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PLACES OF MEMORY

The Case of the House of the Wannsee Conference

Katie Digan

Places of Memory

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Places of Memory: The Case of the House of the Wannsee Conference

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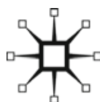

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Introduction

Absract: *In 1942, a group of high-ranking Nazis came together in a villa in Berlin to discuss the Final Solution during what is now called the Wannsee Conference. Fifty years later that same villa was turned into a memorial site and museum for one of the most infamous episodes in the history of the Holocaust. Today, hundreds of people a day visit the house to learn about its history. Why did it take so long for the house to become a 'site of memory'? And what happened to the house in the meantime? This book takes the case of the House of the Wannsee Conference as a beginning point to investigate how and why buildings and places transform from regular places to 'carriers of memory'.*

Keywords: Holocaust; memorial; memory studies; sites of memory; Wannsee Conference

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'Today we give this place its history back,' Berlin mayor Eberhard Diepgen declared on 19 January 1992. It was the official opening of the House of the Wannsee Conference memorial site, and the attendees were gathered in the main room of the new memorial.[1] It had been 50 years since the Wannsee Conference had taken place in that very room. The opening ceremony was highly anticipated and publicized. The president of the Bundestag, Rita Süssmuth, and head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Heinz Galinski, were among the speakers during the ceremony. 'This place confronts us with the main perpetrators, the accomplices of Hitler and the depths of the inhumanity that was imagined, conceived and practiced by people,' Süssmuth said in her speech.[2] 'Even today, it is not easy for me to enter this space, and I am stopped in my tracks every time I am in the house of the *Schreibtischtäter* in the literal sense of the word,' Galinksi declared.[3] It is clear from the speeches that those who visited the house could sense its dark past. But where was that dark past in the 50 years between the Wannsee Conference and the opening of the memorial site?

Diepgen's quote of 'giving the place its history back' is both telling and curious. Telling, because it represents a widespread attitude towards 'historical sites': It reflects the idea that histories 'belong' to the sites where they took place, and that representing history on a site is somehow the default and appropriate status quo (thus, the place gets its history *back*). Curious, because the Wannsee Conference was a two-hour part of the then 78-year-old history of the house which was built in 1914. The house has had many other uses before and after the conference. From 1952 until the decision was made to turn the house into a site of memory in 1987, the Haus Am Grossen Wannsee 56–58 was used for school trips for the city children of the Berlin district of Neukölln. Before that, from 1947 until 1952, it was a school run by the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* to teach Berlin citizens to be good, democratic, socialist citizens. Apart from a plaque hung on the building on the 40th anniversary of the Wannsee Conference in 1982, nothing about the house suggested a group of Nazis had used it to hold one of the deadliest meetings in history.

The history of the house, however, was no secret. In 1966 a discussion about the house broke loose in the West German press. *Bundestagpräsident* Eugen Gerstenmaier commented on the Wannsee House in Israel and the house rapidly became the centre of an international debate. Shortly after that, publicist and Auschwitz survivor Joseph Wulf publicly suggested the house should be turned into a memorial site and a documentation

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centre and a highly polarized and publicized debate ensued. Often referring to the house as the '*Haus der Endlösung*', Berlin citizens, politicians and publicists argued over what should be done with it. The discussion continued on and off until a final decision was made in 1987. Opponents of the memorial had different reasons for their opinions, of course, but the following questions pervaded most of the arguments: why did a beautiful house used for school trips need to be turned into a memorial site? Could a memorial not be built somewhere else? Why did it need to be *that* house? The stark contrast between the views of the house as a nice place for children to play and Galinksi who was 'stopped in his tracks' in the house because of its past raises one main question: what changed? How can a house go from being used for schools and children to 'getting its history back' and feeling like it is 'haunted' by the past to its visitors?

Cases of memory

The developments and histories of sites of memory, especially those of the Holocaust, is a popular area of research. Since the 'memory boom' of the 1980s, an abundance of studies have been published about collective memory and the shapes and forms it can take. Originally focusing mostly on the Holocaust and Germany, the field of memory studies has grown to include studies of anything from relics to landscapes all over the world, all seen as important carriers of 'memory of the past'. The field now seems so saturated that some even question whether the subject has not become a catchall of sorts, wildly growing in every direction with little focus and diminishing explanatory value.[4] This argument has a certain validity. While there are many studies about memory as a politically influenced concept, other factors that may underlie changes in memorial culture are not often researched.[5] There are numerous studies about national memory, the political (ab-)use of memory, memory and its relation to identity, and collective memory. Most of these studies stay within the borders of the nation-state, and most of them take the shape of case studies. A look at recent publications about memory studies reveals a large amount of such case studies, each carefully tracing the histories of individual films, places, books and artworks. Some may go as far as comparing different expressions of memory. Generally, however, apart from references to the important theoreticians of memory studies

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(Jan and Aleida Assmann, Pierre Nora and Maurice Halbwachs), a focus on case studies seems to have come at the expense of broader research about the how and why of changes, developments and theoretical understandings of sites of memory.

Another field that has (re-)gained popularity since the 1990s is the research of material culture: the studies of artefacts and their relation to the social sphere. Though the study of material culture has been around longer, both in historiography and the other humaniora, it has been undergoing a revival of sorts. In 1996 material culture got its own journal, the *Journal of Material Culture*, and more recently exciting research has been done on human–thing relations by theoretical archaeologists like Ian Hodder and Bjørnar Olsen.[6] A prevailing thesis in these works is that humans do not just create and use things, but things in turn also influence humans. The interest in the workings of human–thing relations has been growing so rapidly that historian Ewa Domanska even speaks of a 'return to things' and the filling of a 'paradigmatic gap'.[7] Both the field of memory studies and the field of material culture have inspired a great deal of recent research about sites of memory, or what Pierre Nora famously coined *lieux de mémoires* in the 1980s.[8] Former battlefields, concentration camps, historical buildings, landscapes and execution sites are only some of the examples of studied sites of memory. These days memory is everywhere.

Perhaps precisely because of the diffuse and varied character of the study of material culture, it is difficult to state uniformly what exactly material culture is. In the introduction of the *Handbook of Material Culture* (2006), archaeologist Christopher Tilley introduces no fewer than ten concepts of 'materiality' and 'things'. These include a range of notions from 'things as materially existing and having a significance in the world independent of any human action or intervention' to 'artefacts' to 'the manner in which things relate to conscious ideas'.[9] Unfortunately the scope of this book does not allow for thorough exploration of these conceptualizations. I will work with a basic idea of material culture based on the three aforementioned conceptualizations. I take material culture to consist of 'materially existing' (tangible) artefacts (man-made, or at least altered by man), and the relationship between these material artefacts and conscious ideas. This is not a perfect definition, but within the framework of sites of memory, these are the most relevant aspects.

As noted earlier, most publications about sites of memory appear in the form of case studies. This is not surprising, as case studies are generally a

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valuable way to study memorial culture. They provide concrete information, empirical data and a solid foundation to study the development of a piece of memorial culture. They should not, however, be seen as an end point of a historical study, but as a starting point for comparison, contextualization and perhaps even argumentation towards theory. In this research I want to move beyond the political explanations of changes in memorial culture (as others have researched so extensively), and look at other reasons why places and things become 'carriers of memory' and how people relate to them.

'This is where it happened'

The underlying hypothesis of this research is that not just politics, but also ideas of time, space and materiality ultimately influence the production and development of sites of memory.[10] Much of the discourse surrounding sites of memory involves axiomatic statements about time, space and materiality. Sites are said to 'make the past present' (time), derive meaning from being 'the place where it happened' (space) or 'bear testimony' to the past (through their material presence). This discourse has a strong performative character as it dictates much of how both visitors and conservators perceive or treat the sites. It is therefore important to critically analyse this discourse in relation to the developments of the sites to understand more about them. The relation between the ideas about time, space and materiality and the history of sites of memory has not yet been explicitly researched, probably because these ideas are seen as self-evident and fundamental, and have subsequently acquired a 'natural' status.

The hypothesis that ideas about time, space and materiality shape sites of memory and is too broad to fully test in the scope of this book. I will therefore limit myself mostly to the spatial aspect of sites of memory, taking the case of Am Grossen Wannsee 56–58 as a starting point. I will treat the house itself primarily as a place rather than a material 'object', even though it is of course both. I will consider the entire post-war history of the site, but focus especially on the discussion surrounding the Wannsee House between 1966 and 1992 and analyse the ideas of the site as a space or place expressed. By tracing the different arguments and the eventual development of the idea of, as Diepgen said, 'giving the site its history back', I want to examine how and why a site changes significance and how it can go from being a house to being a site of memory.

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The case of the House of the Wannsee Conference serves as an interesting object of research because the discussion about whether it should be a site of memory or not was lengthy and public. Its complicated post-war history highlights many problems that demonstrate this case's relevance to other sites of memory. Through a chronological account of the developments and discussions of the site during the period 1945–1992, a narrative forms of a place that goes through a complicated transformation from house to 'memory house'. Building on this narrative, I will then outline several theoretical problems that underlie not only the changes of the Wannsee House, but also other sites with a 'negative memory'.

The first theoretical problem or question that needs to be addressed for a better understanding of the how and why of developments in sites of memory is a basic one: how can a space or a place have and change meaning at all? Ultimately, if there is one main thing to be taken from the Wannsee discussions, it is that one space can carry various meanings simultaneously. One house can be the site of playing children, as well as a grim reminder of one of the gravest human atrocities ever committed. While many studies in memorial culture have pointed out that memory and therefore memorials are dynamic and not self-evident or fixed, few have elaborated on the relationship between (groups of) people and the sites of memory.[11] On the one hand, current-day memory studies rely on the notion that sites of memory are constructed and therefore dependent on what people and politics think and make of them. On the other hand, sites of memory (especially those that are sites of actual historical events) can be disruptive, irritating, and are often felt to have effects on people and thus influence them. It is therefore too reductive to see them as Rorschach inkblots that merely reflect what the viewer wants to see. Sites of memory are thus both influenced by people and influencing people.

To explore this problem I will look more closely at the concepts of 'space' and 'place', what they are and how they acquire meaning. To examine the concept of space, I will need to go beyond the borders of historiography and look for answers in the disciplines of geography and sociology. To understand more about what places are, I will consider several conceptualizations from geographers such as John Agnew, who has published extensively about the concept 'place'. To examine the social function of spaces and places, I will follow sociologist Martina Löw's theory of *Raumsoziologie* (2008). In a reworking of the 'duality of structure' in Anthony Giddens's 'theory of structuration' (1986), and building

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upon sociological action theory, she sets out an argumentation for a space as created by the actions of people and reciprocally able to influence people's actions. When applied to the case of a site of memory it clarifies how a space can become a 'container' of memory, and then evoke certain emotions from its visitors. This theory helps us understand how a space can be meaningful, and why a space can have a disruptive effect.

For a further study of the concept of place, I will follow the suggestion of landscape architect expert Marcus Cordes of looking at 'place' from the study of semiotics. In his 2010 book *Landschaft–Erinnern,* Cordes explores a number of philosophies and theories and applies them to the study of landscape. By combining semiotics with the study of landscape, he sees the relation between place and meaning as a moment of interpretation. He gives an account of the development from Peircian semiotics (the famous semiotic triangle of object, sign and interpretant) to the changes its critic Umberto Eco made to it in his later work. In this updated theory of semiotics the object has disappeared from the triangle and the ascription of meaning is no longer so much an act of combining meaning and thing. Instead, the sign and interpretant only refer to each other and endlessly go back and forth. The transformation of this semiotic process opens up the study of a thing (or in our case, a place) to a more nuanced way of understanding how a space can have different meanings to different people and also how the meaning of a site is fundamentally a product of convention and very much tied to our social and lingual context.

The second theoretical problem that will be discussed in this book is the problem of originality and authenticity. Throughout the discussion about the Wannsee House, but also in the discourse about the memorial site when it opened in 1992, there were a lot of implicit references to the originality of the site. One argument that was quite common among those opposed to turning the house into a memorial site was that the house is not a product of '*Nazibau*'. In other words, it was not built by Nazis to serve a National Socialistic end, but an existing building taken and abused by the Nazis. Following this argumentation, the origins of the buildings are not Nazistic so it has no '*Nazi Geist*' and it is not tainted as such. Those who argued that the origins of the house were not as important as the fact that the Nazis held the Wannsee Conference there had to deal with a consequence of their argument: if the house could change from its original use to being used by the Nazis, why could it not change use again?

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Related to the question of originality is the perceived 'authenticity' of the site, which is often thought to give visitors a special 'experience' of its past. This 'experience' resonated in Galinksi's speech of 1992, but the uneasiness of 'sensing the past' in the house remains an often-related experience today among visitors of both the Wannsee House as well as other historical Nazi sites. Visitor reviews of the Wannsee House include many comments like 'get a true feel of history!', 'suddenly you are in the very spot where the meeting took place', 'I found it depressing and slightly upsetting' and 'if you know of the horror that was decided on the inside – it's very disconcerting'.[12] The authenticity of the place produces certain experiences for the visitors. What exactly is this authenticity and why does it influence visitors so much, especially considering that a little over 20 years earlier the house was just a school?

Sources and methodology

This thesis is built upon three types of sources: 'empirical' historical sources, historiographical literature and theoretical works from several disciplines. All three types of sources require different methodological approaches that have to be acquired in different ways. In the interest of transparency, I would like to briefly discuss the sources and methodology used in this research.

The historical documents used in this book, mainly in Chapter 3, are mostly newspaper cuttings. The basis of this collection of newspaper articles lies in the private archive of the *Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee Konferenz*. The memorial site keeps a small news archive about the house, mainly for its own publications, and it has been the primary resource for information and documents about the history of the house. Any gaps were filled by visiting the *Landesarchiv Berlin* and the newspaper archive of the *Staatsbibliothek Berlin*. Though relatively little has been published about the Wannsee memorial in the field of historiography, it has not been completely ignored in recent literature. The Wannsee museum itself incorporates the post-war history of the house in its permanent exhibition, and also mentions it in their own publications.[13] However, most information about the house and the discussions surrounding its use are to be found in literature about the man who proposed making the house into a research and memorial centre in the 1960s, Joseph Wulf. This means that information is available about the correspondence between Wulf

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and others about the project, his personal writings about it and internal memos between the members of his action group, the *Internationale Dokumentationszentrum*. Because it has been used in this context, archive material from both Berlin state archives and the West German press is fairly easily accessible and catalogued. However, because Wulf was already a well-known historian at the time and the Internationalen Dokumentationszentrum (IDZ) project was so deeply personal to him, publications about the discussion have a strong biographical character. The project is seen in the context of Wulf's attempts to research the Holocaust, to make it more of a priority in German academia and to make the general public more aware of their history. Successes and setbacks in these attempts (of which the Wannsee House as information/memorial site was one) are framed as successes and setbacks in the life of Wulf, his personal positive and negative relations with other key figures and, in the end, the tragic fate of a Holocaust survivor. For the purpose of this research a kind of 'translation' was therefore needed from the Wannsee House as Wulf's pet project to a history of a site of memory.

The most challenging aspect of this book is the incorporation of works from other disciplines in this historical thesis. This research aims to respond to the status quo of the theoretical framework of sites of memory and to use different approaches and theories to gain a deeper understanding of thinking about material memorial culture. The theoretical framework of this book then is not so much the current framework of memory research as conducted in historical studies, but rather an eclectic collection of several theories from other disciplines in an attempt to contextualize and broaden the historical research of sites of memory. It really is not a framework at all, but a suggestion to look at the much discussed material culture of memory in a different light. To this end, I use various theories from different disciplines. There is no one all-encompassing theory or discipline that will explain all. Without wanting to risk the gaps and sometimes hubris of interdisciplinary, it is of course possible to incorporate theories from other disciplines into a historical work. There is merit to looking beyond a strictly historiographical way of research and inviting other disciplines to look critically at the problems (and proposed solutions) historians write about. The theories from other disciplines I use will be used by me as a historian, all the while acknowledging my lack of background knowledge and training in these disciplines. I will only use them as far as they help enlighten (or complicate) issues in historiographical literature and analysis.

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A note on terminology

Writing about places and spaces can become confusing because, even though both concepts are highly complex on a theoretical level, they are also very commonly used in everyday language. On the one hand, this supports the thesis that spatiality is a very important aspect of human life, but on the other hand it can be difficult to keep track of the different meanings and uses of the words 'space', 'place', 'location' or 'site'. It can be even more difficult, if not impossible, to keep strict distinctions among them.[14] Though in writing this book I have taken care to be as precise as possible with my wording, it seems wise to make a few notes about the terminology used. First, I use the term 'site' to indicate a practical concept of a place where something is located, that is, a 'meaningful' place. Subsequently, a 'site of memory' is a place where people commemorate, and a 'historical site' is a place people connect to a historical event. In chapters 2 and 3 I use the words 'space' and 'place' in the common sense, exactly as they are used by laymen. In Chapter 4 and onwards, I start theorizing about the concepts, and the words become more defined and specifically used in argumentation. Since authors all ascribe different meanings to concepts of place and space it would be reductive to try to force one meaning throughout the book for the sake of consistency. Instead, I have embraced the plurality of the research matter and tried to be as precise as possible in identifying certain conceptualizations when and where they are used in specific sections.

Notes

1 Eberhard Diepgen, '*Rückgabe eines Ortes an seine Geschichte*', in *Erinnern für die Zukunft* (Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz 1992), p. 5 .
2 Rita Süssmuth, '*Erinnern heisst Rechenschaft ablegen*', in *Erinnern für die Zukunft* (Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz 1992), p. 7.
3 Heinz Galinski, '*Ein Zivilationsbruch und seine Lehren*', in *Erinnern für die Zukunft* (Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz 1992) p. 11.
4 See, for instance, Alon Confino, 'History and Memory', in Daniel Woolf and Axel Schneider (eds), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011).
5 For an overview of studies of memory in relation to politics, the nation state and identity, see John Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996).

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6 See: Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell 2012) and Bjørnar Olsen, *In Defense of Things: Archaeology and the Ontology of Objects* (Lanham: Altamira Press 2013). Both authors are archaeologists.
7 Ewa Domanska, 'The return to things', *Archaeologia Polona*, 44 (2006): 171–185 and '*Die paradigmatische Lücke in den heutigen Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften*', *Historie,* 4 (2011): 34–54.
8 Though Nora meant *lieux de mémoires* to be more than just physical sites alone, the term is now often used synonymously with sites of memory.
9 Christopher Tilley, 'Introduction', in Christopher Tilley, et al., eds, *Handbook of Material Culture* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE online publication 2006).
10 This is not to say these concepts in turn are not political or politically influenced on their own.
11 A very notable exception to this rule is Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (Munich: C. H. Beck 2006), in which Assmann connects a wide range of concepts, like individual and collective memory, history, myth and narrative to sites of memory.
12 Tripadvisor reviews of the *Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz*, http://www.tripadvisor.nl/ShowUserReviews-g187323-d242766-r150629084-Haus_der_Wannsee_Konferenz-Berlin.html, accessed on 28-7-2013.
13 See, for instance, Michel Haupt, *Das Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz. Von der Industriellenvilla zur Gedenkstätte* (Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz 2009).
14 As an experiment, I tried looking up the terms in various dictionaries to gain more clarity about their definitions. I do not recommend it.

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1
An Introduction to Space and Place

Abstract: *In the first chapter, Digan gives a short introduction to concepts of space and place and discusses how they have been used in historiography. Identifying a lack of conceptual clarity and an absence of 'space' and 'place' in historiography, she seeks to find a working definition of the concepts. Following geographer John Agnew, she argues for a concept of 'place' that consists of three elements: place as a locale or backdrop, place as geographical location and a sense of place.*

Keywords: Annales; Braudel; geography; place; relational space; space; spatial turn

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> If one started to talk in terms of space that meant one was hostile to time. It meant, as the fools say, that one 'denied history', that one was a 'technocrat'. – Michel Foucault.[1]

The discourse of studies about sites of memory makes implicit use of ideas of space and place. Historical literature about sites of memory often details the debates about a site of memory, but historians have done little analytical work to really think about what a site (of memory, or otherwise) *is*. Discussions and literature about sites of memory contain popular phrases such as 'contested spaces', 'places of memory', 'sites of terror' without really explaining much about if or how a space can be contested ('it is'), a place can contain memory ('it does'), or a site can be 'of terror' years after said terror has taken place ('because it happened *there*'). These catch phrases, however, are not self-evident. They characterize and shape the way we research historical sites, how we treat them and how we experience them, but we do not really know what the terms mean exactly. In the course of this book I will use the case study of the House of the Wannsee Conference to gain insight into the understandings and relations between people and sites of memory. Because space and place are such important aspects of this understanding, I will first introduce a short theoretical framework of the concepts as they are used in historiography and the social sciences.

Historians and space

For a long time space was mostly conceptualized in physics and philosophy. For instance, Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, Newton's idea of absolute space (in which space exists independently and unmovingly of everything else) and of course Immanuel Kant's space as an a priori category for perception.[2] However, more recent works in the fields of social sciences and arts have identified a lack of interest in space as a social or cultural concept, and have since set out to right that wrong. Sociologists, philosophers and – perhaps most obviously – geographers, as well as researchers of literature, media and art, have shifted their attention towards space since the end of the 1980s, marking the beginning of the spatial turn.[3] Space became an important topic of analysis in studies of (geo-)politics, globalization, film, social movements and social

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inequality. One driving factor behind the awakened interest in space and place was the realization that space is both a key concept in many studies in human behaviour, and problematic and often under-analysed concept. Space loomed in the background of social studies but was not made explicit. Simply put, human behaviour always takes place *somewhere*, and to not include that 'somewhere' in analysis means leaving out an important dimension. With this realization, understanding exactly what space and place are became much more of a pressing issue.

One field stayed remarkably quiet in this spatial turn: history. Historians traditionally work in a paradigm of 'time', and are concerned with developments, events, periods, progress, decay and revolutions. Somehow space was often seen as something that did not fit into this framework. It was something to be left to geographers, and was, in Foucault's words, 'hostile to time'. Perhaps this explains why historians have been largely absent in the spatial turn. However, not all of them proved to be immune to the emerging importance of space. One school of historiography often credited with use of place is the *Annales*. In Braudel's *Méditerranée,* for instance, geography and environment play an important role in the argumentation, not merely as a backdrop, but as a determining factor.[4] Similarly, the school placed focus on the regional scale, perhaps most famously in the work of Le Roy Ladurie, who in *Peasants of Languedoc* and *Montaillou* takes place, not time, as the starting point for his work. These works show that place is not just a setting or a context for the social, but that there is a give-and-take between the two.[5] Another example often mentioned is Karl Schlögel and his book *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit*, which starts with the now famous sentence: '*Geschichte spielt nicht nur in der Zeit, sondern auch im Raum*'.[6] While Schlögel declines to offer a methodological approach to using space in historiography, his book is a mosaic of studies in the use and disappearance of space in historiography, as well as histories of geographical maps and migration (both obviously 'spatial' topics). The latter especially has become popular in historical research, as space is an important factor in migration studies, as well as the wider field of globalization studies. Space further appears as an important player in the study of landscape, for instance in histories or biographies of landscapes.

Apart from these examples though, historians have shied away from using the concept of space, let alone theorizing it. While space and place have become popular key phrases in studies about migration,

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geographical changes and – as we now know – memory studies, they are often not specified as concepts. Space and place (if a distinction is even made between the two) are generally seen as self-evident, common-sense concepts. In daily life, this is of course the case, but the stakes get quite a bit higher when they are used as central terms in a historical study. Looking for theoretical explanation (or complication) of 'space' in historiographical works is often a disappointing endeavour.

Understandings of place

To gain insight into the meanings of space and place, an obvious starting point is the study of geography. More so than any other science, geography deals with places all the time. The branches of human, political and cultural geography in particular deal with the relation between people and places. There have therefore been many recent attempts made by geographers to examine this key concept of 'place' and as a concept it has consequently made its way into geographical textbooks and handbooks. In *A Companion to Political Geography*, the chapter 'Place', written by Lynn Staeheli, is an example of such an examination. In the chapter Staeheli identifies five conceptualizations of space, noting that ' "place" could easily be one of the most contested terms in human geography'[7]. First, place is seen as a physical location, as the material opposite of 'abstract' space. Place is particular and grounded, and when it is studied in relation to social action it is often thought of as a 'backdrop'. Though thinking of place as a 'backdrop' might be reductive, the suggested split between 'abstract space' and 'physical place' is prevalent implicitly and explicitly in literature about place. In *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987), Paul Carter states that 'space is transformed symbolically into a place, that is, a space with history'.[8] This is done, he argues, through the act of naming. According to Carter, the act of naming gives a place its history and, in effect, meaning. It definitely seems appropriate to see place at least in part as a physical location, but with the dynamic social character of memory having almost unanimously been agreed upon by the researchers of memory studies, this concept of place alone is not an exciting one to work with in terms of sites of memory. Second, Staeheli identifies a concept of place as a social or cultural location. This is the more metaphorical use of 'place', often associated with feminist and cultural studies and identity politics. Staeheli mentions the example of

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people 'belonging' in certain places in societies, like women traditionally 'belonging at home' and not in public places. While interesting and especially exciting for emancipatory studies, this understanding of place again does not seem particularly fruitful for a study of memory sites. Third, there is an understanding of place as 'context'.[9] This is different from a place as a backdrop, because place as context is thought to also influence human action. A context can inspire certain behaviour. This brings us closer to a relevant understanding of place for the subject of sites of memory. After all, after a site of memory is 'born', it elicits human behaviour in the form of tourism and certain attitudes of visitors (being quiet or respectful, and in some cases they cause emotional reactions). Fourth, Staeheli notes a concept of place as socially constructed through time.[10] This concept of place is the first one mentioned that has a dynamic character. As social constructs, places can change. With its incorporation of social construction and its sensitivity to change throughout time, this is a fitting concept for the study of sites of memory. There is just one thing lacking from this understanding for the case of memory sites: though it includes a sense of history, it conceives of a place as an *outcome* of history, as opposed to a *process*. While studying a site of memory, it is not only important to look at the *past* of a site, but also at the *present* use and meaning of the site. This is the fifth and last understanding of place according to Staeheli: place as a social process.[11] This conceptualization includes both physical and social aspects, and points out that the combination of these aspects is something that is done continually, not once, 'in history'.

Geographer John Agnew also argues for this last type of conceptualization, and notes that 'place' consists of three elements.[12] First, place is a *locale*, a material backdrop or setting against which social action takes place. This can be anything from a house to a state, informal or institutional. Second, place is a *location*, that is, the geographical location of something on earth, as described by its longitude and latitude. Finally, place has a *sense of place*, an affective element that attaches people to a place. The significance of these three elements lies in the fact that the *social* aspects of place 'cannot be understood apart from the objective macro-order of location and the subjective territorial identity of sense of place'. In other words, a place is not a place without both a social *and* a material component. Agnew proposes a dualism of space/place in which social and physical aspects are separate, but must be understood together. Again, place is always a process, not an outcome. For that reason, 'place'

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is not static but rather negotiable, subject to change and, as fellow geographer Alan Pred calls it, 'historically contingent'.[13] Place-making is not done once, but continually.

Understanding place as not just something that is simply 'there' but as a dynamic process during which actors have an active and affective relation with a physical site can help us understand more about the now well-established dynamic character of sites of memory. As has become clear in this chapter, the study of place and space is versatile and can take on many forms. To ensure that further theoretical discussion about space and place in this book stays relevant for the study of sites of memory in general and specifically for the House of the Wannsee Conference, the next chapters will deal with the Wannsee case study first. A chronological history of the house as well as a thematic analysis of the arguments propagated in the discussion about the uses of the house will provide the groundwork for further theoretical analysis in terms of space and place.

Notes

1 Michel Foucault, 'Questions on geography', in Colin Gordon, ed. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*. (New York: Pantheon), 63–77.

2 For a more comprehensive study of the different uses of 'space' in philosophy, see Markus Schroer, *Räume, Orte, Grenzen. Auf dem weg zu einer Soziologie des Raums* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag 2006) and Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Oakland: University of California Press 1997).

3 For more about the spatial turn and its influence in the social sciences and arts, see J. Döring and T. Thielmann, *Spatial Turn: Das Raumparadigma in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag 2008).

4 Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1996).

5 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Les Paysans de Languedoc* (Paris: MoutonQ 1966) and Montaillou*, village occitan de 1294 á 1324* (Paris: Gallimard 1975).

6 Karl Schlögel, *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit,* p. 9.

7 Lynn Staeheli, 'Place', in *A Companion to Political Geography* (Oxford: Blackwell 2003), p. 158.

8 Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber and Faber 1987), p. XXIV.

9 Staeheli, 'Place', p. 161.

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10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., p. 162.
12 John Agnew, *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society* (Crows Nest, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin 1987), p. 28.
13 Allan Pred, 'Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-Geography of Becoming Places', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 74(2) (June 1984): 279–297.

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2
The Conference and the House

Abstract: *In this second chapter, Digan gives some historical context for her case study. First, she discusses the historiography of the Wannsee Conference, detailing what the conference exactly was and how it has lived on in historical literature and public memory. She shows how the Wannsee Conference has become a symbol for the* Schreibtish-*character of the Holocaust and why it still gathers public interest today. Then, she gives a brief history of the house from its beginnings in 1914 until 1966, when public discussion about the use of the house broke loose.*

Keywords: bureaucracy of the Holocaust; final solution; Wannsee Conference

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Literature about sites of memory has a tendency to neglect the very history (or historical event) the site is supposed to 'remember'. Especially in the case of the Wannsee Conference, however, it is important to discuss what exactly its history was and what kind of *nachleben* it has had. The Haus am Grossen Wannsee 56–58 was built in 1914 by the architect Paul O. A. Baumgarten for Ernst Marlier on what was then called Großen Seestraße in Wannsee.[1] The suburb was a popular spot for summer residences for the well-to-do of Berlin.[2] Marlier was a producer of pharmaceutical preparations that promised to cure ailments such as obesity, insomnia and tremors. It had made him enough money to buy the land to build a house that cost over 500,000 mark. Unfortunately for Marlier, his 'medications' turned out to be ineffective, which in turn got him into trouble with the law. Because of that, he sold the house in 1921 for 2,300,000 Reichsmark to a company called the *Norddeutsche Grundstücks Aktiengesellschaft*. When this *Aktiengesellschaft* was dissolved in 1937, the house was inherited by the only shareholder, industrialist Friedrich Minoux. Minoux was a businessman who had gotten rich by using the inflation in Germany at the time to his advantage and engaging in speculative trading. In 1940, however, he was arrested for embezzling 8.8 million Reichsmark from the Berlin gasworks, the utilities company in Potsdam and a Berlin gas company. As part of his punishment he was sentenced to five years in prison. This, no doubt, made the house an easy prey for the *Stiftung Nordhav*, an organization set up by Reinhard Heydrich to acquire holiday homes for SS members.[3] *Stiftung Nordhav* purchased the villa for the heavily reduced price of 1.95 million Reichsmark. With its beautiful views and ample space, Heydrich would deem the villa a suitable location for a meeting a couple of years later.

The meeting that was held in Haus Am Grossen Wannsee 56–58 in 1942 was in itself an unremarkable event. It lasted no longer than two hours, and many of the high-ranking Nazi party members who were invited had sent a proxy instead. The minutes of the meeting have not been found to this day and the only document left behind is the Wannsee Protocol. Since this is a document that was written up after the conference, anything could have been altered or censored. Still, the Wannsee Conference has turned into a powerful symbol of the Holocaust. In this chapter I will give a short overview of the conference,

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the historical discussion about it and its symbolic value. This will help contextualize the discussions about the house and its role as a site of memory.

The public discussion about the use of the Haus am Grossen Wannsee did not start until 1966. Prior to the controversy, the house was used first by the Social Democrat August Bebel Institute and then by the school district of Neukölln. Hardly crippled by its past, the house functioned as a social institute for learning and summer camps during this time. The contrast between the time before 1966 and after becomes even more pronounced when one looks at the idyllic descriptions of the house in the flyers of the August Bebel Institute and the *Neuköllner Schullandheim*. In the second part of this chapter I will discuss the use of the house in this period. Examining the histories of the conference and the use of the house before 1966 will provide a basis for the discussion that followed it.

The Wannsee Conference

In March 1947 Germany was in the midst of a series of trials of some of the worst offenders of the former Third Reich. These Nuremberg Trials had started in 1945 with the conviction of the 20 *Hauptkriegsverbrecher*, and by 1947 had moved on to bring another 185 former Nazis to trial. The prosecutor, the American Telford Taylor, had his staff search far and wide for information that would help convict the accused. During this search a document labelled '*Geheime Reichssache*' was found in a German Foreign Office. The only surviving copy (of the original 30) of what would soon be called the '*Wannsee Protokoll*' appeared to be the summary of a meeting called by Reinhard Heydrich in 1942 and seemed to contain a bureaucratically formulated plan for genocide.[4]

In 1941, Reinhard Heydrich was one of the 'promising' up-and-comers among the high-ranking Nazi officials. At the young age of 37, he was feared as the infamous head of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* and the *Reichprotektor* in the Czech territory. In November 1941 he had his assistant, Adolf Eichmann, draw up an invitation to a meeting in Wannsee to discuss 'organizational and technical preparations for a comprehensive solution for the Jewish question'.[5] The list of invitees consisted of representatives of ministries that had to do with the 'Jewish question', as well

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as other important figures in race matters.[6] After some scheduling and rescheduling the meeting was finally held on 20 January 1942, in the Haus am Grossen Wannsee 56–58.

According to the protocol, the meeting on 20 January 1942 started with a speech by Heydrich explaining the reason for the meeting: the *Reichsmarschall* (Hermann Göring) had given him the task of drafting a plan for the final solution to the Jewish question.[7] Up until that point this 'solution' had consisted of two elements: forcing the Jews out of the German *Lebensgebiete*, and forcing the Jews out of the German *Lebensraum*.[8] Heydrich then summarized the 'emigration' of the Jews out of the Third Reich as it had taken place until October 1941. At the time of the meeting, emigration had been 'replaced by evacuation' 'as a further possible solution'.[9] The protocol continues with an eerie statement:

> However, this operation should be regarded only as a provisional option; but it is already supplying practical experience of great significance in view of the coming final solution of the Jewish question.[10]

After this statement Heydrich considered the numbers of Jews living in the different countries in Europe and the possibilities of using them for labour in the East 'under appropriate direction'. Others, however, would not be so 'lucky':

> The remnant that eventually remains will require suitable treatment; because it will without doubt represent the most resistant part, it consists of a natural selection that could, on its release, become the germ cell of a new Jewish revival. (Witness the experience of history.)
>
> Europe is to be combed through from West to East in the course of the practical implementation of the final solution.[11]

The attendees seem to have reacted positively to this plan. Secretary of State Bühler of the General Government (the Nazi-occupied part of the Second Polish Republic) even requested that the final solution start in his area, because 'the question of transport there played no major role'. He asked that Jews be removed from the General Government, because they were a 'carrier of epidemics' and 'the Jew ... caused constant disorder in the economic structure of the country by his continuous black-market dealings'.[12] Undersecretary of State Martin Luther of the Foreign Office did predict some difficulties in executing the plan in the northern countries, and advised to 'postpone action in these countries for the present'.

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But, he continued, 'the Foreign Ministry foresees no great difficulties for the south-east and west of Europe'.[13]

As noted before, there are no exact minutes of the meeting.[14] All information available about it comes from the protocol (which was written after the meeting) and testimonies the attendees gave at their post-war trials (during which the defense strategy was to know nothing or 'forget' what happened).[15] When interrogated during the Nuremberg Trials, the accused claimed they had known nothing about the fate of the Jews.[16] When Wilhelm Stuckart was asked whether anything had been said about the genocide of the Jews during the Wannsee meeting specifically, he replied, 'that is absolutely out of the question – otherwise I would have known what it meant'.[17] All this has made the meeting and especially the protocol a mysterious document for historians. No historical document stands alone, and in the case of the Wannsee Protocol it is difficult to determine how to interpret it in relation to other documents and events during that time. Why was the meeting to apparently plan genocide held in 1942, when the mass murder of Jews had already begun in the Soviet Union at least half a year earlier?[18] And if decisions about the 'final solution' were made during the meeting, why were Hitler, Himmler or Göring not present?[19] If the decisions had already been made elsewhere, then where and when? The Wannsee Protocol remains a puzzling document to this day. It seems to at once contain a new plan and no plan at all. It is unclear whether actual decisions were made during the meeting or if those decisions had already been made elsewhere and were simply related. As historian Eberhard Jäckel wrote, 'the most remarkable thing about the Wannsee conference is that we do not know why it took place'.[20]

These and many other questions about the meeting in Wannsee, the document and the planning of the Holocaust have been an object of research for many historians. The case of Wannsee relates to many wider questions about the Holocaust, such as when anti-Semitism and exclusion turned into genocide, who decided on these issues and when. More generally, it once more raises the question of how exactly the genocide of the Jews was planned. Despite the historical uncertainties surrounding the Wannsee Protocol, the document and the meeting have become a powerful symbol of the Holocaust for the wider public.[21] Even if it was not the meeting where the plans for genocide were made or officially decided, the protocol provides a window into the process of organizing

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the Holocaust. Perhaps even more terrifying, it shows the bureaucratic nature of the discussions that would result in mass murder. It has become emblematic of the *Schreibtish* character of the Holocaust and the Third Reich: the image of men in offices and meeting rooms deciding over the lives and deaths of millions of people. The eerie symbolism of the Wannsee Conference is only amplified by the stark contrast between the terrible subject of the meeting and the decadent circumstances in which it was held. After discussing the fate of millions of people for a mere two hours, the men famously dined, drank and smoked comfortably in the beautiful house in Wannsee. For Heydrich and his colleagues it was just another day at the office.

1945–1966: A place to learn

After the war the Wannsee villa could not be returned to any private owner and it thus came into the possession of the (West) Berlin municipality. It is not documented what exactly the house was used for immediately after the war. In 1947, the first tenants moved into the Wannsee villa. It was the August Bebel Institute, the opening of which was announced by its first head of the board, Kurt Schmidt, in February 1947.[22] The new institute was to be a '*neue Bildungsstätte der Arbeiterschaft*' of the *Sozial Demokratische Partei*" Berlin. '*Wissen is Macht*', Schmidt proclaimed in the newspaper *Der Sozialdemokrat*, and this power to the people would come in the form of the teachings of socialism. Since both the West German government and the party did not have a large budget to fund such a project, the entire institute would have to be housed in the villa Haus am Grossen Wannsee 56–58. Schmidt did not mind:

> The house lies in the middle of a wonderful park with a water front of 120 meters. A broad terrace on the south-east provides a view of the Wannsee. The leaf and needle trees of the park, alternated with bushes, give the whole thing a wonderful nature scenery.... The house itself has five large rooms on the ground floor, a representative hallway with a reading corner and several office and kitchen spaces. Large windows flood them with light. Small rooms are meant for teaching and educational work.... In the large hallway every arrival is greeted by the man to which the institute is dedicated: August Bebel.[23]

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The school opened on 25 March 1947, coinciding with the fourth party convention of the SDP. The aim of the school was declared to be the education of the younger generation on the roots of socialism and international developments and history.[24] '*Auch auf dich wartet die August Bebel Schule*', a 1948 brochure for the school is enthusiastically titled. The Wannsee House is featured on the cover; inside it offers courses such as 'History of Bolshevism', 'Turning Points in European History' (they were: the end of the Roman Empire, the Crusades, the German Peasants' Revolt, the French, British and German revolutions, Bolshevism and fascism) and 'The Newspaper – a Public Power'.[25] During every course, costing two Deutsche Mark per day, the participants were to stay at the Haus am Grossen Wannsee, 'freed from the little worries of everyday life', 'in the middle of a wonderful park, located on the lovely Wannsee'.[26]

However, the *Jahresbericht* of the SDP in 1951 bore bad news: the institute had to leave the house in Wannsee.[27] The newsletter outlined the problems the institute had been having for the past years. They came down to one reason: there was not enough money to keep the school running in the Wannsee House. Several attempts were made to solve this problem, like turning the house into the school of the national SDP or sharing the house with other schools, but all were unsuccessful and the institute had to vacate the house in 1952.

The Haus am Grossen Wannsee 56–58 did not stay empty for long. The state of Berlin leased the house and its garden to the Neukölln district of Berlin, some 20 kilometres east of Wannsee. The district used the house as a *Schullandheim*, a country home for school children. The idea was to let inner city children enjoy the outside in a summer camp environment. A 1953 brochure for the *Schullandheim* (again featuring an image of the Wannsee House on the front) marvelled about the location. Though thankful for the 'splendid rooms in the house and the summery garden on the Grossen Wannsee', the brochure did refer to the 'turbulent' history of the house.[28] It told of the building of the house at the beginning of World War I and its later owner Friedrich Minoux, until '*es schließlich einer nationalsozialistischen höheren Dienststelle in die Hände fiel*'. However, the writer of the brochure seemed to be less worried about this '*bewegte Geschichte*' than about the 'large and almost pompously built rooms'. Would the children of Neukölln feel at home at such a house of 'stiff beauty'? (The writer quickly assured readers that they probably would, as children have such vivid imaginations.) The rest of the brochure

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spoke in no vague terms about the beauty of the house and garden. The dining room was so 'bright and full of friendly morning'; the children could sing happily near the fireplace. 'For all those who enter or leave the house, it is a pleasure for the eyes'.

Given these enthusiastic descriptions of the house, it is not terribly surprising that the district of Neukölln was none too pleased when the use of the house became shrouded in controversy in 1966, as will be described in the next chapter. Both the August Bebel Institute and the *Schullandheim* had not only spoken positively of the house, but also integrated the house and its location into their study program. They saw the house as a peaceful place, with different kinds of rooms for different kinds of studies, a nice garden and well suited to the ideal of the schools to have a quiet place for their students to come and stay. While there were vague references to the fact that the house had been used by the Nazis, this did not seem to matter much. The knowledge of the history of the house alone was apparently not a reason to view the house in a negative light, or to somehow 'feel the past' inside. As we know now, that was about to change drastically.

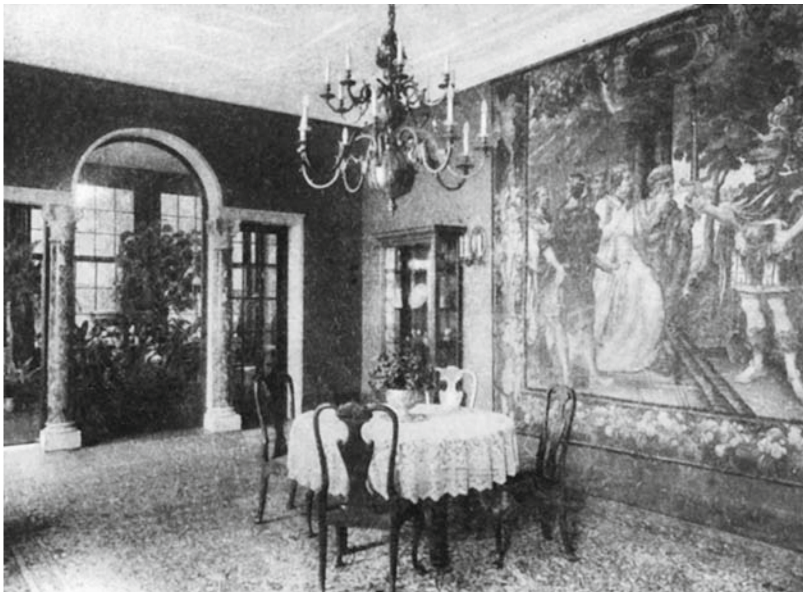

FIGURE 2.1 *The largest room on the ground floor of the* Haus am Grossen Wannsee *56–58 in 1914.* *Source*: *Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz* private archive.

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FIGURE 2.2 *The largest room on the ground floor of the* Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz *in 2013, housing part of the museum exhibition. Photographed by Katie Digan, edited by Lynn Tedjasukmana.*

Notes

1 For an account of the pre-war history of the villa, see: Michel Haupt, *Das Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz. Von der Industriellenvilla zur Gedenkstätte* (Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz 2009).
2 Mark Roseman, *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration* (New York: Picador 2002), p. 92.
3 Haupt, *Das Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz*, p. 50.
4 Roseman, *The Wannsee Conference,* p. 1.
5 Ibid., p. 81.
6 According to the protocol, the full list of attendees was as follows: Dr. Meyer and Dr. Leibbrandt from the *Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete*, State Secretary Dr. Stuckart from the *Reichsministerium des Innern*, State Secretary Mr. Neumann, the *Beauftrager für den Vierjahresplan*, State Secretary Dr. Freisler of the *Reichsjustitzministerium*, State Secretary Dr. Bühler of the *Amt des Generalgouveneurs*, Mr. Luther of the *Auswärtiges Amt, SS-Oberführer* Klopfer, Mr. Kritzinger of the *Reichskanzlei*, *SS-Gruppenführer* Hofmann of the *Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt, SS-Gruppenführer* Müller

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and *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Eichmann, *SS-Oberführer* Dr. Schöngarth, *SS-Sturmbannführer* Dr. Lange and of course, chief of the *Sicherheitspolizei* and the SD Reinhard Heydrich.

7 *Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin*, rep 100857, pp. 166–180. English translation of the *Gedenkstätte Haus des Wannsee Konferenz* used: http://www.ghwk.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf-wannsee/texte/protocol.pdf.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 It has also become a popular document among Holocaust deniers, who either 'expose' the document as a forgery or use it as 'evidence' to prove Hitler never called for a genocide (because he was not at the meeting and did not sign anything). For more about the protocol and deniers, see, for instance, the chapter 'Hitler and the final solution' in Richard J. Evans, *Lying about Hitler: History, Holocaust and the David Irving Trial* (New York: Perseus Books Group 2002).

15 Mark Roseman, '"*Wannsee" als Herausforderung. Die Historiker und die Konferenz*', in *Die Wannsee Konferenz am 20. Januar 1942. Dokumente, Forschungsstand, Kontroversen* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag 2013) p. 405.

16 Mark Roseman, *The Villa, the Lake, the Meeting: Wannsee and the Final Solution* (London: Penguin Books 2002), p. 73.

17 Ibid.

18 Roseman, *The Wannsee Conference*, p. 3.

19 Roseman, '"*Wannsee" als Herausforderung*', p. 401.

20 Eberhard Jäckel, '*Die Konferenz am Wannsee*', in *Die Zeit,* 17 January 1992.

21 The most recent and comprehensive volume about the Wannsee Conference and its historiography is Norbert Kampe and Peter Klein (eds), *Die Wannsee Konferenz am 20. Januar 1942. Dokumente, Forschungsstand, Kontroversen* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag 2013).

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3

The Discussion about the *Haus am Grossen Wannsee* 56–58 in the West German Press

Abstract: *Starting with a comment of Bundestag leader Eugen Gerstenmaier about possible demolition of the house because of its Nazi past, a public discussion about the house erupts in the West German press. Historian and Auschwitz survivor Joseph Wulf proposes that the house, which is now used as a holiday home for schoolchildren, should be used to house an international documentation centre for the history of fascism. The house becomes the topic of an intense debate between those who feel that the house should be turned into a site of memory and those who insist that the house should be used for practical purposes. Digan analyses how these different views concern fundamentally different ideas about what a place actually is and why these views are so opposed to one another.*

Keywords: Berlin memorials; Internationale Dokumentationszentrum (IDZ); Joseph Wulf; Nazi buildings

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From the end of the war in 1945 until 1966 the Haus am Grossen Wannsee 56–58 led a quiet existence. As described in the previous chapter, the house held several uncontroversial functions and was rarely, if ever, mentioned publicly in relation to the Wannsee Conference. The descriptions of the house praise the house's beauty and its peaceful surroundings. In this light, the contrast between the time before 1966 and the time after is all the more striking. Started by a comment made by Bundestag leader Eugen Gerstenmaier in Israel in September 1966 about (the) possible demolition of the house, a fierce discussion broke loose in the West German press. From that moment onwards, the house was referred to as '*Haus der Endlösung*', leaving nothing about the past of the house to the imagination. Soon after the public and political discussion about possible demolition of the house started, fuel was added to the fire that same year by publicist Joseph Wulf, who proposed to turn the house into a documentation centre and educational memorial for the Holocaust.

In 1966 the Haus am Grossen Wannsee 56–58 became a 'contested' site. It sparked discussions about Germany's dealing with its past, what to do with 'historically tainted' buildings (of which Germany had no shortage), Israeli–German relations and international memory of the Holocaust. The debate gradually became about much more than the site alone, with some questioning the need for a documentation centre, others lamenting the many 'negative memorials' in Berlin.[1] Several worried newspaper readers feared turning the building into a research/memorial centre by a mostly Jewish group would inspire anti-Semitic reactions in Berlin.[2] Not all arguments were politically motivated though: a Berlin rowing club that had no interest in Holocaust memory wanted to use the house and its grounds as their new clubhouse, as it was built directly on a lake.[3] In the following paragraphs, however, I will focus on the discussion about the *house* on the Grossen Wannsee 56–58 specifically. This means I will not necessarily look into arguments for or against the proposed documentation centre on its own, nor will I specifically get into political or personal reasons people have for or against the IDZ (such as political function, party membership, religion or ideology, and personal histories with the Third Reich).[4] Instead, I will look at the different meanings people ascribed to the house, why they did so, and how they saw the role of the building in the light of its past. I will examine the discussion primarily thematically, dividing it up into several main arguments and views that are heard throughout.

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Chronologically, most of the discussion took place around 1966/1967. After that, it appeared in the newspapers sporadically in the early 1970s after Wulf quit the IDZ organization in 1970, and in the 1980s because of the 40th anniversary of the Wannsee Conference in 1982. In November 1987 the decision was made to turn the house into a site of memory, fittingly, during a conference.[5] The house got some more attention in the press between that time and the actual opening of the memorial site in 1992. For the sake of structure, I will divide the discussion into two periods: the first from 1966–1982 (pre-decision), and the second from 1987–1992 (from the decision until the opening).

1966–1978: '*Nazi-Dokumente wichtiger als Arbeiterkinder*?'

On 2 September 1966 the *Jerusalem Post* published an article about the visit of West-German *Bundestagspräsident* Eugen Gerstenmaier to Israel. Gerstenmaier and many other international heads of parliament had been invited to Israel to attend the inauguration of the Knesset.[6] The article, titled 'Bundestag leader tells of moving Knesset experience', was a general summary of Gerstenmaier's visit that also included some remarks he had made about German–Israeli relations. In between general statements about current-day extreme nationalism and the place of Jews in contemporary Germany, the question was raised of 'the future of the infamous mansion in Berlin's Wannsee district, where plans for the "final solution" of the Jewish people were drawn up by the top Nazi hierarchy'.[7] Only very briefly was the Bundestag leader quoted as saying 'there is only one solution for it – to tear it down completely and leave no trace of this place of horror'. The rest of the article relayed Gerstenmaier's admiration for the new Knesset building and how he had spent a lovely few days swimming in Crete.

Though the article was small and did not appear on the paper's front page, it did not take long for Gerstenmaier's comment about Wannsee to be noticed by the Berlin senate, and consequently by the German newspapers. Six days later, the *Tagesspiegel* reported that the Berlin delegate of the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD), Herbert Theis, presented the Berlin senate with the following questions:

> Has the *Herr Bundestagspräsident* been informed of the use of this house as Landschullheim for Berlin children? And if so: has the *Bundestagspräsident* disclosed if he will stick to his intentions regardless?[8]

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Theis took issue with Gerstenmaier‘s comment, but the issue was not that a historically ‘tainted’ building might be demolished. Instead, Theis’s concern was that the children using the building would not have anywhere to play. Another article, published in the *Hannoversche Presse* on the same day, also responded negatively to the idea of demolishing the house. The house, the newspaper pointed out, was not a product of *Nazibau*, had already existed before the reign of the Third Reich and had only been confiscated by the Nazis later on. The article further reported that in ‘senate circles’ Gerstenmaier’s comment was criticized: people were ‘overheard’ joking, ‘if we were to follow his suggestion, we would have to demolish half of Berlin’.[9]

This sentiment turned out to be more widely shared. On 16 September the *Tagesspiegel* reported that the Berlin senate had decided against the demolition of the house. They ruled that demolition of a house worth more than one million Deutsche Mark (DM) would not be in the interest of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Major Albertz was quoted as saying,

> We would have to demolish many houses, when we want to remove all buildings in which something terrible has happened. We should worry more about the *people* who did the terrible things in these houses.[10]

The *Nacht Depesche* newspaper was happy about the decision, not just because children were using the house, but also because the Neukölln district had invested over 300,000 DM in the Schullandheim:

> We could say it is lucky, otherwise a series of buildings in all of Germany that once served a nazist purpose but enjoy a democratic function today should have been demolished![11]

These initial reactions showed quite a clear idea of buildings ‘abused’ by Nazis. A building was just a building (and, in this case, an expensive one at that), and there was no point in getting rid of every building that had at some point been the backdrop against which terrible things happened.

The International Documentation Centre

On 19 September, Joseph Wulf entered the debate. Wulf, a survivor of Auschwitz and a historian specialized in the history of the Third Reich, was reported to want to turn the Wannsee House into a ‘documentation

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centre for Jewish suffering'.[12] This was not quite what Wulf proposed. What he actually wanted was a documentation and research centre for the National Socialist era, as he would have to explain and re-explain often over the next years.[13] Already in December of 1965, Wulf and a small group of friends and sympathizers had thought of the idea to start a centre for the research of National Socialism in Berlin, specifically in the Wannsee House.[14] After a preliminary meeting, the group had started a *Verein* to turn this plan into reality in the summer of 1966.[15] In their statute, the '*Internationale Dokumentationszentrum zur Erforschung des Nationalsozialismus und seiner Folgeerscheinungen e.V.*' (IDZ) declared their goal to research fascism, especially fascism in the form of National Socialism in Germany between 1939–1945.[16] To do so the IDZ wanted to collect material and form an archive, as well as build a library for people to study in. Mainly through personal networks, Wulf quickly collected a group of well-known German and international members.[17] Though the statutes do not mention a location for the documentation centre–to-be, *Präsident des Jüdischen Weltkongress* (WJC) and early IDZ member Nahum Goldmann mentioned the 'Haus am Grossen Wannsee' as the proposed location in a letter to then-mayor of Berlin Willy Brandt.[18] The Haus am Grossen Wannsee 56–58, quickly re-named the '*Haus der Endlösung*' in press and correspondence, was contended to be the location for the IDZ from almost the very beginning. This location later turned out to be non-negotiable for Wulf and his supporters; refusal of the city of Berlin to allow the house to be used by the IDZ de facto meant the research centre would not be built at all.

With the September article in *Der Spiegel*, the idea of the IDZ and its proposed location hit the wider public.[19] Instead of demolishing the Haus am Grossen Wannsee 56–58, the Berlin public was now confronted with the idea of transforming the house into a documentation centre exclusively dedicated to the history of National Socialism. Filling the house with documentation about Germany's darkest period of history was somewhat of a different use of the building than an playhouse for children, as was quickly noted in various news outlets. It was the start of a second phase of the debate about the Wannsee House. The option of demolishing the house was no longer considered, but instead the suggestion to make the house into a documentation centre, memorial or museum became a point of great discussion.

On 12 October 1966 a radio programme, *Rundfunk im Amerikanischen Sektor Berlin*, held a round table conversation with Berlin politicians that

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summed up a few important arguments in the discussion.[20] Head of the Berlin SPD, Kurt Mattick, pointed out that the August Bebel Institute had already offered a 'political counterweight' after the end of the war by teaching young Social Democrats to 'fight for freedom'. The 'negative' character of the site, he suggested in this way, had already been 'cancelled out'. He went on to say that it was useless to try and 'rehabilitate' buildings. 'People also must not interrupt this development now', he said. In other words, the past is the past, and time's arrow only points in one direction. Another speaker on the radio programme, *Freie Demokraten* (FD) representative William Borm offered a different argument. He said it was not important where the documentation centre is housed, 'not in the way, that people are bound by dead stones', essentially suggesting a house is made out of dead stones which in themselves are not bound to a purpose. Finally, Dr. Riesebrodt from the *Christlich Demokratische Union* (CDU) made an argument in favour of the documentation centre in the Wannsee House. 'Houses have their histories, not always a good history, and this house has a very terrible history,' he said. 'Had it been demolished during the war, that may have been best.' However, he added, the house was still there, and because of its history it had a symbolic meaning.

Three views on the building are offered here. First, while it is possible for a building to have had a bad '*Geist*' in the past, such a '*Geist*' can be neutralized by putting the building to positive use. In this case, by using the building for Social Democrats and then children, the house in Wannsee had become a site of democracy and a brighter future. It is a process of progress. This view does presuppose that a building has a 'meaning' or even 'aura', but claims that such a meaning can be changed over time, and should not be forced back to an older meaning. The second view, as propagated by Borm, sees a house as 'dead stones'. In this view, stones themselves do not have meaning or exhibit a '*Geist*'; the building they form is a void that can be filled in any way. Finally, Riesebrodt, backing the plans of the IDZ, pointed to the idea that buildings have a biography, their own histories. In his view the present cannot be seen separately from the past and a negative past casts a shadow over the present. This gives the building a symbolic value. These three arguments roughly come back time and time again throughout the discussion. In the following paragraphs I will examine further the way these points are made in the West German press.

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Argument A: '*Entwicklungsgang*'

As previously quoted, Kurt Mattick argued against the interruption of the process of the development of the building into positive uses. This argument mostly had to do with time and progress. The point of contention here was whether the process of time and change can or should be stopped or reversed. This argument was mainly used against the building of the documentation centre. Many people agreed with Mattick. The use of the house by children was seen as a positive change after its grim use in 1942. Even Wulf was quoted from a letter he wrote after resigning from the IDZ as saying, 'The House on the Grossen Wannsee has found a new destination. It has become a *Schullandheim*. Does that not also have a meaning of its own?'[21] The site was now an '*Erholungsstätte*'; it had been given a '*neues Geist*' by the playing children.[22] Others did not just argue for the acceptance of the new, positive use of the house, but additionally did not see a point in changing its meaning back to something negative. A letter from a reader in the *Tagesspiegel* in October 1966 read that removing the children from the house and turning it into a memorial 'will not bring any murdered Jews back alive.'[23]

Those who argued for the use of the Wannsee House as a documentation centre or memorial criticized this idea of 'development' and the possibility of cancelling out a negative past. Playwright Rolf Hochhut wrote in his open letter to Berlin mayor Schütz in October 1967: 'as is well-known, there are crimes that cannot be lived down, not even when the place where they were contrived, arranged and registered is disguised as a children's playground... '[24] A letter sent to the newspaper *Zeit* later that year expressed the same sentiment: 'Apparently Klaus Schütz hopes that cheerful children's laughter in the *Schullandheim* will finally drown out the death cries of gassed Jewish children.'[25]

This argument seems to be a debate between a constructivist and materialistic view of a site. On the one hand, arguing that a site has 'developed' and somehow grown away from its past suggests a constructivist idea. It implies that a site is not tied to some kind of origin or essence, but grows and changes, almost like a person would. On the other hand, arguing that there is no fighting the '*Geist*' of the Wannsee Conference suggests a materialistic approach. It is the idea that the history of the house is somehow embedded in its stones, roams around in the hallways, and cannot be rid of. The house and its history are one

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and the same thing, and no amount of schools or children can override that.

Argument B: '*Tote Steine*'

The second argument concerns the relation between material things and meaning. It is similar to the constructivist view, but more fundamental. The idea here is that a building is just a building, a collection of stones, cement, glass, wood, and none of these things have any inherent meaning. This argument supposes that all material things are equal, and do not necessarily have any value beyond their *current* functionality and meaning. This argument, of course, was mostly popular with those opposing the IDZ. It relieved the Haus am Grossen Wannsee 56–58 of its history, and put it on the same level as all other buildings, whether they had been used by the Nazis or not. A district councilman for Neukölln was quoted as saying: 'by the same logics people can make a museum or documentation centre in the Reichstag'.[26] A reader of the *Tagesspiegel* wrote sarcastically, 'perhaps someone will come about who wants to attack our *Sportpalast*, just because rallies were held there at one time'.[27] A 'light' version of this argument is that so many buildings were built or used by Nazis during their rule there is no point in changing their uses. A citizen of Tempelhof, ironically home to a gigantic Nazi-built airport that continued to be in use until the early 2000s, wrote to the Berlin senate, 'Must the children be banished from there, just because the house, like many others, has played a tragic role in our history?'[28]

Argument C: '*Einmalige Symbolik*'

'No house in Berlin is the same as this one,' Wulf was quoted in October 1966, 'there is an international symbolism in converting the Wannsee villa into a research centre.'[29] Wulf expressed an argument that many proponents of the IDZ shared: because of its history, the Wannsee House had a unique character and should find a function fitting for this character. It was not at all 'just a building', but had a 'unique symbolism'.[30] Its past made the building unique and its meaning and

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past were inalienably tied to its walls; 'it is also clear that there is no second house in the world, between which walls something even close to similar has happened'.[31] The symbolism of the house was so great that the house was even seen as an 'extraterritorial' site.[32] It wasn't seen as a building in Berlin that could have different uses, but a highly symbolic site that 'belonged' to all the former victims of the Nazis, 'legally the house belongs to the senate, morally to all countries that were occupied by Germany'.[33]

The house's past and symbolism were said to give it a certain atmosphere. During the fortieth anniversary of the Wannsee Conference a meeting was held in the house. Galinski spoke,

> Even today, 40 years after the fact, it is a heavy feeling to stand in the room in which four decades ago the deaths of so many millions of people were sealed at a green table ... nothing in this house points to its tragic past.[34]

So even with nothing in the house pointing to the past of the house, Galinski still got a 'heavy feeling' from standing in it. This argument, of the building being one with its Nazi past, is one that has become more and more popular over time, especially after the decision in 1987.

1987–1992: *Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, Gedenk- und Bildungsstätte*

After the decision to turn the house into a site of memory was made in 1987, the discussion about the function of the house may have been over, but talk about the house was not. The focus was no longer whether the house should be a memorial site or not. Instead, the discourse about the house quickly moved to the transformation into the Wannsee memorial as a self-evident thing that was finally happening. 'It is late, but not too late', Berlin mayor Diepgen declared during a conference about the memorial site later that year.[35] Along the same lines, the *Tagesspiegel* wrote later that year, 'they agree: the authenticity of the place, the impact of a place where history has taken place, cannot be underestimated. Walls, stones, spaces must speak, when over the years less and less eyewitnesses are available.'[36] The difference in discourse from the previous discussion is striking. The opening of the site of memory is here spoken of as a revelation of sorts, finally letting the building 'speak',

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having it tell its story to prevent the crimes that have been committed in the building from happening again. Suddenly the authenticity of the site is brought up as a crucial characteristic of the building, as the keeper of history.

An important theme of the post-decision writings about the house is how exactly the house would be used to tell the history of the Wannsee Conference and the Holocaust, how to relate the history to current-day problems of discrimination, and how to connect the house with the (especially younger) visitors. One thing was clear in the press: this was not to be a regular museum. The history of the building gave it a unique status: it had a special connection with the past. The site was ideally suited to teaching visitors about the past and making them connect with it. It was to allow visitors to familiarize themselves with the events of the past and their victims. It was to be 'a place of memory and grief...but mostly a place for the exchange of experiences, learning, work for the future and youth exchanges'.[37]

In its quality as a 'site of perpetrators', the house had to do more than just inform and mourn; it had to warn. The house was described as a 'place of perpetrators and because of its history it cannot be a traditional memorial or museum'. Rather, it was 'more like a place of warning'.[38] But perhaps most of all, the house was filled with the ghost of history. Its unique quality was that history had taken place inside the walls of the building, and that visiting the site could bring visitors in touch with its past. To amplify this connection with the past, the house was to be reconstructed and renovated to its old state.[39] Interestingly, this 'old state' the house was to be returned to was not the state it was in in 1942, but the actual original from 1914, when Ernst Marlier had it built without any intention to invite any Nazis to it. The house, then, was to be reconstructed to its *original* state. The walls were to be painted in the original colours, and the park surrounding the house would be restored according to historical documents and information. One could assume that changes were made to the house between 1914 and the date of the Wannsee Conference, as it switched hands a few times and surely got adapted to the needs of the different inhabitants and visitors.

The direction and the aim of the *Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz* was clear. It had to be an informative site of memory, a place to remember and to meet, a place to warn and to invite contemplation. But most of all, it was to speak its history, which it had not done when children were playing inside it.

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FIGURE 3.1 *The largest room on the ground floor of the* Haus am Grossen Wannsee *56–58 in 1959, used as a classroom for the* Schullandheim.

Source: *Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz* private archive.

FIGURE 3.2 *The largest room on the ground floor of the* Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz *in 2013, housing part of the museum exhibition.*

Source: Photographed by Katie Digan, edited by Lynn Tedjasukmana.

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Notes

1. *Christ und Welt* 1-12-1967.
2. *Der Zeit*, 'Glut in der Asche', 1-12-1967.
3. *Berliner Morgenpost* 22-10-1967.
4. Such analyses have already partly been made by others. For a short overview of the debate as seen from the biography of Joseph Wulf, see Klaus Kempter, Joseph Wulf. *Ein Historikerschicksal in Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2012). A political analysis of the debate can be found in Gerd Kühling, 'Schullandheim oder Forschungsstätte? Die Auseinandersetzung um ein Dokumentationszentrum im Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz (1966/67)', *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, online publication, 5 (2008).
5. *Tagesspiegel* 12-9-1987.
6. *Haaretz* 2-9-1966. Online source: http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/features/this-week-in-haaretz-1966-the-knesset-is-inaugurated-in-jerusalem-1.311642 accessed on 15-6-2013.
7. *Jerusalem Post* 2-9-1966.
8. *Der Tagesspiegel* 8-9-1966.
9. *Hannoversche Presse* 8-9-1966.
10. *Der Tagesspiegel* 16-9-1966, translation and emphasis by author.
11. *Nacht Depesche* 20-9-1966.
12. *Der Spiegel* 19-9-1966.
13. '*Internationale Dokumentationszentrum zur Erforschung des Nationalsozialismus und seiner Folgeerscheinungen e.V. Satzung* 29-8-1966', online source http://www.ghwk.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf-wannsee/bibliothek/satzung_idz.pdf, accessed on 13-5-2013.
14. Kempter, *Joseph Wulf*, p. 342.
15. Ibid.
16. '*Internationale Dokumentationszentrum zur Erforschung des Nationalsozialismus und seiner Folgeerscheinungen e.V.. Satzung* 29-8-1966', online source http://www.ghwk.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf-wannsee/bibliothek/satzung_idz.pdf, accessed on 13-5-2013.
17. Kempter, *Joseph Wulf*, p. 344.
18. Ibid., p. 346.
19. *Der Spiegel* 19-9-1966.
20. 'RIAS Berlin (*Rundfunk im amerikanischen Sektor*) 12.10.66 "Thema der Woche"', Wulf Archiv, 'Schreibmachinelle Zusammenfassung der öffentlichen Diskussion zum "Wannsee Haus" v. 13.8.66 bis 2.2.67', box I, rep 22–25.
21. *Die Tageszeitung Magazin* 20-1-1982.
22. 'Gesprach mit dr. Nahum Goldmann. Sender Freies Berlin am 5.10.1966', Wulf Archiv, box 1, rep 20, and *Die Welt* 12-10-1966.

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23 *Der Tagesspiegel* 23-10-1966.
24 *Die Tageszeitung Magazin* 20-1-1982.
25 *Der Zeit* 1-12-1967.
26 *Die Welt* 10-10-1966.
27 *Der Tagesspiegel* 23-10-1966.
28 '24.10.66 Pressedienst des Landes Berlin', Wulf Archiv, box 1, rep 27.
29 *Die Welt* 12-10-1966.
30 *Der Tagesspiegel* 16-10-1966.
31 '1/2.2.67 *RIAS Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*', Wulf Archiv, Box 1, Rep 34.
32 *Die Welt* 7-12-1967.
33 *Tagesspiegel* 22-10-1967.
34 'Rede des Vorzitzenden der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin, Heinz Galinski, anläßig des 40. Jahrestages der Wannsee-Konferenz', Wulf Archiv, box I, rep 241.
35 '*Es ist sehr spät, aber nicht zu spät*', speech by Diepgen on the meeting about the house on 9-11-1987, private archive *Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz* (uncatalogued).
36 *Der Tagesspiegel* 16-11-87
37 '*Es ist sehr spät, aber nicht zu spät*', speech by Diepgen on the meeting about the house on 9-11-1987, private archive *Gedenkstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz* (uncatalogued).
38 Annegret Ehmann, 'Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz', *Zeichen. Mitteilungen der Aktion* 19 (1991) p. 18.
39 *Berliner Morgenpost* 25-2-1990.

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4

Memory Space and Memory Place

Abstract: *In this chapter Digan examines the different concepts of 'space and place' and how they relate to sites of memory. She makes a distinction between* space *('Raum') as a social concept and* place *('Ort') as a measurable, tangible unit. She examines the*social *interpretation of space, which assumes that space is shaped and kept in existence by actors interacting with one another. She then examines the concept of* place *as a measurable entity that can change meaning (and have different meanings) as a whole. To do so she uses theories from the field of semiotics to examine how the meaning of a place depends on social conventions. In both of these analyses, the crucial question is how the 'social' and the 'physical' place come together.*

Keywords: human geography; place; semiotics; social space; sociology of space; space

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Between the 1960s and the 1980s, the people of West Berlin disagreed vehemently about the use and meaning of the Haus am Grossen Wannsee 56–58. It seems odd that a single building can embody such different meanings and inspire passionate debate over the course of almost 30 years. It seems even stranger that from the moment the decision was made to turn the house into a memorial site, the significance of the house as a *Schullandheim* faded away in the public mind and was almost completely eclipsed by the memory of the Wannsee Conference. It was as if the house changed seasons, transformed into something else, even though the building was the same.

The discussions about the perception of a site are especially confusing (and unfruitful) because they are based on different fundamental ideas. A lot of the arguments in the debate in the West German press implicitly concerned the question: what is a building, place or site? Is it an empty vessel that has to be filled with meaning or does it have some meaning of its own? And how can one site mean different things to different people simultaneously?

In Chapter 1, I discussed a selection of ideas about space and place. Though these ideas are helpful, they are also very general. In this chapter I will relate ideas of space and place to sites of memory specifically. Having considered different understandings of place, Agnew's combination of the several understandings of place into a *social and physical process* is both most inclusive as well as fitting for the study of sites of memory. The next step is to look closer at these social and physical elements and the process in which they create a meaningful place. To do so I will examine the two elements separately. For the sake of clarity, I will consider *space* to be social (or *Raum*, the non-physical) and *place* to be physical (or *Ort*, the non-social). This is a choice for analytical clarity specific to sites of memory, and not meant to dismiss other uses of the words. I also do not suggest that a radical distinction can be made between the two, since they are extensively intertwined. Following the space–place duality, I propose an analogue distinction between 'memory place' and 'memory space'. By 'memory space' I mean the social process of shaping a space of collective (or group) memory by actors, and then acting according to the 'rules' of that space. By 'memory place' I mean the physical site of memory that is marked as such and which people encounter in that function. Keeping this duality in mind, and accepting the idea that place-making (and place-keeping) is a) an ongoing process where b) the social and the physical are combined, two more questions

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arise. First, what exactly is the 'social process' through which a place is created? Second, how exactly does the 'social' get attached to a particular location?

In this chapter I will examine these questions. I will start by analysing 'memory space', the *social* aspect of a site of memory. It is shaped and kept in existence by actors, interacting with one another. I will try to better understand this type of social space by using sociological action theory and *Raumsoziologie* as a derivative thereof. Then I will examine the physical aspect of a site of memory, or 'memory place'. To do so I treat the concept of memory place as an entity, that is to say, a physical, measurable object that can change meaning (and have different meanings) as a whole. This means that a place has borders and constitutes an area which is demarcated from that which exists around it. A place can be a building, a park or a country. In this part, I use theories from the field of semiotics to examine how the meaning of a place depends on social conventions. In both of these analyses, the crucial question is how the social and the physical place come together. Using both the concept of *localizing* by Löw and semiotics based on cultural conventions as described by Eco, I will try to determine how something social such as 'memory' can be connected to a building, as has happened in the case of the Wannsee House.

First, to learn about the forming of social space, an obvious place to start is in sociology. Unhappy with the tendency of sociologists to ignore space, or to put the concept away as a backdrop of human action and leave it at that, several sociologists have been working towards a sociology of space. One of the most well-known researchers of social space, Martina Löw, argues for a relational social spatial concept based on action in her 2001 work, *Raumsoziologie*. She proposes a concept of space that is not separate from everything else, but rather constituted by actors. Because it is made and kept in existence by people, it is subject to change, but at the same time not completely ambiguous as it is based on convention. A similar argument is made by Dieter Läpple in his 1991 *Essay über den Raum. Für ein gesellschaftswissenschaftliches Raumkonzept.* In this essay Läpple argues for a *Raum-Matrix* which also takes space to be a social structure.[1]

The key question in the second part of the analysis is what *makes* a place; in other words, how a physical site relates to the social space attached to it. After all, if sites of memory are, as is often said, dynamic and socially constructed, then how do these social and cultural constructs

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relate to the physical site? This question is of especially great relevance to the study of sites of memory, since it underpins the difference between 'real' and 'fabricated' sites. While this distinction is not definite – 'real' sites can also be constructed, and 'fabricated' sites can in fact 'feel real' – it is often made, just not made clear.[2] The relation between the social construct of a site of memory on the one hand, and the physical site on the other, relies on a number of concepts: historical knowledge, assignment of importance to a historical event, ideas on preservation and other wider social conventions. The coming together of all these factors can be seen as a process of semiosis. It is, simply and far from perfectly put, the assignment of meaning to an object (or place), constructed and continued through a network of other meanings. To explain this reasoning I will use a standardized form of Charles Peirce's semiotic triangle, and the adaption thereof by Umberto Eco.

Social space

The idea that space is social is one of the main focal points of theorists of the spatial turn. Most famously, 'social space' was seen as a crucial factor in the division of power by Henri Lefebvre and Foucault. Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* especially turned into a key text for the research of (Marxist) spatial theory. However, 'social space' in a broader sense got to be a far wider and fundamental topic for researchers of geography, philosophy and sociology. The role and impact of space on human relations, identity, hierarchy and experience gradually expanded to all aspects of human life. Sociologist Martina Löw formulated a theory of 'sociology of space' that can be particularly enlightening when examining sites of memory as it focuses on the process of space-making, which is useful for an analysis of the dynamic, socially constructed idea of memory and, more specifically, 'memory space'.

Löw starts her book by examining her own discipline and the way the concept of space has been used by other sociologists. She comes to the conclusion that almost all sociologists have used space in one of two ways: either as an absolutist or a relativist concept. An absolutist concept of space is the idea of space as unmoving, existing out there in-the-world, independently of human action. Relative space, on the other hand, is a concept that supposes space is a consequence of human action. Because humans change, space can too.[3] Löw argues for a relativist idea of space

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and to see the constitution of space as a social process in which action 'makes' space.[4] This has an important consequence for the connection between space and place.[5] An absolutist view of space would see space as something that exists independently, and thus gets 'filled up'. This view, however, does not allow for multiple social spaces to overlap – like, for instance, a memory space and a playing space for children in one house that may be located somewhere in Wannsee. Once it is filled, there is no more room. A relativist concept of space sees space as a process and not a void, and thus it does not get 'full'. Löw posits a thesis of space as 'relational *(An)Ordnung* of actors, which are in incessant movement, which means the *(An)Ordnung* itself changes constantly'.[6] By this she means actors who are not static, but instead dynamic and active, constitute space. The spelling of *(An)Ordnung* combines the words '*anordnen*' and '*Ordnung*', loosely referring to both the act of organizing ('*anordnen*') as well as the constituted organization ('*Ordnung*'). According to Löw, actors constitute space, and because actors change, their space does too.

Löw sees two distinct processes in the constitution of space. The first is the process of 'spacing'.[7] This is the positioning or arranging of people and social goods. This positioning can be literal – Löw gives the example of arranging products in a shop – but is usually a matter of placing symbolic markers to define a space. Think, for instance, of hanging signs (entrance, exit, memorial). The second process is one of *Syntheseleistung*, or achieving synthesis. This is the process in which the positioning as achieved in spacing is grouped in perception (or memory) as one element[8] – for instance, perceiving a building with some visitors, artefacts and signs as a museum.

Spacing and synthesizing constitute a space. Because space is socially constituted, it also needs to be socially 'kept'. The existence of a space depends on social action, and does not somehow carry on without it. Löw draws on sociologist Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration to explain how exactly this 'carrying on' works by drawing an analogy between Giddens's social structures and her idea of 'spatial structures'.[9] Giddens describes structures as 'isolable sets of rules and resources'.[10] There are different distinct structures in society. An obvious example is the judicial system in a society, which quite literally has rules (laws) and resources (prisons and police forces), but one can also speak of political structures or educational structures.[11] The 'rules' meant here are not necessarily as clear as codified law, but rather the conventions on which a structure relies. They are the implicit rules that determine behaviour

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without the threat of immediate sanctions. While Giddens takes these structures to be independent from space and time, Löw takes them to be independent from place and point in time, but not from space and time *an sich*.[12] After all, there are historical and spatial elements to these structures (they develop, disband, change).

Giddens's theory of structure is a theory of social action. Structures are created through action. However, he sees a duality in the relationship between action and structure. This duality of structure means that structure is not only 'made' by action, but also recursively reproduced by action.[13] For instance, a judicial structure means nothing if people don't reproduce it every day. If people stopped accepting the rules of the structure, the system would collapse. People's actions are influenced by the rules of the structure, but also keep the structure going by reproducing it, enforcing it and copying it every day. Löw claims the same duality is to be found in spatial structures.[14] They influence action yet are reproduced by that same action. For instance, when entering a memorial site, people accept that the site represents a certain historical event, usually act respectfully, and try to connect with history because those are the 'rules' of the space. If everyone stopped accepting that a certain site represents a certain history, and started using the house as a shop, the 'memory space' would no longer be kept in existence and thus cease to exist.

All of this leaves one question unanswered: what is the relationship between social space and place? While they are not the same thing, it is difficult to imagine a space without a location. Löw concedes that all spatial structures are somehow based on localization. Think back to John Agnew's concept of place, in which a location is a necessary addition to the social aspect of space. In both Agnew's and Löw's interpretations of place and space the constitution of their concepts of space and place are not complete without a locale, a concrete site where the social and physical come together. After all, without a location, a space is nothing more than a floating metaphorical concept.[15] Löw argues that while space and place are closely related, they are not the same. Unlike a space, a place can exist after the actual spacing of people and social goods has gone. Think of ruins, for instance, which can still exist as an entity even though their original use is gone. A place can keep a symbolic meaning of a spacing that was once there but now gone.[16] Like the spacing of a meeting space in 1942 that is now no longer there but its localized place is still known for this former spacing. Löw adds that, especially in memory, people and things can be synthesized with their (former) localization and can,

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because of that, be treated differently in the present.[17] However, which social space gets synthesized with which place can differ between social groups.18 When a social space is no longer there, it is no longer evident that the place it was attached to keeps its meaning. Newer social spaces can therefore interfere with the old social context when they localize in the same place, as happened for many years in Wannsee.

Semiotics of place

Sociology of space teaches us about the social process of making space. It also suggests that a social space finds a place in localization. This last point needs more explanation. The idea that a social space 'dawns on' a place is a bit abstract. To help understand more about the connection between the social and physical aspects of a place, I will take a closer look at the interpretation of memory places. As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, I will use the term 'memory place' here to mean a marked, measurable entity.

Through my interpretation of place as an 'object' (not to be confused with the use of the word 'object' within semiotic theory), I do not want to suggest that the interaction between the social space and the physical place is one-directional. Once a place is firmly situated within a web of social conventions, it can in turn influence behaviour. When a place is deemed a site of memory, it compels certain attitudes and actions. This can happen in many ways. On the level of experience, people may visit the site, and while doing so they may act quiet, respectful or emotional. On an institutional level, it may be deemed appropriate to invest money into the site for educational, conservational or political purposes. In short, it would be unwise to underestimate just how tight the connection between space and place as conceptualized previously is. The social does not just 'project' its conventions onto random, unassuming places. The interaction between space and place is not just what makes a building a site of memory, but similarly what makes a house a home.

In analysis, I will approach analyse the process of meaning-making between people and place. To do so I will use some concepts from the discipline of semiotics. I will not attempt to give an overview of the field of semiotics, to give a critical discussion of its developments or specify the many different uses and types of semiotics. Instead, I will use two basic parts of the field that I think provide clarity in the way

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people understand memory places and how one place can have different meanings.

First, I will look at the standard Peircian model of semiotics. This is the theory of signs developed by logician C. S. Peirce from the 1860s onwards. Though semiotics has of course developed since, Peirce's model is still used as a basic theory in the study of interpretation. By looking at the production of meaning in memory sites as a semiotic process, more will be revealed about the place-people-society intersections in a site of memory. Secondly, I will follow Marcus Cordes's comparison in his book *Landschaft – Erinnern* (2010) between Peirce's semiotic triangle and Umberto Eco's later work in relation to a site. Cordes discusses Eco's work *La Struttura Assente* (1968), in which Eco challenges the triad and comes up with an alternative that locates the process of meaning-making in a 'moment' and thus as less fixed and more subjective. This will then serve as an explanatory factor for the changing meanings of a place.

Giving an exact citation or definitive definition of Peirce's theory of signs is difficult, as the basic version of his theory used today is really a synthesis of his many different papers and essays. This is complicated further by the fact that many works of Peirce read today were published after his death and not all are compatible with one another. I will therefore rely on secondary literature about Peirce to distil a workable version of his theory of signs. This is the version Cordes uses, as well as Assche et al. in their article 'What place is this time?' about semiotics in landscape architecture.[19] I have chosen these works not because they give a comprehensive analysis of semiotics, but because both are attempts to apply semiotics to studies of landscape.

Both works use the Peircian triadic model of semiosis. To produce meaning, three elements are needed: a sign, an object and an interpretant (see model below).[20] The term 'object' can be confusing, as it does not have to concern an actual material thing, it just has to be something that exists in a culture.[21] This can be a material thing, an ideology, feelings or, important in this context, a cultural or collective memory. In the context of this study we can take an object to mean 'the memory of a historical event'. The sign is the 'thing' that refers to that object. In this context, it can be a historical artefact, an old document or a place. The sign and the object are not inherently tied to each other. The element that brings them together is the interpretant, the reference. It is the set of cultural conventions that brings objects and signs together (and thus makes a sign a sign).[22]

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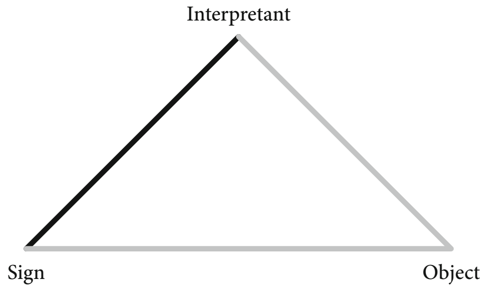

FIGURE 4.1 *A version of the semiotic triangle, made by Katie Digan.*

This is the basic Peircian model of semiotics, one that is still widely taught today. However, it has of course been criticized over the years. One of the most vocal and probably most well-known critics of Peirce is semiotician Umberto Eco. In his work *La Struttura Assente* (1968), Eco writes about a great problem he has with the semiotic triangle. He sees this type of semiotic theory as too heavily reliant on the logics of Gottlob Frege. Frege, a logician/mathematician contemporary of Peirce, is famous for his theory of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* (sense and reference). In short, Frege makes a distinction between the *sense* of an expression and the *reference* of an expression. The reference (*Bedeutung*) of the expression is the object to which it refers, while the sense (*Sinn*) is the *way* in which it does so.[23] Eco's problem is how the idea of a *Bedeutung* has influenced too many semioticians into thinking semiosis needs an object. He writes, 'the harmful notion of "Bedeutung"' should be seen as a residue rather than an integral element in semiosis.[24] He states there is no such thing as a clear, objective 'object'. Meaning, Eco says, does not come from a reference to an object in-the-world. Instead, the conceptual entities we refer to as objects are nothing more than cultural agreements.[25]

Essentially what Eco does is get rid of the 'object' in the semiotic triangle. This means that the process of semiosis changes. With the object gone, the interpretant is no longer an element that ties object and sign together, but rather the only element the sign is tied to. Since the interpretant consists of cultural conventions, the sign now refers to cultural conventions only. The production of meaning is thus not so much an interpretation of things in-the-world, but rather something that happens first and through which the material world is mediated.[26] The 'object-less' semiosis means that a memory place does not refer to

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an 'objective' historical event (object), but to our cultural conventions. These conventions are both specific, like a shared idea that the Wannsee Conference was a historically significant event, and, much more broadly, like the idea that history can be tied to places, the past needs to be remembered, and 'historical' buildings need to be conserved. As with every set on conventions, they are not absolute or unchanging. They also only apply to certain cultural groups. This group can be a nation, but also members of a political party in Berlin, a certain generation or residents of the Neukölln district. A combination of Peirce and Eco's (simplified) semiotics again shows how place-making is a social process, not a matter of finding the material place that fits with the correct social space like two pieces of a puzzle. When the Wannsee House opened as a memorial and 'got its history back', it was not a matter of finally successfully matching a sign to its rightful object. Instead, wider cultural conventions about the significance of the Wannsee Conference, the importance of the history of a building, and the ability to 'sense' the past in a place changed and in this way put the Wannsee House in a new (or at least brighter) light.

Notes

1 Dieter Läpple, 'Essay über den Raum. Für ein gesellschaftswissenschaftliches Raumkonzept', in Hartmut Häußermann, ed., *Stadt und Raum. Soziologische Analysen* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus Verlag 1991), pp. 157–207.
2 I will further elaborate on this difference in the chapter about authenticity.
3 Martina Löw, *Raumsoziologie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag 2000) p. 18.
4 Löw, *Raumsoziologie,* p. 67.
5 Ibid., p. 131.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., p. 158.
8 Ibid., p. 159.
9 Ibid., p. 167.
10 Ibid., p. 168.
11 Anthony Giddens, *The Construction of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1984), p. 17.
12 Low, *Raumsoziologie*, p. 168.
13 Ibid., p. 170.
14 Ibid., p. 172.
15 Ibid., p. 200.

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16 Ibid., p. 198.
17 Ibid., p. 199.
18 Ibid., p. 201.
19 Kristof van Assche et al., 'What place is this time? Semiotics and the Analysis of Historical Reference in Landscape Architecture', *Journal of Urban Design* 17:2 (2012): 233–254.
20 Marcus Cordes, *Landschaft - Erinnern: Über das Gedächtnis im Erinnern von Orten* (Hamburg: Junius 2010), p. 45.
21 Van Assche, 'What place is this time?', p. 236.
22 Ibid.
23 Gottlob Frege, 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung', in *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik* 100 (1892): 26–27.
24 Cordes, *Landschaft – Erinnern,* p. 48.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., p. 51.

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5
Authenticity

Abstract: *The authenticity of a site of memory makes people experience its narrative differently from, for instance, a modern museum or a very realistic film. But what exactly is this 'authenticity'? Is something inherently authentic because it is old? Or is authenticity a construction, a value that is paired with certain objects or sites? The first view is a materialistic idea that is often popular in conservation practices and heritage management. However, in many recent academic works authenticity is seen as socially constructed. To explore these two views and their criticisms, Digan traces the modern origins of material authenticity and its institutionalization by UNESCO. Then she examines the constructivist view in the context of the touristic experience of visiting historical sites of memory.*

Keywords: authenticity; materialism and constructivism; tourism; UNESCO

Digan, Katie. *Places of Memory: The Case of the House of the Wannsee Conference*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. DOI: 10.1057/9781137456427.0009.

The House of the Wannsee Conference welcomed 110,834 visitors in 2012.[1] Given the slightly remote location of the memorial site and the relatively small size of the house (small for museum purposes at least), it is quite remarkable that hundreds of people visit it a day. Though the exhibition in the house is highly informative, the true attraction is clear both from visitors' comments and descriptions of the house as mentioned in the introduction of this book: *this is where it happened*.

It is this 'realness' of the place, the feeling of standing in the very room a very symbolic historical event took place, and the eerie sense of tangible history, that makes the Haus am Grossen Wannsee an attractive place to visit for many people. It is that same characteristic, the authenticity of the place, that made Heinz Galinski 'stop in his tracks'. The authenticity of a site of history makes people experience its narrative differently from, for instance, a modern museum or a very realistic film. It is also exactly this sense of authenticity that many historical museum curators strive for. Some may do so by lending or acquiring historically authentic artefacts, others through the use of historical witness accounts. An extreme example of the creation, or rather staging, of an 'authentic site' is the Holocaust exhibition in the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, in which visitors are guided through 'realistic' fake train cars, barracks and even gas chambers.

The word 'authenticity' appears a lot in the literature about sites of memory. It seems to be hugely important in matters of heritage, historical preservation and material culture. Especially when it comes to historical memorial sites, the authenticity of the site is seen as the defining factor of the site, its most important characteristic, or – if you will – its selling point. However, it is not always clear what is meant by authenticity. Is something inherently authentic because it is old? Or is authenticity a construction, a value that is paired with certain objects or sites? If so, why does authenticity 'cling' to some things but not to others?

Two views on authenticity are characteristic of the discussions about the understanding of authenticity in material culture. The first view, of inherent authenticity, is a materialistic idea that has been (and often still is) popular in conservation practices and heritage management.[2] Think of the minute conservation work in museums, and efforts to keep objects and sites of heritage in their original shape. Keeping heritage 'original' is also the raison d'être of the UNESCO World Heritage List. As can be read in its first convention held in 1972, UNESCO aims to combat 'deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural or

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natural heritage [that] constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all the nations of the world'.[3] In many recent academic works, however, authenticity is seen as socially constructed, or constructivist. This means that authenticity is not inherent in anything, but is rather a social construct and can therefore differ per social sphere. The materialistic and constructivist views on authenticity present a dichotomy where the views are mutually exclusive but neither side provides a satisfactory explanation. While the materialist view seems to be fairly common sense, and certainly underpins a wide set of practices in the museum industry and the antiques and art business, the critique of the constructivists seems justified. At the very least, an object has to be seen or 'recognized' as authentic to gain that label. This presumes that it is not the object that is inherently authentic, but social action that determines authenticity. The constructivist view, however, does not answer every question either. If authenticity is socially constructed, then can any random thing be authentic? Is there no fundamental difference between an authentic object and a very good copy? Why is one thing authentic and the other inauthentic?

To explore these questions, I will first use the work of archaeologist Siân Jones and her account of Lionel Trilling's analysis of the origins of a materialistic idea of authenticity. Jones argues with Trilling that the materialistic view is a product of the development of Western modernity. I will then take a slight detour and look at the canonization or institutionalization of this view by UNESCO, as started with the Venice Charter of 1974. This is important because UNESCO, and especially the World Heritage List, plays an important (practical) part in the worldwide conservation and musealization of historical sites. The institutionalization of the materialist view of authenticity partly explains why this view has stayed so prevalent despite its many criticisms. After having explored the development of materialistic authenticity, I will turn to constructivist authenticity. I will do so specifically in the context of constructivist authenticity in touristic experiences, as visiting historical sites of memory is a form of tourism. To do so, I will use the work of anthropologist Edward M. Bruner, together with an interpretation of his work by sociologist Ning Wang, to look at constructed authenticity in tourist experiences. Finally, I will return to Jones and her argument that authentic objects or sites are neither materialist nor constructivist, but rather need to be seen within a network of people and things.

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Materialistic authenticity and modernity

In the Middle Ages determining authenticity seemed nowhere near as complex as it does today. An object was authentic because the authorities said so, or because it had supernatural powers. Who was going to argue with a crying statue or a relic that heals your blindness? The Catholic Church decided what was, for instance, a sacred relic and what was not based on whether it could perform miracles, and that was all anyone needed to know.[4] Where the object had come from or how old it was did not matter. Jones argues that authentication changed in the 17th and 18th centuries, basing her argumentation on the work *Sincerity and Authenticity* by Lionel Trilling.[5] In his work Trilling pinpoints the early modern era as the starting point of a preoccupation with sincerity in Europe. This preoccupation, he argues, stems from the breakdown of feudalism and the accompanying radical shifts in the social order, with new phenomenons like social mobility and new organizations of communities. Society was no longer static. Instead, social status and community could change.[6] Because old securities were gone, people needed new ways of making sure they could count on their social relationships. In effect, sincerity became a desired trait because it gave people 'guarantees' that they could no longer derive from a defined social order. Sincerity thus became a new sort of glue to hold social relationships together. Jones points out that other authors argue that the modern desire for sincerity has its roots in the Protestant Reformation, and a preoccupation with the 'inner self'. In any case, authors agree that a complex set of societal changes led to a preoccupation with being sincere and 'real', and a new idea of the individual in which the desire to be sincere (authentic or true to oneself) was internalized.

Together with this rise of 'the genuine', this transformation from the idea that people were placed on Earth by God and had their specific place in the world to a scientific world view meant a development of the individual as a *unique* individual. Each individual was seen as an entity having an internal essence which made him or her unique.[7] Jones argues that this modern idea of individual entities that have essences also became important with regard to objects. Instead of looking at the appearance or surface of an object, the question arose whether objects were 'original' and 'real'. Their essence determined what they were. This essentialism has been hugely influential in modern cultural institutions like museums.[8] Even to this day sophisticated technology is used to

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examine historical and artistic objects to determine their originality. Famous paintings are scanned to see the layers of paint and sketches underneath. Conservation experts examine artefacts to see if they have been modified and set out to 'purify' the objects from those modifications. Interestingly, in this way we do still rely on a form of authority (expertise) to tell us what is real and what is fake. We just use different criteria. These days we prefer to not look on the outside, at what an artefact does (like perform miracles), but instead prefer to bore into the object and look inside to determine whether we deem it 'authentic'. This equation of essentialism with authenticity underlies the materialistic view of authenticity. Authenticity here is seen as 'originality', something that is true to its essence. This also presupposes that the 'essence' of an artefact does not change, but instead remains the same throughout time; otherwise it would lose its 'identity'. In this sense, conservation based on a materialistic view of authenticity is like stopping the clock: the artefact may no longer change (or 'deteriorate', as UNESCO would say) or it will lose its essence, and consequently its authenticity.

However, *the moment* time is 'stopped' for an object relies entirely on a connection that is consciously made between a thing and a historical event. An interesting example of the way an 'original' is tied to a historical event is the case of '*Het Snotneusje*'. *Het Snotneusje* (literal translation: the snotty nose) is a Dutch street organ that happened to be playing on Dam Square in the centre of Amsterdam during the liberation of the Netherlands in 1945. The war had just ended, and while the Dutch gathered on the square to welcome the Canadian liberators a fight broke out between the Dutch and the capitulated German soldiers. The event turned sour when German soldiers started firing their weapons into the crowd, killing 22 people and wounding hundreds more. Among their victims was *Het Snotneusje*, which served as a shield for the terrified Amsterdam crowd and ended up being shot several times. The organ was fixed quickly after the tragic event and it played in the streets of Amsterdam for years after. It was not until 1992 that the organ was acquired by the Amsterdam Museum for their history collection. The organ was put in the exhibition, but not before the bullet holes were reopened and the bullets were retrieved from inside as extra exhibition pieces.[9] *Het Snotneusje* had no bullet holes before *or* after May 1945, yet that was the time stamp it got as an authentic object. It seems that even in the materialistic view of authenticity, originality is in the eyes of the beholder.

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Institutionalizing authenticity

Given its Western tradition of 'essentialism', it is not surprising that the institutionalization of materialistic authenticity depended on rules of preservation. This institutionalization found its roots in the UNESCO First International Congress of Architects and Specialists of Historical Buildings in Paris in 1957.[10] The topic of the congress was the protection of historical buildings from increasing damage from natural and human disasters, which at the time was not centrally organized in many countries. The architects and specialists at the conference made a plan to form an international central organization and to define rules and regulations for the safeguarding of historical structures. The second congress, held in Venice in 1964, revolved around the codification of these rules. The product of the congress was the International Restoration Charter, better known as the Venice Charter. During the same meeting, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) was created. The preservation of historical buildings and sites was now an international (though overwhelmingly Western) institution. The Venice Charter opens with the words,

> imbued with a message from the past, the historic monuments of generations of people remain to the present day as living witnesses of their age-old traditions. ... The common responsibility to safeguard them for future generations is recognized. It is our duty to hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity.[11]

The charter then details how to do so in 16 articles, detailing appropriate ways to conserve. Conservation must be done so that the monument can serve a social function, but not in a way that changes the layout, and broken parts can be replaced for restoration but only in such a way that it is obvious they are fake. The Venice Charter enjoyed a successful start, inspiring many meetings about conservation of monuments organized both by UNESCO and national and local groups. ICOMOS started out with no less than 57 member countries.[12] When UNESCO started the World Heritage List in 1972, ICOMOS became the organization responsible for evaluating the nominees for the list. However, over time the charter became problematic. When 23 people drafted the Venice Charter in 1964, 17 of them were European. What was deemed worthy of conservation and how that should be done was thus decided by a group of mostly European experts, reasoning from their European attitudes.[13] In

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other words, the principles outlined in the charter were not necessarily meaningful for non-European countries. Furthermore, given the rapid developments in technology and changes in attitudes towards historical sites, by the mid 1970s the Venice Charter already seemed outdated and attracted heavy criticism.

The plan, then, to pass down 'historic monuments' in the 'richness of their authenticity' was a bit more complicated than the congress in 1964 had anticipated. As time went on, the charter seemed more and more old-fashioned, a relic of a European idea of universalism, and inadequate as a general set of rules. On a more practical level, it was difficult to determine which sites were to be considered 'world heritage' and why. The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention as written in 1977 to determine such matters saw revision every couple of years. The 'test of authenticity' mentioned in the convention was especially problematic, and it eventually prompted ICOMOS to ask the UNESCO World Heritage Committee to elaborate on this 'authenticity' in 1994.[14] A workshop was organized in Nara, Japan to bring together experts on the subject to discuss the concept of authenticity and the Venice Charter.[15]

Conference participants were largely critical of the Venice Charter and its implicit claim that authenticity is a universal concept. Probably most famous is the speech of heritage expert (and critic) David Lowenthal, who said,

> Authenticity is a widespread modern cult. It denotes the true as opposed to the false, the real rather than the fake, the original not the copy, the honest against the corrupt, the sacred instead of the profane. But these virtues pose a difficulty: they oblige us to treat authenticity as an absolute value, a set of eternal and unshakable principles.[16]

Lowenthal pointed out not just the culture-bound character of authenticity, but its historical aspect as well. Just as the concept of authenticity can differ from society to society, it can also differ diachronically. This posed an even bigger problem for the codification of authenticity; not only would a universal definition of authenticity need to include all different current cultures, but it would also have to anticipate what it would mean in the very future for which it sought to preserve.

Though the task at hand seemed improbable if not impossible, the Nara conference produced a document outlining procedure for the definition and handling of authenticity and authentic heritage. The Nara Document

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on Authenticity was presented at the World Heritage Committee convention in December 1994. It specifically stated that it was 'conceived in the spirit of the Venice Charter, 1964, and builds on it and extends it in response to the expanding scope of cultural heritage concerns and interests in our contemporary world'.[17] After a preamble and a few articles about how the diversity of culture in the world was to be protected, the new insight on authenticity was presented:

> Knowledge and understanding of [the values of heritage in all forms and historical periods] ... is a requisite basis for assessing all aspects of authenticity. Authenticity, considered in this way and affirmed in the Charter of Venice, appears as the essential qualifying factor concerning values. The understanding of authenticity plays a fundamental role in all scientific studies of the cultural heritage, in conservation and restoration planning, as well as within the inscription procedures used for the World Heritage Convention and other cultural heritage inventories.[18]

This understanding was so fundamental, apparently, that one did not need to elaborate on what it actually is. However, a shift can be seen here towards a relativist understanding of authenticity. The pretence of a universal concept is dropped in favour of no concept at all. It follows in this understanding that something is authentic when it is considered valuable heritage. Authenticity, here, is no longer an a priori defined category used as a measure, but rather a label given to 'things people find important because it is old'.

Constructivist authenticity

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a distinction can be made between materialist and constructivist concepts of authenticity. The following section will discuss the constructivist view which is very much in vogue in recent academic literature about authenticity. Because the study of authenticity is a large field, especially in philosophy, I will specify the following discussion of constructive authenticity to mean authenticity in tourist experiences (the visit of a site of memory).

In his article 'Rethinking Authenticity', sociologist Ning Wang discusses different kinds of authenticity in tourist experiences. With regard to object-related authenticity in museum settings (artefacts or a building in Wannsee, for instance), he makes a distinction between what he calls 'objective authenticity' and 'constructive authenticity'.[19] The first

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is a form of materialist authenticity. Here, the visitor of a museum with authentic objects has an epistemological experience in which he or she *recognizes* the authenticity of the object. This presupposes that the object itself is authentic. The second type of authenticity is the 'constructive' (or constructivist) one. In this type, authenticity is *projected* on the toured objects. In this scenario one object can be authentic to some and not to others, or can be authentic for different reasons to different people.

Wang uses the work of Edward M. Bruner to elaborate on this constructivist authenticity.[20] Bruner holds that authenticity in historical tourism has four different meanings. The first two meanings refer to 'authentic reproductions'.[21] First, the reproduction can be a representation that is historically 'true' and convincing. In this kind of authenticity the main objective is to achieve mimetic credibility, or verisimilitude. The reproduction resembles the original enough to convince the visitor that it is historically correct, but it is not an exact copy of the original. The second kind of authenticity is the exact copy, an immaculate simulation of the original based on genuineness. Bruner argues that most museums opt for the first approach.[22] This is probably also true for many historical sites, as being convincing is often more beneficial to the narrative of the site than being exact. Even the most famous authentic sites of memory, like the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, are not exact copies of the original sites. They have been adapted to be more visitor-friendly, tell a more vivid story or evoke a more emotional response from their visitors. The third type of authenticity is the original artefact, as opposed to the fake or the copy.[23] This is the type of authenticity we know from the modern Western materialist point of view, the essential original. And, finally, the fourth type of authenticity is authority-based. This type derives its authenticity from experts who confirm its authenticity, such as, in the case of historical artefacts, historians, art historians or archaeologists.[24]

If authenticity can be conceived of in terms of 'verisimilitude, genuineness, originality and authority' which seems convincing in the context of historical sites and sites of memory, Bruner argues that the materialistic or objectivist idea of 'authenticity equals original' is too narrow. Clearly, other (social) factors are in play here. This is where the constructivist approach comes in, which sees authenticity as a social construct. Wang derives from Bruner's article five common viewpoints of constructivist thinkers of authenticity in tourism. First of all, they hold that 'we all enter society in the middle, and culture is always in process'.[25] This means that there is no such thing as an 'absolute original'.

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Objects and sites are used and re-used and to determine the 'origin' of a single object or site is a choice, not a given. Is the Wannsee House as it was used by the Nazis more or less original than the house as used by a wealthy industrialist or as a school? Secondly, following Eric Hobsbawn's 'invention of tradition', traditions and origins themselves are socially constructed.[26] As well as all other values, ideas and concepts throughout history, origins (and, therefore, materialistic authenticity) are tied to a historical context and are part of a social process. Quoting Bruner, 'No longer is authenticity a property inherent in an object, forever fixed in time; it is seen as a struggle, a social process, in which competing interests argue for their own interpretation of history'.[27] Thirdly, how one sees authenticity and what one finds authentic is based on one's perspective, which is in turn influenced by social and cultural (and, by default, historical) context.[28] Fourthly, in the specific context of tourism, authenticity is 'a label attached to the visited cultures in terms of stereotyped images and expectations held by the members of the tourist-sending society'.[29] Tourists have certain expectations of a place and having their expectations met during their visit makes the visit an authentic experience to them. Finally, something that starts off as being inauthentic can become authentic over time. An often-used example here is Disney World.[30] Upon entering the park, the visitor walks through Main Street, USA, a street designed to look like a typical American street of the 1910s. It was never an 'authentic' 1910s street, and visitors know that, but over time it has become an original in itself. As Wang puts it, 'infinite retreat of the "now" will eventually make anything that happens authentic'.[31] Something can start off as a copy or a fake, but as time goes by it can lose its connotation of a 'fake' and become not a replacement, but something that stands on its own.

People and things

While the constructivist approach of authenticity seems to make a plausible argument, it still does not explain everything. If authenticity is a socially constructed label people attach to things or sites, can it simply be attached to anything? This seems counter-intuitive. Technically, one could declare anything 'authentic', but that does not mean it is seen as such by others, nor does it give it that 'authentic' characteristic people seek when visiting museums or historical sites. Siân Jones attempts to

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find a middle ground between the materialist and constructivist views of authenticity by arguing that authenticity does not lie in either the material or the social realm, but in a network of people, places and things.[32]

Jones uses Walter Benjamin and John Ruskin to emphasize that the tradition or the 'marks left by successive generations', not the original, gives an object or place its 'voicefulness'. Quoting Ruskin,

> The greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, nor in its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, or mysterious sympathy, nay, even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity.[33]

The authenticity is not 'in its stones' but in the fact that the building is old, older than us, and has persisted through time where humans have not. Benjamin alludes to a similar idea when he writes, 'the authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to the history which it has experienced'.[34] For Benjamin, too, it is the history the object/site has 'experienced', together with the fact that the object/site still exists today, that gives it its special authentic character (or, in Benjamin's words, 'aura'). Experiencing that character is more than experiencing the single site or thing, but it is the sense of 'its network of relationships with past and present people and places'.[35] The key here is that while authenticity is not inherent in the object or site, but needs to be incorporated in a network, *the materiality of the object or site is crucial*. The materiality, the palpability of the authentic thing, is necessary for the intimate contact or experience between visitor and site/object. The materiality facilitates the contact between the visitor and the past the object/site embodies.[36] Had the Wannsee House been torn down per Eugen Gerstenmaier's initial idea, there would be no rooms to 'sense the past' in, nobody would be 'stopped in their tracks'. Despite the convincing arguments of the constructivists, the actual house is an integral factor of the 'historical experience' of the site. If the house were gone, we could still learn about the Wannsee Conference and commemorate it, but without the actual walls of the house and the actual site that knowledge and memory has no tangible counterpart. The roughly 100,000 people a year who visit the house seek out this tangible aspect to connect to the past in a way they cannot do without the authentic building intact.

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Conclusion

Abstract: *These days in most parts of the Western world it is considered normal and obvious that a place where a historical event took place is turned into a memorial site. However, the example of the House of the Wannsee Conference shows that sites of memory do not appear out of thin air in places where 'history happened'. Digan takes steps towards examining the very* idea *of a site of memory. So much is now known about many individual sites of memory that it is time for historians to use all that knowledge and historicize not each memorial, but the implicit ideas that underlie them and that have histories of their own.*

Keywords: authenticity; materialism and constructivism; tourism; UNESCO

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These days in most parts of the Western world it is considered normal and obvious that a place where a historical event took place is turned into a memorial site, whether that means adding a plaque to a building or turning an entire building or piece of land into a site of memory for the past. Especially when the historical event is a negative one, it seems inappropriate to not acknowledge it on the location where it took place. It is almost inconceivable that, for example, the grounds of former extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, the World War I battlefields of the Somme and the 'sniper's nest' on Dealy Plaza from where Kennedy was shot would not be memorial sites. However, the example of the House of the Wannsee Conference shows that memorial sites should not be taken for granted. Sites of memory do not appear out of thin air in places where 'history happened'.

The case of the House of the Wannsee Conference is so interesting because of the wide time gap between the conference and the creation of the memorial site. If anything, this case shows just how ambiguous the relations between the present and the past, and memory and history, are. Even if those relations *are* figured out, there is still a way to go until a place where a significant historical event that 'needs' to be remembered took place actually becomes a representative of that history. Reluctance to turn the Wannsee House into a memorial in the 1960s was not just a matter of a difficult relation between Berlin and its past, but a question of friction between present (playing children) and past (genocide). Moreover, connecting the memory of the history to a place was simply not the obvious choice, as it became when the memorial opened. Not all opposed to the plans of the IDZ were against a memorial or documentation centre per se, but locating it in the Wannsee House just did not seem to take precedence over the children who now used the building.

An examination of differences between space and place was my starting point from which to look more closely at meaning-making processes in sites. How can a single site have different meanings and change meanings? The difference between space (as a social concept) and place (as a material, measurable, tangible concept) proved to be illuminating. It allowed me to think of a site of memory as both a 'memory space' and a 'memory place'. The social character of space explains why different groups of people have different sets of meaning, rules and conventions of a space. Because space always needs a localization (place), but space and place are not the same, one place can inhabit different spaces. This explains why one group of people may see a place as a house for

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schoolchildren, and another as a place with a horrible past that must be treated accordingly. By combining these thoughts with semiotic theory, in which I took a place to be the 'sign', it became even more clear how much the meaning of a place is based on social conventions. This means that a place does not get one fixed meaning, or that it gets whatever meaning the interpretant (a person or a group of people with their cultural conventions) assigns to it. The sign itself is also part of the meaning-making process. Translating this to sites of memory, it means that while a site of memory, as a sign, is dependent on an interpretant to actually *be* a sign for something, the sign in turn can influence the interpretant. In this back and forth process, sign and interpretant (place and culture) work together to create a meaning like 'site of memory'.

The chapters about memory space and memory place and authenticity have shown that neither the memory nor the authenticity of a site lies in the material place itself. On the other hand, it is not merely a social construction that can adhere to any and every object or place either. Once a 'memory space' has been localized in a 'memory place' the two are tied together and can influence each other. This works both ways. The social space of course determines the meaning of the place (that it is a site of memory, for instance), but the place in turn evokes reactions, actions and behaviour in visitors. It is then the interweaving of the social and the material that makes up the full meaning of the site of memory, not just one or the other.

The same goes for authenticity. I have shown that authenticity is not a universal, self-explanatory or unchangeable concept. To demonstrate this, I have attempted to show a range of developments and meanings of the concept. Much of the discussions about authenticity (for instance, in the Nara conference, but also in tourism studies) point to the fact that authenticity is a context-bound concept. This could easily lead to a full-on constructivist view on authenticity. However, this view does not explain *why* some things are seen as authentic and others are not. It also does not explain the 'feeling' of authenticity when one visits a historical site. Again, the circle is not complete without the material component. At a very basic level, material presence of an authentic object or site enables a kind of contact between the object and its past that is not there without the material component.

This book is nowhere near a comprehensive analysis of sites of memory, but rather a first step towards finding other approaches to these sites. The fact that political factors greatly influence the creation of memorial sites

is well documented by now. The aim of this book, however, was to look beyond these factors and ask different questions about sites of memory. How is it possible for people to see one place in a fundamentally different and mutually exclusive way? For the wealth of literature historians have produced about memory, memorials and memorial sites, not much of it deals with very basic questions regarding the attitudes and ideas about history, memory and places that underlie the actual discussions and developments of each site of memory. There is much to be learned from social scientists, geographers and philosophers about the history of the very *idea* of a site of memory. We now know so much about many individual sites of memory, their similarities, their differences and their immediate contexts that it is time for historians to use all that knowledge and historicize not each memorial, but the implicit ideas that underlie it and that have histories of their own. To me, that sounds like an exciting challenge to embark on in future research.

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