationship to the museum... [and] they regularly hold politically significant special events.”¹⁰⁵ The relationship between groups such as the GAA and the museum was more complex than official narratives might suggest. Those directly associated with the USHMM argued that there were plans from the outset to recognize gay victims of Nazism in the Museum.¹⁰⁶ Yet this assertion is contested by activists who insist that this recognition was the result of a lengthy, hard-fought campaign for inclusion. In 2003, as part of a presentation to the *Rainbow History Project* in Washington DC, a decade after the Museum opened, members of the GAA reflected on the long history of this campaign, dating back to the late 1970s. This campaign accorded with the wider histories of the post-Stonewall gay liberation movement in the US, and the struggle for recognition of gay victims of Nazism both there and in Europe. Moreover, the fight for recognition of gay victims in any planned US Holocaust museum reflects the hitherto dearth of representation of their narratives and of the misinformation that arises from such absence.¹⁰⁷ Levy and Sznajder argue that not only is the Holocaust itself open to cultural appropriation, the survivor status of the Jews who endured and lived through it is increasingly being challenged and renegotiated by other individuals and groups who identify as victims of traumatic events.¹⁰⁸ The GAA had lobbied then-President Jimmy Carter, but any mention of homosexual victims was completely omitted from the Commission’s final report, prompting them to pronounce, “This will not stand.”¹⁰⁹ There followed several years of struggles and campaigning before the sympathetic Wiesel was able to persuade the Commission to recognize the gay victims of Nazism, provided that it was not equated with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust.¹¹⁰ Such political wrangling over memorialization is not uncommon when

¹⁰⁵ Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 21.

¹⁰⁶ The USHMM has claimed to be “the first Holocaust museum to present, in the framework of an encompassing portrayal of the Holocaust, a memorial to the victimization of homosexuals.” - Weinberg and Elieli, *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 161.

¹⁰⁷ “Behind the Exhibits,” accessed 21 July 2019,

<http://www.glaa.org/archive/2003/howellbehindtheexhibits1103.shtml>;

GAA member Craig Howell recalled the vastly overinflated estimation in the gay press in the mid-70s of the number of gay victims of Nazism – upwards of 200,000 – which prompted Howell and the GAA to seek rightful, accurate representation of the history from the museum Commission. See also Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997).

¹⁰⁸ Levy and Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, 139.

¹⁰⁹ “Behind the Exhibits,” accessed 21 July 2019.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

nations attempt to commemorate the memory of war, violence and persecution.¹¹¹ As was demonstrated in part one of this study, European survivors, were silenced by continued homophobia and contexts of continuing fear and oppression which marked their post-camp lives.

The memorialization of the Holocaust in the United States has been the subject of intense scholarly interest. In this context, the USHMM in particular has been critically examined, not only in terms of its attempt to structure a specifically Americanized narrative, but also in terms of its very existence. The museum's inception, location, creation and operation shape, and are shaped, by the 'Americanization' of Holocaust memory. The museum represents Americans as liberators, though it acknowledges the nation's role as a bystander. It attempts to honour a history that did not take place on its soil, and thus helps to make it part of the nation's cultural memory. It locates a history of destruction and despair on the mall of the capital of "the leader of free world" and its narrative notes that the nation should be proud that their troops liberated victims from the tyranny of Nazism, whilst remaining cognizant of their failings in preventing it sooner. Weinberg and Elieli argue that it is precisely due to America's democratic system that a public establishment such as the USHMM is able to embody both recognition and criticism.¹¹² Furthermore, the narrative of the museum stresses how very *un-American* the Holocaust was; how removed it was from US ideals. This form of representation serves to reinforce American ideology by emphasizing the "alien other" of the Nazi regime and its racist, fascist, genocidal tenets. This mode of othering recasts the Holocaust so that it is able to "teach fundamental American values... pluralism, democracy... the inalienable rights of individuals."¹¹³ Here was a museum which reflected a perspective premised on nationalist triumphalism, and this accords with some of the ways in which the Americanization of Holocaust memory has been criticised and which I addressed in chapter three. This pluralistic dogma is precisely the environment in which the scope can be given for consideration of multiple narratives

¹¹¹ Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 1.

¹¹² Weinberg and Elieli, *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 18.

¹¹³ Phillip Gourevitch, *Behold now behemoth: The Holocaust Memorial Museum America's Newest Theme Park*, *Harpers Magazine*, 1993. Michael Berenbaum seems to note that the *raison d'etre* of the USHMM was to resonate with as many people as possible, to demonstrate the uniqueness of the Holocaust alongside the desire of American Jews to assimilate, see Michael Berenbaum, *After Tragedy and Triumph: Essays in Modern Jewish Thought and the American Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 19.

within the museum, and through which we can interpret the exhibition of gay victims. Ultimately, the museum is largely commercial and needed to attract a broad range of both sponsors and potential visitors. Moreover, despite the melee of voices jostling for recognition, there existed an unerring imperative that one of their linking factors *was* their Americanness. Here were American Jews, Americans of Russian, Romany and Polish descent, and American homosexuals, all “groups who had been victimized [and] felt that it was their right as American citizens to have their experience acknowledged in what would be one of the most prestigious Holocaust memorials in the world.”¹¹⁴

The cultural, collective memories of each group of victims is socially constructed, and, in terms of memorialization, this drives discussions about who is recognized and remembered. This recognition then shapes identity, in terms of how a particular group is represented.¹¹⁵ Given that the USHMM is located in the capital city of the United States and caters for a predominately American audience, the question of “identity” is a crucial one. Jeffrey Karl Ochsner argues that there was a very real danger that visitors would more likely identify with the American liberators, as opposed to actual Holocaust victims.¹¹⁶ In order to counter this potential pitfall, the designers of the museum created for the visitor a vicarious, emotional, traumatic experience which enabled visitors to have a direct link to the identity of victims/survivors.¹¹⁷ One of the means by which the museum attempted to achieve this experience was via the use of almost 600 identity cards, which were developed by interviewing 130 Holocaust survivors, as well as telling the stories of those who perished.¹¹⁸ Upon entry, visitors are given one of the cards, which include a photo, and a profile of a Holocaust victim or survivor. These cards were initially designed in order that each visitor could update their card at electronic stations on each floor so that the visitor learned of the fate of their “companion.” These identity cards were the museum’s attempt at personalizing divergent Holocaust experiences.¹¹⁹ In 1993, shortly before he wrote the forward for

¹¹⁴ Sodaro, *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, 39.

¹¹⁵ Diane L. Wolf, Judith M. Gerson, eds. *Sociology Confronts the Holocaust: Memories and Identities in Jewish Diasporas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 156.

¹¹⁶ Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, “Understanding the Holocaust through the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.” *Journal of Architectural Education*, 48, no. 4 (1995): 241.

¹¹⁷ Weinberg and Elieli, *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 19.

¹¹⁸ “Resources for the Classroom,” accessed 22 August 2019, <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20000825-idcards.pdf>

¹¹⁹ “Identification cards and personal stories,” accessed 22 August 2019, <https://www.ushmm.org/educators/teaching-materials/identification-cards-and-personal-stories>

the second edition of *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, Klaus Muller was appointed as European representative of the USHMM and began collecting and collating objects and artefacts that could represent gay victims of Nazism.¹²⁰ Part of Muller's remit was to prepare the ID cards that represented homosexual victims. The ID cards produced by Muller served to present individual voices that spoke to the broader narrative of the persecution of homosexuals under Nazism. The cards gave the visitor to the museum – and later the visitor to the online resource – a sense of the general conditions of the period whilst situating specific characters within this timeframe. In less than two-hundred words, one card informs the reader/carrier about Paragraph 175, mass arrests, torture, castration, German gays in the military, and detainment in concentration camps. Moreover, it conveys this information in the context of a single person's history.¹²¹ The cards represent forms of memory and embodiment, intended to demonstrate to the visitor the heterogeneous nature of those who were persecuted by the Nazis due to their sexual orientation. They present accounts, for example, about merchants, actors, shop-workers and drag queens. These individualized histories reveal the scope of the persecution, with the geographical reach of the oppression extending far beyond the capital, Berlin, from cities such as Hamburg and Munich to villages and port towns. They also demonstrate the vast chasm between the Weimar period and the Third Reich. The cards inform the visitor/reader about German youth groups and the cabaret era, then the Hitler Youth and the pink triangles. The cards are printed with grainy black and white photographs of men from a bygone age. They are brought to life with succinct narratives that, in the absence of substantial archives, aim to represent cumulatively the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. For example, visitors can learn the histories of Friedrich-Paul von Groszheim from Luebeck in northern Germany, who was one of 230 men arrested in 1937 under the newly-strengthened Paragraph 175. He was imprisoned, humiliated, tortured, castrated then imprisoned in a concentration camp for the remainder of the war. They can also learn about Karl Gorath, (whose testimony was addressed in part one) who was denounced by a jealous partner, arrested and forced to

¹²⁰ "Curator's Corner, accessed 22 August 2019, <https://www.ushmm.org/collections/the-museums-collections/curators-corner/documenting-nazi-persecution-of-gays-the-josef-kohout-wilhelm-kroepfl-collection>

¹²¹ "Persecution of homosexuals in the Third Reich," accessed 18 August 2019, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/gallery/persecution-of-homosexuals-in-the-third-reich-stories>

wear the pink triangle in Neuengamme concentration camp near Hamburg, then later Auschwitz.¹²²

The ID card concept proved to be contentious. Lennon and Foley point to the “reality gap” that the cards produce. They noted that using “narrative techniques to maintain interest ... remove[s] the real that much farther from the simulation.”¹²³ By presenting each visitor with an individual’s story, the museum was assigning an identity and a particular narrative and enforcing this identity and story onto them in the hope that the visitor identifies with the victim. The use of the ID cards as a way of engaging USHMM visitors is certainly problematic. Lennon and Foley also stress the dark irony of (mostly) American visitors adopting predominantly Jewish identities when many Jews would have desperately tried to obtain false papers – and thus identities – in order to survive, as well as the casual way many cards were discarded post-visit, resulting in a kind of metaphorical death.¹²⁴ Andrea Liss points out that the identity cards and the narratives that unfold within them can be read as echoing the arbitrary and horrific treatment meted out to Jews and others by the Nazis - the perfunctory pre-Holocaust biographies followed, invariably, by “ruined existence.”¹²⁵ Whilst the use of ID cards in the museum has been criticized for encouraging artificial empathy, it has proven influential, being adopted and adapted by similar memorial sites around the world.¹²⁶ Sophie Oliver concurs that elements designed for visitor interaction such as the ID cards can help to create an ‘emotive and engaging experience.’¹²⁷ Paul Williams contends that memorial museums tend to primarily focus on objects with a ‘human presence’, for example clothing or furniture. These items are, he argues, are more akin to ‘our sense of bodily comfort and emotional attachment.’¹²⁸ Yet, he argues, artefacts and objects collected and displayed can only go so far towards representing trauma, devastation and loss, and that ‘in a sense, it is the *story* that is the object, insofar as it is

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, “Interpretation of the Unimaginable: The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C., and “Dark Tourism,”” *Journal of Travel Research*, 38: 1 (1999): 49.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Andrea Liss, *Trespassing Through Shadows: Memory, Photography, and the Holocaust* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 15.

¹²⁶ Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 32.

¹²⁷ Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, Tea Sindbæk Andersen, *Disputed Memory: Emotions and Memory Politics in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 102.

¹²⁸ Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 32.

not the item itself that is distinctive, but the associated history to which it is attached.’¹²⁹ The identity cards utilized in the USHMM are, in their simplest incarnation, *presenting* these stories.

The ID cards are just one of the ways in which the cultural memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals has been represented and memorialized in the USHMM. The museum has curated a travelling exhibition around this particular history that has visited numerous US cities since 1995. In addition, the USHMM has a detailed online resource which presents the history of gays in Weimar, under Nazism, and the post-war continuation of persecution.¹³⁰ As discussed in part one, the collection houses rare artefacts such as Heinz Heger’s original pink triangle, and Manfred Lewin’s small hand-made book, *Do you remember when*, which he wrote for Gad Beck and which documents their friendship in a Berlin being slowly ripped apart.¹³¹ Alongside the handful of identity cards, it is a comparatively small collection, but is an important part of the cultural memory that has been developing over the decades. Its inception was, notably, some fifteen years before the *Memorial to Homosexuals persecuted under Nazism* was erected in Berlin. Moreover, the collection is largely conventional, presenting a linear, chronological narrative, part of which is the acknowledgement that the persecution of gays continued post-war. Given this, the collection mostly manages to evade the American liberator trope that is evident elsewhere in the museum, and more widely, American Holocaust narratives.

Despite their overt differences, we can identify some similarities in the ways that these sites present, recognize, and contribute to the cultural memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. Both the Berlin gay memorial and the USHMM ID cards emphasize continued silence and contested memories. Both distinguish between the brighter, more hopeful era of Weimar versus the dark days under Nazism, though in neither is there much scope for the complication of this narrative that I presented in chapter one. In terms of their relationship to the Holocaust – a key consideration that is constantly reinforced throughout the cultural memory of gays under Nazism, and later the use of

¹²⁹ Ibid. 33.

¹³⁰ “Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals,” accessed 21 March 2017, <https://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/persecution-of-homosexuals/>

¹³¹ “Do you remember when,” accessed 25 March 2018, <https://www.ushmm.org/collections/the-museums-collections/collections-highlights/do-you-remember-when/curator-note-and-interview>

a Holocaust narrative as a metaphor for the AIDS crisis – both the memorial and the museum collection can be seen as ‘appendages’ to the concurrent Jewish narratives. Yet, both the Berlin memorial and the USHMM collection also aim to distinguish themselves by honoring the cultural memory of the specificity of the Holocaust whilst at the same time being cognizant of the particular events that other persecuted groups were subject to. Both address the silence of this history, which has been a central feature of the entire thesis. The sites are both emblematic of the ongoing struggle for remembrance and the contentious nature of victimhood debates. The history of the memorials themselves can be read and understood within the wider context of the history of this thesis – silence, activism, consciousness-raising, fighting against dominant discourses, and contention around the use of the Holocaust to frame other histories and struggles.

My interest in both of these sites of memory has been as much about the politics surrounding their realization as about the sites themselves. Survivors like Brazda may have been rightly exhilarated that there was finally a memorial to gay victims in Berlin, and we might consider the USHMM innovative in terms of representing these memories. Yet, as with so much of this history, it was fought for; the American saviour narrative is redundant here. The survivors and activists had to save themselves. The latently-discovered meaning of the pink triangle increased the political consciousness of gay liberationists, whilst the symbol mobilized gays in terms of the AIDS crisis. This then sparked a push to remember the history of Nazi persecution of them. These are all interlinked and inform one another. This is a long history which spans the best part of a century and is still being written.

Conclusion – “What is remembered lives”

2022 marks forty years since the pink triangle plaque was erected at Nollendorfplatz station in Berlin, and ten years since I first visited it, providing the impetus for this study. The memorial to the victims of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals is now something of a minor tourist attraction in the area, alongside other monuments including a rainbow-decorated stela.¹ The triangle serves as a reminder of past persecution and is complemented by the forward-looking rainbow symbols of “diversity and tolerance.”² In addition to the triangle plaque, there are now other markers of this once-neglected history, including additions to the renowned *Solpersteine Project* which traces and commemorates individuals persecuted under Nazism. Two stones are laid in the area commemorating the lives of two men imprisoned and murdered by the Nazis for homosexuality.³ The most recent addition to the thriving memorialization to this history is a six-story high mural depicting Walter Degan, imprisoned as a homosexual and German political prisoner in both Auschwitz and Mauthausen camps.⁴ The sizeable memorial is constituted of a portrait of Degan in his striped concentration camp prisoner uniform, bearing his prisoner number and the pink triangle. The work is by street artist Nils Westergard and is aptly titled *The Unforgotten*.⁵ I remarked at the start of this thesis that the pink triangle plaque I sought out in 2012 was relatively discreet and, like the memorial block tucked away in the Tiergarten, could be seen as perpetuating the concept of a “hidden history.” Westergard’s giant mural, on the other hand, looming over the corner of a busy Berlin

¹ “Nollendorfplatz: Look down and remember,” accessed 19 January 2022,

<https://www.visitberlin.de/en/nollendorfplatz>

² “Kieztour: Rainbow-District,” accessed 19 January 2022, <https://www.berlin.de/ba-tempelhof-schoeneberg/politik-und-verwaltung/service-und-organisationseinheiten/wirtschaftsfoerderung/tourismus/artikel.449242.en.php>

³ “Solpersteine in Berlin,” accessed 19 January 2022, <https://www.stolpersteine-berlin.de/en>

⁴ “Faces of Auschwitz,” accessed 19 January 2022, <https://urban-nation.com/2019/01/urban-nation-x-nils-westergard-the-unforgotten-edition-1/>; <https://facesofauschwitz.com/gallery/walter-degen/>

⁵ “Nils Westergard’s One Wall Mural,” accessed 19 January 2022, <https://www.graffitistreet.com/nils-westergards-one-wall-mural-pays-tribute-to-walter-degen-a-victim-of-the-nazi-regime-berlin-2019/>

intersection could hardly be *less* hidden. Moreover, its very title insists that this history is actively being un-forgotten. They may be constituted of varying sizes, forms and locations, and some may appear more effective than others, but all of these memorial sites are contributing to the collective memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, and in a historically and geographically significant area.⁶

This thesis has been a study about memory and remembering; those lost, and those left behind but silenced. It is a thorough-going interdisciplinary study that has produced a contribution to memory studies generally and to gay cultural history in particular. As the Holocaust was beginning to pass out of “living memory” so too were those persecuted by the Nazis for their homosexuality. The gradual “remembering” of these victims was in part shaped by bigger forces – particularly the rise and globalization of US-led liberal democracy. Although the survivors had been unable to speak for many years, I have argued and shown how the conditions and context emerged which enabled these individuals to not only speak but to be heard. Initial texts which spoke to memories stressed that this was a “hidden history.” I used this as the genesis of my thesis, to investigate if and why, despite the development of the significance of memory in the latter part of the twentieth-century, these *particular* memories might have been occluded. I have traced the distinctive epochs that speak to this history, particularly Weimar Germany and the period of Nazi domination, and the significance of how these are both remembered and represented by survivors. There are various ways in which this history has been rendered but I have brought together this material in a particular way to tell a particular story. My focus has been on the way this history – the persecution, then continued subjugation – informed the testimonies that began to emerge. Using Holocaust testimony frameworks, I have produced original readings of the oral testimonies and written memoirs of gay survivors. These readings have focused on the tropes inherent in the texts themselves, as well as the contexts in which they were written and recounted. I have argued that these texts, and the scholarship that has built up around this history has contributed to the development of a cultural memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, and, alongside this, the pink triangle. I have then traced how this cultural memory informed the emerging gay liberation movement

⁶ Page, *Auden and Isherwood: The Berlin Years*, 75.

and then how the symbolism of the pink triangle was appropriated to speak to the AIDS crisis. Finally, I produced a critical analysis of sites of memory that speak to this history. My interest has been the extent to which these epochal moments, movements, memorials and memories were shaped by the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, and how this has also contributed to the wider cultural memory that has developed. This is a cultural memory that has been emerging and expanding for over half a century, one that has been defined by willful silencing, and an ongoing struggle for recognition. It is a cultural memory that has begun to transcend the idea of a “hidden history,” as survivors, artists, writers, corporate interlopers and political activists have brought the history and memory of the pink triangle into public consciousness, and kept it there. It is a cultural memory to which I have contributed.

The adoption of the pink triangle years after its initial insidious origins has brought this history to the attention of new generations who also co-opted and adapted it for new purposes, whilst also being cognizant of its origins and trying to retain a sense of its authenticity. In April 2016, social media account *The AIDS Memorial* was created on Instagram, then latterly Facebook and Twitter.⁷ Poignantly, the creator of the site, Stuart, remains, like many of the survivors we have encountered, semi-anonymous, preferring to let the victims’ voices take centre-stage. This online repository of remembrance is a place that commemorates love and loss and consists of a continually contributed-to selection of stories of people whose lives have been lost to AIDS, usually accompanied by photos of victims, often young, beautiful, and frozen in time.⁸ In comparison to the memorials that were engaged in chapter four, online memorials are a relatively recent concept, and shape remembrance in particular ways. They are more immediately interactive than stone edifices or museum exhibitions, they are less restrictive in terms of space and form, and they can be more collaborative and supportive.⁹ The *function* of this particular memorial – individual stories that contribute to an ever-expanding narrative that remembers loss and celebrates lives – is like a “weightless gallery” version of the AIDS quilt.¹⁰ Its *form* – photographs and

⁷ “The AIDS Memorial,” accessed 15 April 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/theaidsmemorial/?hl=en>

⁸ “Instagram’s AIDS Memorial,” accessed 8 August, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/nov/04/instagrams-aids-memorial-history-does-not-record-itself>

⁹ For a good overview, see Carla Sofka, PhD, Illene Noppe Cupit, Kathleen R. Gilbert, *Dying, Death, and Grief in an Online Universe* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2012)

¹⁰ Ibid.

accompanying bibliographical information – is not dissimilar to the identity cards in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The *iconography* of the memorial site binds these memories together – the AIDS Memorial logo sits upon an inverted pink triangle and its accompanying pink triangle clothing range has been sported by supporters and celebrity allies. Finally, its *ethos* – represented here in the form of the site’s most prevalent hashtag is ‘What is remembered lives.’¹¹

The AIDS Memorial is a useful way of thinking about how the memories of gay victims of Nazism have been marshalled not only as a means to memorialize that *particular* history, but, more widely, the influence these memories have had upon the narrative of those lives stolen by AIDS, and the continued activism of LGBTQ people. The hashtag “What is remembered lives” can be read as both an antonym to, and a contemporary companion of, the ACT-UP slogan “Silence = Death.” It perhaps most closely resembles an online counterpart to the *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt*, the physical memorial comprised of individual panels which commemorate those who have been lost to AIDS. The quilt was inaugurated in October 1987 and what began as a small patchwork of less than 2,000 panels has now expanded to over 50,000 panels, each of which “document the lives they feared history would neglect.”¹² Much has been written about the AIDS Memorial Quilt and there is not the space here to do justice to the history and impact of “the largest community arts project in history”¹³ In terms of this thesis, though, it is particularly notable as another cultural text informed, in part, by the legacy of the history of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. Many of the panels explicitly reference the pink triangle, SILENCE = DEATH, and the need to ‘never forget’, for ‘What is remembered lives.’¹⁴

Central to this study has been subjugation, silence, and forgetting, alongside awakening, appropriation and activism. Reflecting on the 1993 March on Washington on its twentieth anniversary, its national organizer Deborah Moncrief Bell, noted that “this progress has been accomplished not by the march of one day, but in the collective

¹¹ “The AIDS Memorial,” accessed 15 April 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/theaidsmemorial/?hl=en>

¹² “National AIDS Memorial,” accessed 15 December, 2020, <https://www.aidsmemorial.org/quilt-history>

¹³ *Ibid.*; see also Charles E. Morris III, *Remembering the AIDS Quilt* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2011).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; when the quilt became too big to ever be displayed intact again, the committee in charge of it secured its legacy by making every single panel viewable online.

efforts of millions over many years taking many steps forward together.”¹⁵ These collective efforts are crucial to giving voice to marginalized memories and are echoed in the myriad memorials and marches that serve to honour victims and survivors, of Nazi persecution, of the AIDS crisis, and of each and every person who fought for gay liberation and equality. Through these collective *efforts*, collective *memories* are formed and individual identities are united and strengthened. The decades of struggle from activists, historians, curators, and most crucially, survivors, has ensured that the cultural history of the pink triangle, and the cultural memories of the victims and survivors of all those associated with it, will endure.

¹⁵ “Remembering the 1993 March on Washington,” accessed 28 December 2018, <https://www.losangelesblade.com/2018/09/20/remembering-the-1993-march-on-washington/>

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United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – Homosexuals – Victims of the Nazi Era
- <https://www.ushmm.org/learn/students/learning-materials-and-resources/homosexuals-victims-of-the-nazi-era>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – Oral history interview with Rolf Hirschberg
- <http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504930>

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<https://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum/presidents-commission>

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<http://libcom.org/history/1940-1945-the-zazous>

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<http://andrejkoymasky.com/mem/holocaust/ho08.html>

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<https://www.cdc.gov>

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<http://www.actupny.org/documents/Denver.html>

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<http://www.actupny.org/reports/silencedeath.html>

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https://www.thecjm.org/learn_resources/305

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<https://mic.com/articles/189624/lgbtq-advocacy-group-act-up-calls-out-nike-for-appropriating-its-pink-triangle-logo-for-profit#.2rINRBLcA>

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<https://news.nike.com/news/nike-betrue-2018-collection>

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<https://slate.com/human-interest/2016/07/silence-death-artist-avram-finkelstein-on->

[history-of-queer-art-and-activism.html](#)

Pink Triangle, Symbol of SF Pride, Rises Again Above the City

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHPzZv7n-II&feature=youtu.be>

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<https://adhc.lib.ua.edu/queeralabama/items/show/163>

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<https://berlin.lsvd.de/projekte/denkmal-fuer-die-erste-homosexuelle-emanzipationsbewegung/>

City of Sydney - Gay & Lesbian Holocaust Memorial

<https://www.cityartsydney.com.au/artwork/gay-lesbian-holocaust-memorial/>

Vancouver – Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals: 1933-1945 exhibit

<https://egale.ca/vancouver-nazi-persecution-of-homosexuals-1933-1945-exhibit/>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – Mosaic of Victims

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/mosaic-of-victims-in-depth>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – Persecution of Homosexuals

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/gallery/persecution-of-homosexuals-in-the-third-reich-stories>

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<https://fortlauderdalemagazine.com/events/u-s-holocaust-memorial-museum-exhibition-nazi-persecution-of-homosexuals-opens-at-stonewall-national-museum-archives-in-wilton-manors/>

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<http://hmckc.org/nazi-persecution-of-homosexuals-focus-of-traveling-exhibit-at-umkc/>

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<https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/professor-gregory-woods-speaks-about-pierre-seel/>

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<https://italianacademy.columbia.edu/event/holocaust-remembrance-“unnatural-indecency”-sexuality-and-homosexuality-during-nazism-and>

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<https://www.kunst-im-oeffentlichen-raum-frankfurt.de/de/page182.html>

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<http://m.events.miami.com/performer?id=2519770>

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<https://mjhnyc.org/exhibitions/nazi-persecution-homosexuals-1933-1945/>

Minnesota Public Radio - Exhibit details Holocaust against homosexuals
http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2003/08/05_cunningham_holocaust/

Traveling Exhibition Explores Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals
<https://www.out.com/news-opinion/2015/5/27/new-exhibition-explores-nazi-persecution-homosexuals>

Pictures: 7 Gay Holocaust memorials around the world
<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2015/01/27/pictures-7-gay-holocaust-memorials-around-the-world/>

Seattle Holocaust Center Hosts Powerful Look At Nazi Persecution of Queer People
<http://seattlegayscene.com/2016/09/seattle-holocaust-center-hosts-powerful-look-at-nazi-persecution-of-queer-people/>

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<http://sites.jcu.edu/trs/2015/01/07/us-holocaust-memorial-museum-exhibit-nazi-persecution-of-homosexuals/>

Photo: Holocaust exhibit
<http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2014/nov/22/holocaust-exhibit/>

Stiftung Denkmal – Information Centre
<https://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/en/exhibitions/information-centre/yad-vashem-portal.html#c968>

Stiftung Denkmal – Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted Under the National Socialist Regime
<https://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/en/memorials/memorial-to-the-homosexuals-persecuted-under-the-national-socialist-regime/history-of-the-memorial-to-the-homosexuals.html>

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<https://www.stonewall-museum.org/event/nazi-persecution-of-homosexual-1933-1945/>

Reflections on the 1993 March on Washington
<https://www.thetaskforce.org/reflections-on-the-1993-march-on-washington/>

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<https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/siteindex/1993-4>

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<https://www.unomaha.edu/criss-library/news/2018/10/lgbtq-history-month.php>

RNN Covers The US Holocaust Museum Exhibit at The LI GLBT Center
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8JCtVDY-vU>

March On! 1993
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXcbAIKrHmo>

Simple Matter of Justice clip
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MbWNfX5NT8>

Vito Russo – Why We Fight
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0Q8p0HCQEs>

Pink Triangle - The History of the Gay Male and Lesbian Experience during World War II
<http://www.pink-triangle.org>

Peter Tatchell - Survivors of a Forgotten Holocaust
http://www.petertatchell.net/lgbt_rights/history/survivors.htm

Appendices and Images

Appendix – Revised Paragraph 175 (1935)

Taken from

<http://www.ushmm.org/research/library/bibliography/en/gays/paragraph175.php>

On September 1, 1935, this harsher, amended version of Paragraph 175 of the Criminal Code, originally framed in 1871, went into effect. Under this revised law and the creation of the Reich Special Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion: Special Office (II S), the number of prosecutions increased sharply, peaking in the years 1937-1939. Half of all convictions for homosexual activity under the Nazi regime occurred during these years.

175. A male who commits lewd and lascivious acts with another male or permits himself to be so abused for lewd and lascivious acts, shall be punished by imprisonment. In a case of a participant under 21 years of age at the time of the commission of the act, the court may, in especially slight cases, refrain from punishment.

175a. Confinement in a penitentiary not to exceed ten years and, under extenuating circumstances, imprisonment for not less than three months shall be imposed:

1. Upon a male who, with force or with threat of imminent danger to life and limb, compels another male to commit lewd and lascivious acts with him or compels the other party to submit to abuse for lewd and lascivious acts;
2. Upon a male who, by abuse of a relationship of dependence upon him, in consequence of service, employment, or subordination, induces another male to commit lewd and lascivious acts with him or to submit to being abused for such acts;
3. Upon a male who being over 21 years of age induces another male under 21 years of age to commit lewd and lascivious acts with him or to submit to abuse for lewd and lascivious acts;
4. Upon a male who professionally engages in lewd and lascivious acts with other men, or submits to such abuse by other men, or offers himself for lewd and lascivious acts with other men.

175b. Lewd and lascivious acts contrary to nature between human beings and animals shall be punished by imprisonment; loss of civil rights may also be imposed.

English translation by Warren Johannson and William Percy in "Homosexuals in Nazi Germany," *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual*, Vol. 7 (1990).

Images



Figure 1. Commemorative plaque, Nollendorfplatz, Berlin, Germany
Source: author's own image.



Figure 2. The Eldorado Club in 1920s Berlin
Source: oddmanoutphx.tumblr.com



Figure 3. The Eldorado Club post-1933
Source: cabaret-berlin.com



Figures 4-6. Installation of Pink Triangle, San Francisco
Source: <https://www.thepinktriangle.com/pictures/index.html>

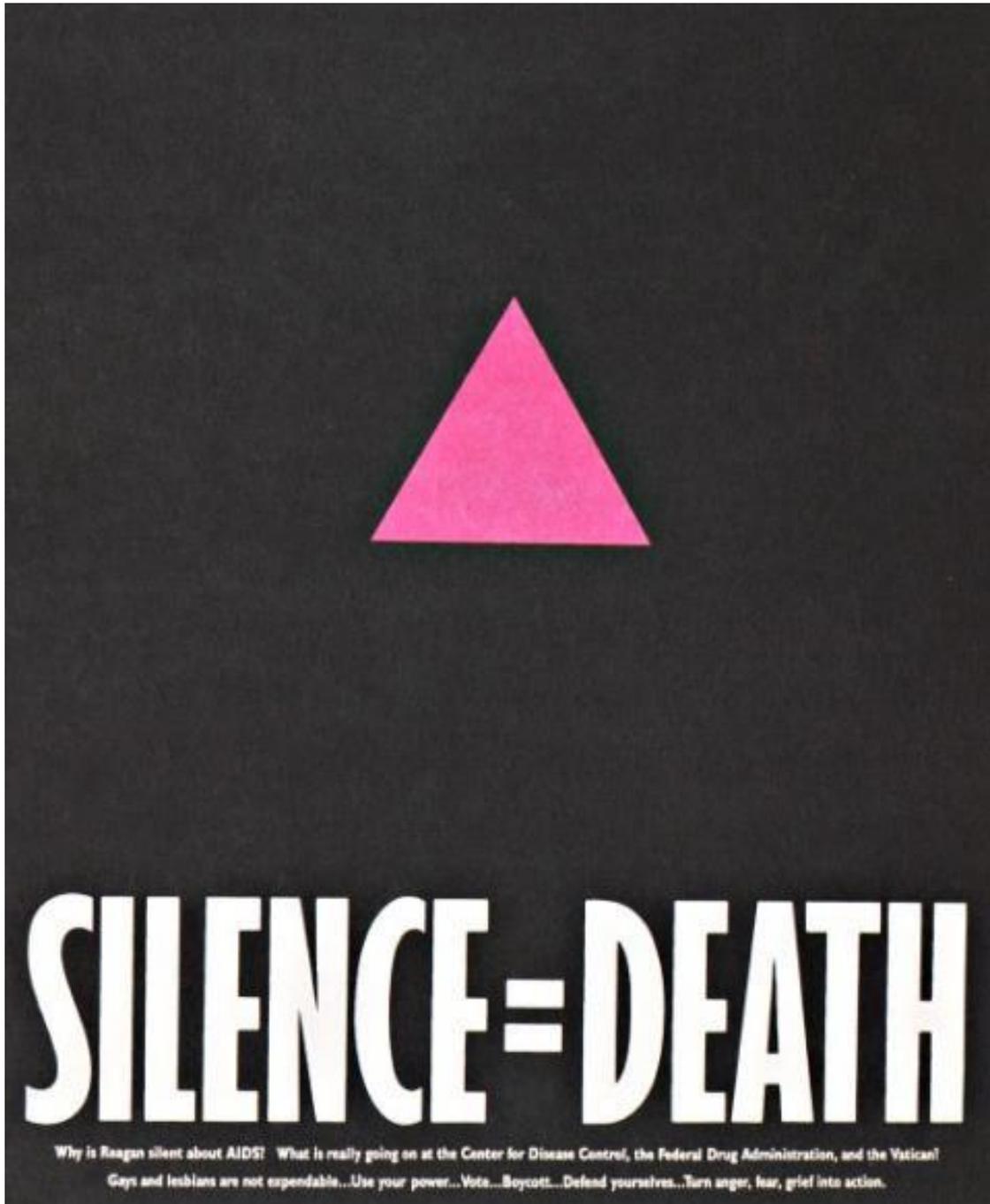


Figure 7. SILENCE = DEATH poster

Source: <https://envisioningtheamericandream.com/2016/03/11/aids-and-ronald-reagan/>



Figure 8. Pink Panthers Logo Source: <https://www.thepinkpanthersmovement.com>



Figures 9-11 Pink Pistols' logos and demonstration Source: <http://www.pinkpistols.org>



Figure 12. Documenting Nazi Persecution of Gays: The Josef Kohout/Wilhelm Kroepfl Collection, Unites States Holocaust Memorial Museum
<https://www.ushmm.org/collections/the-museums-collections/curators-corner/documenting-nazi-persecution-of-gays-the-josef-kohout-wilhelm-kroepfl-collection>



Figs 13 and 14: Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, credit: author's own



Figure 15: Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted Under Nazism, Berlin, Germany,
credit: author's own



Figure 16: Explanatory memorial panel to accompany the Berlin Memorial, credit: author's own

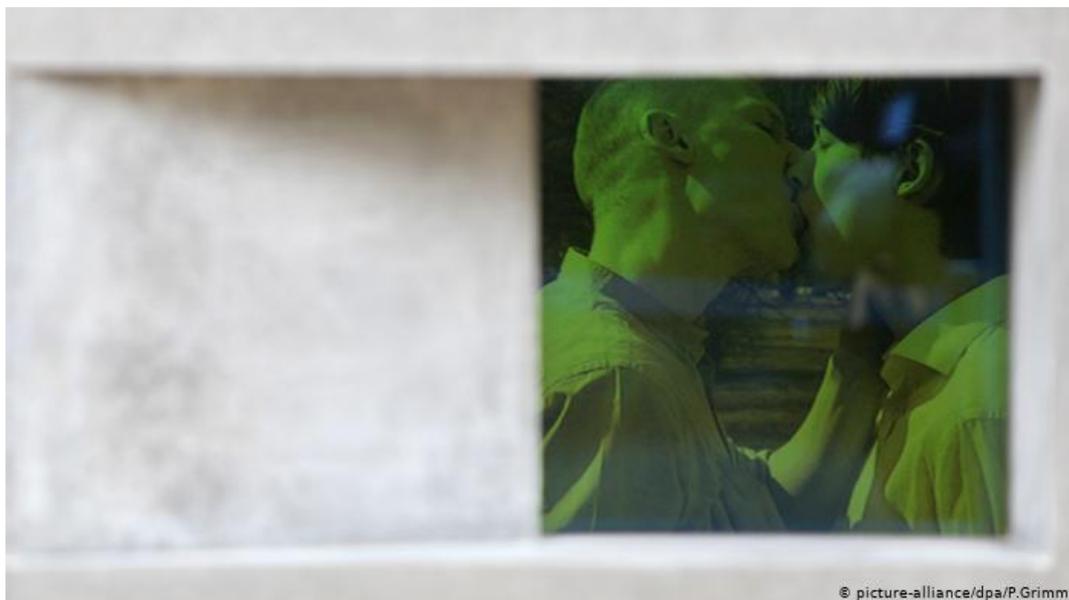


Fig 17: A simple kiss could land you in trouble – the continuously looping video on the screen set in the Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted Under Nazism, Berlin, Germany <https://www.dw.com/en/new-film-for-berlins-memorial-to-commemorate-persecuted-homosexuals/a-42124314>