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## FORUM

### Everyday life in Nazi Germany

At a conference in 2007 in his honour at the University of Michigan, Alf Lüdtke commented that there are many different ways to research the history of everyday life: its practitioners are still more united by the questions they ask than by how they seek their answers. Its pluralism, and its marginality, has allowed *Alltagsgeschichte* to serve as a conduit for epistemological innovation into modern German history from other fields, such as the linguistic, postmodern, cultural and spatial turns. Yet the characteristically *eigensinnig* lack of consensus can make it challenging for individual scholars to explain precisely what they mean by *Alltagsgeschichte* to their readers.

In this issue, *German History* is pleased to bring together an international panel of distinguished historians who are either practitioners of *Alltagsgeschichte* or whose scholarship has been significantly influenced by it: **Elissa Mailänder Koslov** (Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Essen), **Gideon Reuveni** (University of Melbourne), **Paul Steege** (Villanova University), and **Dennis Sweeney** (University of Alberta). Since the 1960s, historians of everyday life have investigated many different periods of German history, but none so much as the Nazi era. It seems fitting then to focus this *Forum* on the brown elephant in the room. The contributors have been asked to think about how the history of everyday life has altered our interpretations of the Third Reich in particular and modern German history more broadly. But rather than starting with a framing question from the moderator, we begin instead with the sceptical doubts of a panellist. It would hardly be a *Forum* on *Alltagsgeschichte* without unruly acts of reappropriation. **Andrew Stuart Bergerson** (University of Missouri–Kansas City) moderates the discussion.

**Reuveni:** The very notion that one should even consider (re)defining the practice of *Alltagsgeschichte* so provokes me. It reminds me of a satirical history textbook that has since become a British cultural icon: *1066 and All That*. It divides English history into two parts: from the Roman conquest of England to 1914, which is considered ‘a good thing’, and the period thereafter, when the United States emerged as a superpower and ‘history came to a . . .’ As these humourists explain in their ‘compulsory’ preface, real history is what you remember. ‘All other history defeats itself.’

This approach to history is much more common than some of us would like to admit, and German history is no exception. In the ‘1933 and all that’ approach, the contrast between the Germany of poets and philosophers and the Germany of judges and murderers became the yardstick by which modern Germany and its history came to be examined and judged. Divided into pre- and post-Third Reich, this way of framing German history made the Nazi period into its zenith or nadir. To be sure, *Alltagsgeschichte* attempted *sotto voce* to undermine the *Sonderweg* theory as the dominant interpretative framework of modern German history. But what made *Alltagsgeschichte* attractive to its practitioners became an object of derision by mainstream historians: its fragmented and

de-centred perspective on the ordinary as well as its emphasis on practice in place of an overarching narrative. *Alltagsgeschichte* was perceived as a kind of history that defeats itself.

The so-called *Historikerstreit* did hinder conservative historians, led by Ernst Nolte, from turning the brown elephant in the room to a little brownish mouse. In part thanks to *Alltagsgeschichte*, professional historians are now expected to seek ways critically to historicize the past without challenging the memory of the horrors of National Socialism. The history of everyday life now appears an attractive option that offers historians of various political convictions a way to confront the past without falling prey to simple dichotomous thinking. But it is still an open question to what extent *Alltagsgeschichte* springs out of—or contributes to—the big story of ‘1933 and all that’ or even an alternative metanarrative for modern German history. That is, I wonder if the history of everyday life is a mere expansion of our knowledge about the past, or whether it can offer another way, hopefully no less memorable, to conceptualize modern German history.

**Bergerson:** I think the place where historians of everyday life have already accomplished the most in this regard is in terms of rethinking the nature of the historical subject. Over the years, modern German historians have depicted ordinary Germans in many different ways: as both unruly and obedient, coerced and coercing, implementing orders and improvising new solutions, sometimes anticipating public policies, and at other times simply responding to them. My first question to the panel is:

**1. Could each of you comment on how *Alltagsgeschichte* has encouraged you to rethink the agency of ordinary Germans?**

**Sweeney:** The promise of *Alltagsgeschichte* for me has always been related to its insistence on exploring the subtleties and complexities of human agency. I understand agency as the capacity of historical actors to act creatively and efficaciously in and on their immediate social worlds. In this regard, Alf Lütke’s version of *Eigensinn* has been the most fruitful. It explored willful acts of self-distancing that allowed ‘ordinary people’ (*kleine Leute*) to forge autonomies at the workplace, in social and leisure time activities, in the local neighbourhood and on city streets, from the Imperial era to the eras of Nazism and following World War Two. The value of this definition of agency for me was threefold. First, it offered a way of exploring how ordinary historical actors partially recreated and reappropriated their conditions of work and social life without assuming that they were engaged in fully-articulated, calculated actions or operating on the basis of fully-developed subjectivities. Second, it facilitated discussion of the capacity of ordinary people to shape—at least in part—their own immediate worlds without romanticizing forms of popular agency, for instance, by assigning them progressive political valences. And third, it allowed us to trace the gap between the often formulaic appeals of social organizations and political parties, on the one hand, and the apparent needs and desires of ordinary people, especially industrial workers, on the other. Alf Lütke was concerned as much to demonstrate the distance of industrial workers from the Social Democratic Party during the *Kaiserreich* as he was to identify the support, however unwilling or indirect, that workers lent to the Nazi regime during the 1930s and 1940s. He showed us how to think in fascinating new ways about the indeterminate political-ideological valences of *Eigensinn*.

**Steeger:** For me, *Eigensinn* serves not only to describe how ‘little people’ create liberating spaces for independent agency but also, in somewhat less optimistic terms, how their acts of independence work to articulate and reinforce structures of hegemony. Far from asserting a single answer to questions about Germans’ individual or collective guilt and innocence, *Alltagsgeschichte* offers one way to integrate arguments about different layers of personal responsibility in and for Nazi rule. The historiography has perhaps moved beyond the crudest intentionalist-functionalist debates about Nazi-directed genocide, but, as Peter Fritzsche recently argued in the *Journal of Modern History*, historians still need to find ways to move back and forth between ideological visions articulated in Berlin; local, but mass, practices of violence, whether in the German capital or on the Eastern Front; and individuals’ choices to watch, participate, muddle through, resist, or some combination of the above. *Alltagsgeschichte* embraces the shades of grey implicit in this mode of questioning for which there are more than two—black or white—answers. It offers a vision of human agency that is at once broad and narrow. While acknowledging how structures of power, and the people who inhabit them, can limit the room for manoeuvre available to individual actors, it also leaves room for their mutual complicity in producing those same structures of power. This is why the historian of everyday life looks to stories of collaboration and resistance. The fact that they are often the same stories is precisely the point.

**Mailänder Koslov:** For me, everyday life is both an analytical concept and a methodological approach that relates experience to agency. Nazi ‘executioners’ are a case in point; their violence offers historians a particularly important juncture from which to understand the relationship between the Nazi regime and its ordinary agents. Most theoretical and historical studies treat the violence of Nazi perpetrators as a logical consequence of three major factors: Nazi ideology (antisemitism, anti-Bolshevism and so on), the quest for *Lebensraum*, and the institutional setting of genocide. But if Nazi policies are necessary conditions for historians to account for the massive destruction and annihilation, they are not a sufficient explanation for what I call *concentrational and genocidal violence*. The executors of these forms of violence were not born experts of terror. They became violent—or rather, they made themselves into perpetrators—in very specific institutional and socio-cultural settings: for instance, concentration and extermination camps that were, for them, also workplaces and living environments. A focus on the everyday allows historians to reconstruct how individuals appropriate norms, discourses and practices in order to position themselves in wider socio-political landscapes.

**Reuveni:** In my view, one of the core features of *Alltagsgeschichte* lies in this emphasis on meaning and consequently in the significance it ascribes to culture. While it would be misleading to imply that all historians of everyday life are equally interested in culture, it would be fair to say that *Alltagsgeschichte*, more than any other approach to modern German history, has paid careful attention to what occurs inside the minds of ordinary people. The innovation of this approach does not rest in the way it defines culture—a notoriously elusive concept—but rather in its call for a closer examination of the means by which people endow the world with meaning, or what the Germans call *Simnggebung*. *Alltagsgeschichte* is not simply a new version of the *histoire des mentalités*; what we have in

*Alltagsgeschichte* is an attempt to understand being as constituted by a continuing interaction with the world. In advancing a stimulating research agenda that acknowledges the full range of human experience, *Alltagsgeschichte* emphasizes that it is ordinary people who make human society and that they are not merely passive subjects of abstract structures or powerful individuals.

**Mailänder Koslov:** *Alltagsgeschichte* has taught me to interrogate the rules, practices, objects and spaces of everyday life that the agents themselves do not question and, in the case of the Third Reich, that even seem to have nothing to do with the violence of extermination. Practising *Alltagsgeschichte* means taking nothing, even the trivial, for granted. Ethnographic in style, the history of everyday life negotiates familiarity and strangeness in order to render the familiar alien and the alien familiar. In this, *Alltagsgeschichte* is closely allied with sociology, psychology and especially anthropology. It does not matter if our historical subjects are ‘the little people’ or ‘the elites’. One could just as readily conduct an *Alltagsgeschichte* of Nazi institutions or leaders as ordinary Germans. Researching the history of everyday life is not so much a matter of who we chose as our historical subjects but how we interpret the situations in which they find themselves and their behaviour in those situations. Ordinary moments of crystallization allow us to reconstruct the larger social relationships and cultural meanings—I prefer the term resonances (*Sinnzusammenhänge*)—relating to power and violence that otherwise would be overlooked.

**Steeger:** The most telling insight I’ve gained from recent works of *Alltagsgeschichte* has been their encouragement to read stories and histories differently. Rather than a school or even a circumscribed set of topics or issues, *Alltagsgeschichte* is better understood as a fluid assemblage of ways of doing history that offers questions rather than answers. It foregrounds the agency of the reader and storyteller, and thus challenges him or her to make choices about how, and whether, to empathize or condemn—and thus to be aware of and critique that process of making choices. Although not conceived as *Alltagsgeschichte*, Ruth Kluger’s intensely self-aware memoir, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, makes explicit these layers of agency as historical actor and as narrator of that history. She questions and casts doubt on the motivations for her and others’ actions in the past, but she also casts doubt on the words she commits to the page in the present. She demands of herself and of her readers that they confront the need to make ethical judgments. In its effort to take human agency seriously in the past as in the present, *Alltagsgeschichte* makes similar demands on the historian and her readers.

**Reuveni:** The problem of reading is a good example of how *Alltagsgeschichte* can help us understand the agency of ordinary people. Research on reading culture commonly displays reading as an acquired skill that does not simply reflect certain mindsets, but is also a powerful medium used to shape outlooks and influence readers’ behaviours. Based on the approach that sees readers as victims of what they were reading, scholars such as Anton Kaes or Rudolf Schenda have argued that the popularity of anti-democratic, nationalist and antisemitic writings paved the way for the Nazi Party’s rise to power. Yet other evidence shows that, in the 1920s, there was a wide dissemination of publications light years away from these proto-fascist ideas. Was German society imbued with extreme

nationalism and an antisemitic ideology that penetrated the society through the reading of anti-democratic and racist literature? Or was German society instead more tolerant and open to the ways of thinking disseminated through works of literature and journalism emanating from authors and publishers with moderate and liberal positions? Part of the problem here is the way we are thinking about the agency of the reader. Is reading simply an acquired skill of deciphering messages printed on paper, and the reader an empty self with no mind of his own who is therefore in constant danger of being manipulated? Or, should we instead regard reading as a creative activity itself capable of conveying meaning? Reading should not be viewed solely within the narrow framework of the political, as if institutional politics were the primary context for meaning and interpretation while reading. The act of reading should be placed in a broader context in which the reader draws on an eclectic range of social and everyday experiences to give meanings to the text, as I have shown in my study *Reading Germany*. This approach restores the agency of readers in historical analysis.

**Bergerson:** Your comments about reading bring us to my second question, which I ask in the light of new scholarship on the violent side of National Socialism—its antisemitism, Gestapo tactics, *Einsatzgruppen*, concentration camps, plans for war, and so on.

## **2. How might we understand the role of ordinary Germans in the production, distribution and reception of ‘knowledge’ in everyday life?**

**Sweeney:** Knowledge of the regime’s policies can neither be conceived in isolation from the propaganda and mass spectacles of the agents of the Nazi regime, nor can we imagine that we treat them exhaustively by studying the coercively regulated public sphere under German fascism. A more differentiated account of state and society would suggest that the Nazi public sphere, in its official and unofficial dimensions, did not produce a singular body of knowledge about the regime and its violent policies that could lead to consensus in any straightforward manner. The widespread attempt to mobilize the German people, taken together with a wide range of strategic responses on the part of ordinary Germans, from avid collaboration to many forms of non-conformity, suggest that nearly all Germans knew about Nazi terror; but they produced that knowledge about terror in circuits of everyday communication that were never autonomous, coherent, equal or simply two-way.

**Reuveni:** Moving the historical gaze from the collective guilt of Germany to the knowledge of actual Germans transforms the everyday into a site through which we can examine the full scope and depth of meaning of the Nazi project. It is by now well established that ample information on various aspects of the Nazi policies and practices of victimization was widespread among the general public. Depending on the time period and proximity to the sites of violence, this information varied in its extent and accuracy. Thus some might have possessed more details than others. But the matter is not exhausted by determining that information was available and was circulated through a variety of channels among ordinary Germans. The receiving and transmitting of such information could be an indication of conformity with the regime and its policies. At the same time, it could also be read as indicating an unwillingness to embrace, or even

discontent with a system that became exceedingly violent. In order fully to assess the meaning of this awareness we still need to learn more about how this information was received and internalized. Not only does this highly complex endeavour require an examination of the processes by which information becomes knowledge, but it also invites us to reflect on how and by whom this knowledge was translated, if at all, into concrete action.

**Mailänder Koslov:** That is the place to start the analysis, in my opinion; the knowledge of Nazi crimes begins in everyday habits and experiences. The German women working in the Nazi East, portrayed with such nuance by Elizabeth Harvey, assisted in the expulsion of the Poles, visited ghettos and gave testimony about the disastrous conditions; but all they saw were dirty, strange, and uncanny people. What they ‘knew’ about their victims was formed by how they interacted with them. In the case of perpetrators, their knowledge began with their daily labours: the expulsion, persecution and extermination of European Jews and other target groups. The complex work of mass murder, for instance, involved a multitude of actors and was divided into different steps: selecting people to kill; killing by injections, gas or shooting; dealing with the corpses; and so on. Even those who were not directly implicated in the extermination process could see, hear, and smell it during their day-to-day labour. Their ambition to ‘do a good job’ inspired and justified the work of actual extermination as well as the many support activities also necessary for keeping the extermination process running. Perpetrators were able to fulfill their work obligations over the course of years by conceiving of their labours as the ‘ultimate fulfillment of German quality work’, to quote Alf Lüdtke. There is no doubt that this peculiar way of framing extermination was brought home after work. Gudrun Schwarz has shown that spouses helped executioners carry out their ‘difficult’ task—on the ground in the camps as at home in the *Reich*—by supporting them emotionally and rationally in this way of thinking about their labours. My point is that ‘doing a good and hard job’ framed the way these crimes were ‘known’, initially in terms of social relations among camp guards, well before this was communicated to Germans in the homeland. That is, a complicated process of knowledge and ignorance of these crimes was built right into the everyday process of extermination. What they saw and did made perfect sense, on the ground in the camps as well as at home in the *Reich*, once we frame their ‘knowledge’ in terms of their everyday lives and work.

**Steege:** Even independent of a discussion of their roles as perpetrators, the assertion that ordinary Germans knew nothing or very little about the violence at the centre of Nazi Germany has been refuted, not least by the many photographs that capture ordinary people *watching* acts of violence—snapshots of German police humiliating the Jews they are ‘clearing’ from towns of eastern Poland or police photos of spectators watching the execution of forced labourers in Cologne, for instance. Of course watching and seeing are not the same. Ruth Kluger describes how, after she escaped from the Nazi camp system and assumed the identity of a non-Jewish German girl, she encountered a group of concentration-camp prisoners in the Bavarian town where she had taken refuge with her mother and ‘sister’. When the Americans arrived a few days later, none of the townsfolk had seen a thing. At least they had not perceived what they were physically seeing. Victor Klemperer offers a similar account in his diaries of how a Nazi official was

blissfully unaware of the fact that in April 1942 Jews were for the most part not permitted to take the tram in Dresden. By carefully parsing ‘looking’ from ‘seeing’ in our analysis, the history of everyday life suggests one way to confront knowing as an undertaking rather than a condition.

**Sweeney:** Consider in this regard Michael Wildt’s excellent recent book on antisemitic violence during the 1930s, *Volksgemeinschaft als Selbstermächtigung*. As Elissa Mailänder Koslov suggests, he begins with the violent actions themselves. He focuses on the extraordinarily widespread everyday acts of violence directed at German Jews, ‘actions’ that were concentrated in smaller towns and villages across Germany: progrom-like attacks on persons, homes and synagogues, often preceded by highly ritualized roundups and marches through town during which Jews were humiliated and beaten. He argues that the members of Nazi organizations invoked this violence, but they also created all kinds of opportunities for ‘bystanders’ to participate by either joining in or offering approval to the actions. The crucial media of communication were announcements in local newspapers, leaflets posted throughout the town, notices placed in town display cases—the notorious *Stürmer-Kasten*—and accusations and rumours circulated by activists by word of mouth in ways that allowed other townspeople to participate in the events. Pre-existing channels of small-town or neighbourhood communication were vital to this activity, but just as important were the ways in which activists in the Nazi movement recreated them, inserted themselves into them, and quite self-consciously colonized them.

**Bergerson:** Who colonized whom, and how precisely, seems to me to be one of the main areas in which modern German historians still disagree the most. Some use categories such as perpetrators, bystanders and victims to label ordinary Germans in terms of degrees of ideological penetration ‘from above’. Others account for nazification ‘from below’ by focusing on interpersonal interactions such as denunciations, parades, protests, symbols and violence.

### **3. In, or extrapolating from, the Nazi case, how might we reframe the problem of ‘politicization’ more productively?**

**Sweeney:** Here I would like to register my disagreement with the direction of much recent work on the Nazi period. I accept the arguments that the Nazis left no corner of German society untouched by their all-encompassing ideological reach and their brutal interventions, and that large numbers of Germans willingly supported the Nazi leadership. But I dispute the now pervasive and increasingly undifferentiated claims about a general consensus in favour of Hitler and the Nazi regime. Several studies (Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul, for example) ignore, sideline or explicitly discount the role played by Nazi and Gestapo-inspired terror, violence, intimidation and pressures in everyday life, even around issues as mundane as expectations of the *Heil Hitler* greeting or Winter Aid collections. Not only does this scholarship fail to address the specific, differential workings of political violence—its targeting of social, political and racial enemies or outsiders—in the ways that Eric Johnson’s work has so convincingly explored, it also fails to consider, as Tim Mason suggested in his essays on workers, the



structural interrelations between the different mechanisms of repression, neutralization and integration that brought Germans into varying levels of participation in the Nazi *Völksgemeinschaft*. This interpretation obscures what I regard as the central dynamics of fascism as a terrorist movement and regime: the relentless mobilization of supporters on behalf of their aims and against their enemies, in peace and war, and with all of the intimidation, threats, and pressures that this entailed.

**Reuveni:** To me, the question of whether the nazification of everyday life was forced from above or cultivated from below represents a binary system of thinking that is preoccupied with the attempt to refute or establish the nexus between the ordinary German and National Socialism. But the greatest strength of *Alltagsgeschichte* lies in the way it insists upon ambiguity and ambivalence. These considerations provide for a more nuanced and meticulous reading of agency in complex historical situations. Ambiguity and ambivalence allow historians the possibility of moving beyond the traditional dichotomies that still dominate the common perception of life under National Socialism such as submission and opposition, or improvisation and planning. By acknowledging the ambiguity of historical representation and the ambivalence of human experience, *Alltagsgeschichte* offers the historian much more room to account for the multilayered quality of human experience and the courses of historical time.

**Steege:** Sebastian Haffner's self-critical memoir presents this kind of challenge to personal and chronological dividing lines. He describes his response to SA-men who confronted him in March 1933 in a library in Berlin's *Kammergericht* and asked whether he was an Aryan. He answered affirmatively but later recognized this response as an indirect validation of the question. *Alltagsgeschichte* offers one way to engage this ambiguity: how the decisively anti-Nazi Haffner might nonetheless be implicated in the nazification of daily life—here, the ejection of Jews from a Berlin library. Central to this way of interpreting these kinds of ironies in everyday life is *Eigensinn*: that fluid and almost untranslatable coinage that articulates both the liberating possibilities of stubborn independence in the midst of daily life and the often unintentional complicity in producing and sustaining the structures of *Herrschaft*. *Alltagsgeschichte* endeavours to make that simultaneity and contradiction apparent in the narratives it crafts.

**Reuveni:** Or consider the case of typography, an area that we would normally not immediately associate with politics. Debates about which typeface—Fraktur or Antiqua—constituted the real German letter were embedded in political debates on the nature of German-ness, the relationship between Germany and the other nations, and on other political issues of the time. Prior to 1933, the Nazis had made a point of only using Fraktur in their publications, but thereafter, they standardized Fraktur as the German national typeface: all official publications, newspapers, and textbooks were required to use it. This decision, however, did not eradicate the use of rounded typefaces of Antiqua. In the 1930s we find abundant use of those fonts in books, magazines and advertisements. Whether National Socialism was unwilling or unable to eliminate Antiqua is an interesting question, but this issue indicates that life in the Third Reich was much more flexible and offered more space to manoeuvre than the image of totalitarianism allows. The Nazis finally reversed their position on 3 January 1941. While

Germany was still at the pinnacle of its power, Hitler's Chancellery stipulated that Fraktur was in reality a version of Jewish characters which had invaded the German language via the Jewish newspapers and print, and that Antiqua was the true German type. This example suggests to me that, in addition to exploring the changing meaning of the political and how it limited or enhanced the space of people to act, historians of everyday life should also ask why under certain circumstances politics—in the narrow sense of the term—becomes so imperative. Comparing and contrasting the Third Reich to other regimes might deepen our understanding of human agency under extreme conditions while also providing a more sober approach to some of the myths about daily life during the Third Reich.

**Mailänder Koslov:** We might also ask how highly political acts can be experienced in apparently ordinary ways. Take for instance the transfer of camp guards from the greater *Reich* to concentration camps located in the so-called *Generalgouvernement*. The Nazis treated the General Government, called the 'Far East' of the German empire, like a foreign land, separated by a currency, customs and an administrative frontier. It was also the ideologically charged site of the Third Reich's *Lebensraum* policy where the Nazi regime ruthlessly implemented radical antisemitism and antislavism. But did they experience this involvement in this major policy initiative as a politicization of their everyday life? For instance, almost all of the former guards in the concentration and extermination camp of Majdanek recalled their stay as an imposition. This explanation of events was a way to excuse their collaboration, but it also reflected their actual experience of moving to this foreign-seeming place. For them Majdanek was a chaotic place when contrasted with the better organized camps in the *Reich*. The climate was unfamiliar as were the Spartan living conditions. Where they were used to sharing a common language and culture with the prisoners in the camps in the *Reich*, the guards were confronted in the General Government with people predominantly from Eastern Europe who only occasionally spoke German. All this caused frustration, fear, and anger. Suddenly the abstract racist propaganda of the Nazi regime regarding dirty and disease-ridden 'Jews' and 'Slavs' made perfect sense in their eyes. In this case, the camp guards were not remade into executioners by the Nazi regime per se; rather it was the actual experience of moving into this foreign and threatening context that provided the impetus for an escalation of terror and violence.

**Steeger:** This is why I dislike the term 'politicization'. To my mind, it suggests too much a sense that politics comes from outside. One of *Alltagsgeschichte's* real accomplishments rests in its ability to imbricate the contestations for power within everyday life. Insofar as *Alltagsgeschichte* is ultimately a history of practices, albeit one that also wrestles with their meanings, the degree to which ideologies saturate everyday life seems less critical than the extent to which the activities of everyday life help constitute hegemonic structures. If we locate nazification within daily practices, it does not depend on the Nazi state or, for that matter, only on Nazis. By focusing on practices—of violence, sociability, inclusion and exclusion—several recent works on the Weimar Republic by Drew Bergerson and Pamela Swett locate the deeply personal processes of the Nazi revolution already before 1933. The histories they tell are less about people *becoming* Nazis than about *doing* in a Nazi way, even before 1933.

**Sweeney:** Like Paul Steege, I don't find the term 'politicization' very useful because it suggests that we can identify social practices or domains innocent of power. I think that this sort of perspective runs the risk of overlooking central aspects of National Socialism: namely, the way the Nazi movement was able to build upon the everyday discontents of radical right political activists in the 1920s and its extraordinary capacity as a regime to draw on, and open up spaces for, the everyday energies of its constituencies during the Third Reich. We now have interesting studies of everyday life during the Third Reich that point to the ways in which the regime's leaders could count on ordinary Germans inadvertently to serve the interests of Nazism. We also have excellent studies of the ways in which Nazis and their supporters reaccented and recolonized already politically cathected everyday experiences: from activity in social clubs (Peter Fritzsche), to leisure and entertainment venues (Eric Rentschler and Shelley Baranowski) to the brutal treatment of the homeless (Wolfgang Ayaß). At this point, we need to think more about how the Nazis both deliberately targeted everyday life and were able to mobilize their own supporters in ways that opened up possibilities for ideological collaboration for *non*-supporters. As Peter Fritzsche argues in his new book, when it came to racial policy, the regime deliberately, in the words of one official, strove to 'shake Germans out of the "quiet of everyday life".' The leaders of the regime and their grass-roots activists set out to do this by means of mobilizing support via numerous pedagogical initiatives—especially the *Gemeinschaftslager*—media spectacles, orchestrated exhibitions and violent incursions. But they did so in part self-consciously, both in everyday life and through institutions of the public sphere and state.

**Steege:** Yet Alf Lütke and Michael Wildt have both cautioned against relegating the political to the state alone. Rather than looking for connections between daily life and political or state affairs, they see politics and the political as part and parcel of everyday life practices. In the famous example offered by Alf Lütke, the policy and practice of the Holocaust becomes decipherable in the ordinary coffee break in the Göttingen office of the Gestapo. The point here is not that the coffee break has been 'politicized' or even 'nazified' but rather the much more unsettling proposition that something as innocuous as people gathering for a cup of coffee can 'work' in Nazi terms, or more precisely: that its practitioners can make it work that way. Here Nazism is not an exotic import but part of the relational 'furniture' that the people in the office arrange to fit comfortably within their personal and work regimes.

**Mailänder Koslov:** This is just what happened in Majdanek. The German SS personnel did not feel that living in the General Government was a totally negative experience. Their job as camp guard had already meant upward social mobility for most of them thanks to their stable income and status as a functionary of the Reich. Reassignment to the East involved yet another step up on the social ladder because the imperial Germans were able, once they adjusted to their shock upon arrival, to assume a position of authority vis-à-vis the Jews, Poles and even the indigenous ethnic Germans both in the camp and on the streets of Lublin. In this colonial context, German women even gave orders and issued instructions to Polish men. Elizabeth Harvey speaks about 'instilling *Herrenbewußtsein*' in those women who served as settlement instructors and teachers in the annexed and occupied portions of Poland. The point is that the colonists

of the so-called ‘German East’ did not simply reproduce labels diffused by propaganda or preexisting in popular culture, as David Furber and Jürgen Zimmerer have argued. Rather, they helped implement the Nazi social imaginary in everyday life by appropriating these labels and attitudes for themselves.

**Bergerson:** What I find compelling about the way the four of you are describing *Alltagsgeschichte* is that you are reinterpreting passive ways of being as active forms of doing—and then very carefully considering just how these everyday practices relate to larger systems of meaning, power and violence. This approach cuts across the traditional definitions of state and society that have shaped German historiography for many decades. Among microhistorians this approach almost becomes an article of faith: that ordinary people make their own history in spite of being constrained by circumstances not of their choosing—or better, precisely because of those constraints. But some historians, working in the tradition of local history, still prefer to view ordinary Germans, and their everyday lives, as the objects of broader historical forces, the most important of which was of course the Nazi regime itself.

#### **4. How do you make these interpretative leaps: between the realm of ordinary experience and history writ large?**

**Sweeney:** This is an excellent question, I think, because it gets to the heart of the kinds of theoretical and interpretative discussions from which *Alltagsgeschichte* can benefit. Historians of everyday life have been concerned with exploring the local and immediate circumstances of individuals, especially their needs and concerns that are thought to lie beyond ideology or formal politics. This has unfortunately led to a focus on self-determined acts of *Eigensinn* in relation to ordinary quotidian needs. Even if it is not what most of these scholars intend, it has reinforced what I see as an anti-institutional or anti-structural bent in many histories of everyday life. My criticism of this approach is that it tends to overlook the degree to which most individuals are embedded in a wide array of social institutions and political organizations up to and including public authorities such as parties, the state and so on. In the recent essay by Paul Steege, Drew Bergerson, Maureen Healy and Pamela Swett, this critique has even gone so far as to suggest that some historians bring their abstract categories—class, state and so on—to their material, while historians of everyday life avoid such distortions by focusing on the concrete (read: authentic) experience of individuals. This problematic claim obscures the extent to which histories of everyday life are every bit as indebted to analytical categories and theoretical claims or assumptions such as *Eigensinn*, *Herrschaft* and their workings. And it also tends to treat anything that might lie beyond everyday life—such as the economy, the public sphere, the state or ideology—as more or less self-evident and coherent structures by default. The risk here lies in separating individuals out from wider social relationships and institutions in ways that make it more difficult to make those leaps suggested in the question. A more productive approach would be to recognize that these institutions or domains—like everyday life—were never free-standing entities but rather were themselves the complex, unstable and provisional historical outcomes of social practices and political events that were constitutively linked to the routines and arenas of everyday life during the twentieth century.

**Mailänder Koslov:** At the same time we need to draw critical attention to the gap between official guidelines and everyday practices. The tension between orders coming from above and circumstances found below often leads to a possibility for agency on the part of those working ‘on the ground’, especially when we discover multiple, conflicting levels of social expectations. In the context of the concentration and extermination camps, for instance, guards had two influences to balance: on the one hand, there were prohibitions of violence handed down from the central camp administration in Berlin (the *Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt* and former *Inspektion der Konzentrationslager*), and on the other, mid-level instructions from camp commanders whose violent ideology was exacerbated by the practical problems they faced in their living and working environment. Their excessive cruelty derived not simply from their embedded position within these institutions and ideologies, however. While official guidelines explicitly prohibited any individual maltreatment of the inmates, the SS personnel quite often used physical violence on the body of camp inmates to negotiate complex hierarchies of power with the members of this camp society. From the perspective of everyday life, the concentration camp appears not as a static institution but rather as a dynamic arena in which a variety of agents negotiated norms for expected, violent behaviour. The guards appropriated official rules in everyday situations: enforcing, modifying and even creating new codes of behaviour. Investigating the microphysics of power (Michel Foucault) helps us to understand the everyday foundations for violence and the Nazi racial *Herrschaft*.

To be sure, the institutional setting matters as a structuring frame for violence, as Dennis Sweeney is arguing. But that structure is also a product of these micro-social dynamics. Nobody denies the influence of the designers and administrators of the camps in Berlin who set up and organized the camp system. Yet the tendency in the literature since Christopher Browning has been to argue that this alone does not explain the efficient violence of the camps as a system of mass destruction. Indeed, senior administrators in Berlin considered the massive violence conducted individually but systematically by the guards to be both counter-productive, insofar as it created chaos where they wanted disciplined employees who killed when it was necessary and as ordered, and also productive, insofar as the obstinate violence in everyday life produced terror in both the camps and in the larger civil society. To privilege the agents on the ground and their social practices in our research does not mean that individual agency matters more than institutional factors. By changing the focal distance of the lens and enlarging the ordinary objects of observation, historians of everyday life take seriously the contention that a social reality does not operate in the same way at all different levels of observation and analysis. Jacques Revel compared it to the levels of representation in cartography. By drawing attention to social experiences and lived realities, *Alltagsgeschichte* allows us to see something more clearly that is otherwise blurred from view: the play of structures (*jeu de structures*) that help give them historical presence in everyday life.<sup>1</sup>

**Steeger:** The structures within which historians work are blurred too. In spite of the fact that everyday life history has, in Alf Lüdtke’s words, entered into the ‘ensemble of the historical social sciences’, there remain, I think, significant strands of uneasiness, or

<sup>1</sup> ‘Micro-analyses et construction du social’, in Jacques Revel (ed.), *Jeux d’échelles. La micro-analyse à l’expérience* (Paris, 1996), pp. 15-36, here p. 19.

perhaps more accurately, unsettledness with regard to *Alltagsgeschichte*, evident even in this forum. This is not to claim for everyday life historians the status of persecuted outliers in the profession but rather to acknowledge the awkwardness of this way of doing history. *Alltagsgeschichte* is hard to place, and rightly so. Its practitioners cast their eyes first to material locations in which their subjects take up positions and then to the broader symbolic frameworks that claim to make sense of the world. In my work, I am simultaneously on the streets and squares of Berlin after World War II and in the Cold War. Historians need to take both constructions seriously even as we tease out how each helps to conceal individuals' involvement in the production of the other. There may be a trace of incoherence or incomprehension in our efforts to put these perspectives together, but acknowledging those gaps also serves to give us room for manoeuvre and points of friction to spark further analysis.

**Reuveni:** I support the use of this approach to understand better what ordinary Germans did or did not want to know, and how they acted when faced with situations of extreme violence. But when the discussion turns to historical responsibility, I share Dennis Sweeney's discomfort regarding the swiping claims about the willingness of ordinary Germans to be subordinated to the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*. One of the sources for such undifferentiated generalizations seems to me to go back to the problem of *Verstehen*—that is, the quest for empathic or participatory understanding of historical subjects—and thus the issue of the relationship between history and morality. In my view, the two should be kept strictly apart even when dealing with this highly charged chapter of German history. History deals with what people did, or thought they were doing, under certain circumstances, whereas morality is preoccupied with what they should have been doing. That is why understanding does not necessarily imply forgiving.

**Bergerson:** What do the rest of you think of Gideon Reuveni's argument? As German historians, we all know that the way we frame the everyday is inextricably enmeshed in the politics of German memory. It is practically impossible for a historian to study everyday life during the Third Reich without being confronted by the brown elephant in the room. The polemics of responsibility shape our historical scholarship.

##### **5. What do you think makes for a more responsible history of the everyday: the inclusion or the exclusion of ethical considerations from our analysis?**

**Mailänder Koslov:** If we take violence as an object of study, we need to look closely at practices of physical violence, which has of course a taste of voyeurism. But we cannot analyse and understand the phenomenon otherwise. Research on perpetrators began with the postwar trials where the executioners, who had not spoken publicly about their actions and experiences, were forced to do so. It is still closely linked to the juridical records that are an excellent source material; and it took the perpetrator research a long time to emancipate itself from the guilt question and move to more anthropological and sociological questions. To be sure, dealing with behaviour and agency raises the question of responsibility. But to understand how and why violence happened, I see no point in reintroducing ethical categories in the historical analysis. I try not to judge the perpetrators and the violent acts but let the reader draw his own conclusions; for me the

crucial and most difficult question is: how can I accurately represent and analyse this violence and cruelty, and do I succeed?

**Sweeney:** I wouldn't know how to separate morality, or what I prefer to call politics, from our histories in the way suggested by Gideon Reuveni and Elissa Mailänder Koslov. Even the most resolute antiquarianism is covertly informed by political intentions, which influence everything from research emphasis to the very claim to remain outside ethics or politics, and necessarily entails, however indirectly, ethical-political consequences. Moreover, if we try to keep our politics out of our histories in this way, we risk suppressing the politics of our historical subjects, whose thoughts and actions evolved out of their own contexts of ethical and political choice, not the mute imperatives of obedience and conformity or some unified field of social action. I think any responsible history of everyday life, and any responsible history, must be informed by political concerns—concerns that are openly acknowledged and thus open to critique—and seek to understand the political choices facing historical subjects themselves. For me, *Alltagsgeschichte* has always thrived on its ability to combine rigorous scholarly protocols with explicit political concerns, especially in studies of ordinary people during the Third Reich. More than other approaches, it has opened up crucial perspectives on how ordinary Germans encountered Nazism and how everyday life became a crucial terrain of ideological mobilization in ways that have forced us to think differently about how the Nazi regime functioned and how the most quotidian routines can become complicit with genocide in ways that serve as reminders of the need to be vigilant in our own world.

**Steeger:** I agree here with Dennis Sweeney. I also think that the study of *Alltagsgeschichte* forces those of us in the present to confront the disconnection between our habits of seeing and knowing about Nazi violence. The 2008 Academy Award season included a remarkable collection of films depicting National Socialist Germany and its violence, but the degree to which these cinematic renditions—which aim, of course, both to turn a profit and to accumulate awards for their seriousness—are comfortably familiar hint at how easy it is to *look* at the violence of the Nazi era. We remain safely voyeuristic, separated in space and time from the actions before us on the screen. This complacency is not restricted to our cinema-going. Jane Caplan challenges our easy willingness to see ourselves inevitably on the side of the victims of Nazi violence, for instance, in our assuming the identity of victims at the United States Holocaust Museum. *Alltagsgeschichte* helps historians to level a simultaneously accusatory and sympathetic gaze at its historical subjects because of its willingness to direct that gaze to historians as historical actors, too. It takes seriously the particular historical location of violence in the Third Reich and confronts what people saw and know. But *Alltagsgeschichte* also acknowledges the ways in which that violence is not unfamiliar in our worlds, too. In a different historical and geographic context, Gyanendra Pandey explores the presence of routine violence in South Asia, even as post-partition Indians comfortably assert their peaceful nature. Pandey argues that acknowledging the continuities of violence in the present is vital if we are successfully to grasp the implications of the cataclysmic violence of Partition.<sup>2</sup> Or, as Maja Zehfuss has recently argued, while the narratives we tell about violent pasts matter

<sup>2</sup> *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (Stanford, 2006).

for how we remember that history, they cannot be detached from the ethical decisions in the present that lay claim to their explanatory power.<sup>3</sup>

**Reuveni:** Paul Steege makes an important point about the mediating position of the historian between the past and present. The willingness of historians to think of themselves as historical actors is not only a matter of making the Third Reich relevant to their own present, but also asks historians to consider how their life experiences inform their approaches to that past. Placing the historian in ‘history’ forces us to consider the impact on the writing of German history of their own very different living and working contexts, in the United States, Canada, Germany, Israel or Australia, for example. Growing up in Israel no doubt increased my awareness of Jewish victimization. Much more difficult for me is to establish how my experience as an Israeli informs my understanding of the Third Reich as a whole, and even more challenging for me is the question of the relevance of this history to our own reality today.

**Steege:** I don’t think we can talk about ordinary Germans as historical subjects without raising the problem of responsibility. I count myself among those historians who believe that ordinary people make their own history; but I am also convinced that this assertion does not relegate their history to some location ‘down below’, disconnected from the interpretative frameworks of macrohistory. The question of how to locate the everyday conceptually remains an ongoing dilemma, but asserting that *Alltagsgeschichte* is either spatially constrained within a particular locality or microhistory, or chronologically expansive as part of a timeless everyday-ness, reduces everyday life history to nothing more than a series of narrative topics drawn from daily life. Critics in the 1980s worried that the exploration by historians of everyday life in the Nazi period risked trivializing the crimes of the Nazi era. In effect, they argued against looking at everyday life during the Third Reich, even suggesting that it dangerously historicized the Nazi period as harmlessly normal. In other words, *Alltagsgeschichte* threatened to commit the same crimes, with admittedly different motivations, as the conservative polemicists whose appeals to normalize the Nazi past sparked the *Historikerstreit*.

Jill Stephenson’s 2008 article in this journal offered a very different basis for concern. In her reading, the problem with *Alltagsgeschichte*, especially as practised by a younger generation of scholars in the United States, is not that it focuses on daily life, but rather that it makes the causal connections between that daily life and the Nazi programme of mass murder that we have been making here in this forum. For her, the danger lurks not in historicization but in ‘emotionally’ charged assertions of German collective guilt—the bogeyman by association not Ernst Nolte but Daniel Jonah Goldhagen. For me, the choices confronting historians of everyday life, like those facing their historical subjects, are more finely drawn. Posing questions about ethical responsibility does not demand of historians that they render verdicts of guilt or innocence. It is the questions that matter. Granting historical actors agency means that we historians must also attempt to articulate the choices they faced and the consequences of their actions. That undertaking necessarily presents political and ethical challenges, not least to ourselves.

<sup>3</sup> *Wounds of Memory: The Politics of War in Germany* (Cambridge, 2007).



**Reuveni:** A parable comes to mind: the well-known short story ‘Funes the Memorious’.<sup>4</sup> Jorge Luis Borges tells the story of a meeting between his fictional self and a young man by the name of Ireneo Funes who became hopelessly crippled in a horse-riding accident. After his fall from the horse, Funes perceived everything in full detail and remembered it all. Reflecting on this amazing aptitude, Borges maintains that, although Funes could record almost everything, he was nevertheless ‘not very capable of thought’. To think, according to Borges, ‘is to forget a difference, to generalize, to abstract’. Borges observes: ‘In the overly replete world of Funes there was nothing but details, almost contiguous details’. In dealing with the particular and the phenomenological richness of human experience, there is indeed a risk of becoming a kind of Funes the Memorious, depicting the past as an endless ensemble of adjacent details. This applies to all histories and not only to those working within the realm of *Alltagsgeschichte*.

But *Alltagsgeschichte* is far from being a mere reiteration of the life stories of ‘ordinary’ men and women. The main concern of *Alltagsgeschichte* is meaning; thus it is engaged in the constant interplay between the particular and the general, exploring how historical forces are projected in people’s experiences, and how people form their historical conditions. More precisely, *Alltagsgeschichte* is all about the act of giving meaning, of *Sinngebung*, not merely in the sense of how we as historians make sense of the past in relation to our own reality, but also how our subjects interpret their specific historical situation. In this respect, the apparent division between ordinary experience and history writ large is not inherent in *Alltagsgeschichte*, and thus should not pose a problem to those practising it.

**Sweeney:** Picking up on what Paul Steege said earlier about the dangers of a timeless everyday, we have to take care to avoid presuming that everyday practices are so deeply rooted that we imagine them as comprehensively structuring, widely embraced, unconsciously shared, or solidly anchored in long-term continuities of routine. When pushed too far, this model of *habitus* slights the more dynamic, volatile, fragmented, contradictory and multivalent ways that everyday life was being reconstituted in Germany across the twentieth century. A new analytical vocabulary—or different usages of existing terms—that can accommodate the transitory nature of the everyday, and what David Harvey has called ‘the compression of time-space’, might be needed: that is, a historicization of the everyday as a category of experience in the ‘modern’ world.

But returning to the relationship between microhistory and macrohistory, Henri Lefebvre might be able to help us out here in thinking about the spatial relationships within the everyday. If we think of everyday life as a series of unique places, each with its own particular temporalities and routines historically specific to the modern era, surely we are better off exploring them in their historical and constitutive inter-connections with other domains and practices associated with the economy, the public sphere, the state and so on. This perspective might prompt more discussion about how individuals are situated in these other social sites, how *Eigensinn* is partially constituted *through* them by inflecting or appropriating their resources and discourses, and how the everyday is always necessarily the site of both individual self-assertion and colonization or governmentality. From this perspective, analysis of the everyday experience of ordinary

<sup>4</sup> <http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/borges.htm>.

people and the mutually constitutive connections between the local, the quotidian, the public sphere, and the state might offer new ways of understanding wider systemic processes and political transformations from the perspective of the everyday.

**Bergerson:** I would like to interject here that I find Elissa Mailänder Koslov's expression 'on the ground' to be a preferable metaphor than 'from above/from below'—which I am as guilty as any of abusing. It still distinguishes the everyday from the traditional story of high politics but allows for what many of you have been saying about our need to depict everyday life as an ambiguous space of intersubjectivity, interpretation, and interpellation.

**Sweeney:** I would add to these categories a term such as ideology or discourse. Historians of everyday life have been sceptical of them and routinely try to look beyond them to find more authentic everyday concerns and struggles. They do this, however, by embracing unhelpful definitions of ideology or discourse, which are usually thought to imply coherent systems of ideas: blunt schemas that deny the everyday material needs of historical actors or obscure the complexity of everyday social interactions. But even ordinary Germans held to notions, if sometimes not very coherent, ranging from the character of social relations in the life world and how it should be organized, to more general understandings about what constituted legitimate or illegitimate authority, and even to political beliefs about what was just and fair in the distribution of social goods—all of which shaped their own sense of immediate or personal needs. In order to pay more attention to these wider fields of meaning, symbolic structures, connotative codes, cultural narratives or political languages in which ordinary people operated, historians could adjust the models proposed by Foucault, Bakhtin and Althusser in such a way that discourse or ideology are seen as ensembles of polyvalent and socially-constructed signifying practices. In this model, discourses are sites of social struggle and thus susceptible to tactical redeployment. Historians of everyday life have been using such models to reconstruct how individuals locate themselves in relation to wider structures of thought, belief and meaning, but they need to say more about how those individuals are also defined by those structures, embracing them as systems of meaning, and acting on the basis of them.

**Bergerson:** This makes sense to me. Ideologies need to be unpacked, but not put away. *Alltagsgeschichte*, with its emphasis on everyday practices, can contribute a lot to that conversation because it is in those performances of self that the cultural meanings of *Sinngebung* meet the social relations of *Sinnzusammenhang*. But this thought brings me to a final question. Scholars study ordinary Germans using all sorts of proxies: from what they said, wrote or remembered to their belongings, habits or photographs. But the self being discovered there is notoriously elusive—in the present and in retrospect, to others and even to itself. A major challenge for *Alltagsgeschichte* lies in getting beyond ideological representations of ordinary people to actual experiences of the self.

## **6. What approaches do you find most productive for reconstructing the experience of selfhood?**

**Mailänder Koslov:** Any lived experience is difficult to capture. It is constructed historically, as Joan Scott has pointed out, but not only through representation and

language. There is also a pre-discursive reality directly felt through the body, as Christine Stansell has argued.<sup>5</sup> The experience of genocide is even more challenging to reconstruct for the victims since we have very limited testimonies of personal experience; ‘experience’ in this context must be understood literally as survival first and foremost, even before we can begin to determine the many forms of suffering, watching, tolerating, not conforming, brutalizing, and of course dying that characterized everyday life under the SS. It is hard to get at the experience of the gassed inmate or even the ‘muselman’, for instance, since survivors as well as guards had a complex and conflicted relationship with these other victims. Historians thus get only glimpses of these experiences of the Holocaust. From ego-documents of guards or survivors, we get mostly self-representations and -presentations; from photographs and documentary evidence, we can perhaps reconstruct the material conditions in which people lived and worked, the organization of space and time, hygiene and nutrition, and so on. The aim is to gain some insight into the experience of everyday life by triangulating from the different types of sources that we do have available to us.

**Steeger:** Since the mid-1990s, historians have gained access to a growing array of deeply ‘personal’ perspectives on Nazi Germany, from Victor Klemperer’s invaluable diaries to the SS photo album from Auschwitz acquired by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.<sup>6</sup> These sources, and the question of how to read them, present the historian with incredible opportunities but also quite distinct challenges. The best *Alltagsgeschichte* makes that act of reading explicit. Historians of everyday life wrestle not only with the nature of this historical subject, but with our own place in the implications that we claim for them. Following Gideon Reuveni, we too participate in this act of *Sinngebung*. By rejecting popular assertions of a ‘normal’, ordinary life that exists independent of historical events, the historian of everyday life works to create moments where experiences of the self can flash up in bursts of recognition.

**Mailänder Koslov:** Ultimately, historians only get glimpses of the self. Our appreciation of these experiences will necessarily stay fragmentary and inconsistent. But these very discrepancies can become part of the analysis, showing a multilayered history behind the master narrative and the complexity of human experience. Rudolf Höß opened his autobiographical notes on his experience as the commander of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp from 1940 to 1943 with the statement that Auschwitz, ‘was far away, back there in Poland’. Although that concentration and extermination camp was situated within the Polish territory of Silesia which had been reannexed to the German Reich, the allusion to ‘far away Poland’ is nevertheless suggestive of how distinctly remote, inferior and foreign Poland was perceived to be, or rather, felt to be.

**Steeger:** But we also need to be critical of these depictions of experience. Since most human lives were not contiguous with the twelve-year Third Reich, the claim to an ordinary life that extended before and after the Nazi era seems to offer people a respite from any totalizing assertion of a Nazi subjectivity. Their ability to claim a continuous

<sup>5</sup> ‘A Response to Joan Scott’, *International Labor and Working Class History*, 31 (Spring 1987), p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/ssalbum/auschwitz\\_album](http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/ssalbum/auschwitz_album).

normality of daily existence that was not Nazi creates an impression that, within at least part of their lives, they managed to resist the National Socialist regime. Yet the historian of everyday life vigorously rejects any claim that this life, 'lived [merely] through time' (*Erlebnis* for Walter Benjamin), served as an inoculation against complicity. By acknowledging the all-too-human reality of complicity, and firm in the belief that assertions of broad complicity do not equal blanket condemnations à la Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, the historian of everyday life also raises the bar on what constitutes resistance. At least since Martin Broszat articulated his concept of *Resistenz* in the mid-1980s, historians have wrestled with the relationship between ends and means in everyday responses to and engagement with the Nazi regime. A decade later, Michael Geyer set a high definitional bar for resistance: 'to refuse involvement in the violence of the regime, to oppose the societies that tolerated it or thrived on it, and to destroy the powers that enforced it.' If Nazi violence sought fundamentally to deny the subject status of particular groups of people, most notably Europe's Jews, resistance and the history of resistance ought to recover those subjects. The moral implication of this last statement is intentional. *Alltagsgeschichte* can succeed in its historical undertaking by retaining the 'traces of violence' within and beyond the Nazi era. Catching sight of these traces in the midst of everyday life offers historians the chance to realize a Benjaminian shock of recognition, to recognize the humanity they share with their historical subjects. In such moments, *Alltagsgeschichte* is resistance history.

**Sweeney:** The study of subjectivity or identity, in my view, is an avenue of research that holds the most potential for future work in *Alltagsgeschichte*. Emphasizing self-determined acts of *Eigensinn*, many historians of everyday life tend to assume that there is already an autonomous self operating as the witting or unwitting architect of his or her own micro-world or acting on outside forces in ways that shape the latter. As a consequence, they tend to assign a kind of default identity to their subjects—as Germans, Berliners, and so on—without exploring the ways in which those identities were shaped, cultivated, experienced, undermined or mobilized. I think we really need to take more notice of the many fundamental challenges to this figure of the self-actualized historical actor in recent bodies of theory and research and treat the self as fragmentary due to the fact that it is perpetually the object and site of political negotiation and performance. In this theoretical context, historians could also consider how everyday life as a mode of experience was called into being and then continually transformed or 'colonized' by the new forces of 'modernity'—the spatial transformations and transnational flows of economic exchange, the mass consumption of commodities and visual spectacles, media and public communication, and the constant barrage of political slogans and ideological discourses. In the context of these efforts to redesign the everyday, subjectivities were often radically disrupted and disassembled, prompting ever more strenuous ideological efforts to reconstitute or resist them.

**Reuveni:** This critical re-evaluation of categories of selfhood should reassess the victims of National Socialism. We commonly conceptualize *Alltagsgeschichte* as perpetrator history, but how does it operate among the victims? In the historiography of the Holocaust, the task of reconstructing the life experiences of the victims and establishing their agency has played a crucial role in the politics of memory. Yet, while in the context

of the victims' history, the history of everyday life does not seem to challenge memory or raise any ethical difficulties, it exposes a much broader spectrum of victimhood and raises many challenging questions about the moral stance of victims and act of surviving. A case in point here is the question of collaboration. In more recent survivor testimonies and historical representations the issue of compliance is marginalized, but the survivors' discourse in the first decades after the Holocaust was haunted by discussions about collaboration. Hundreds of trials in so-called Courts of Honour in Displaced Persons camps, and twelve trials in Israeli courts—one of which ended with a death sentence—attest to the significance of the collaboration trope within the survivor community. A closer examination of these trials—which still await a more systematic and comprehensive investigation—is likely to display survival at its most complex, and reveal the ambiguities of selfhood in these contexts. It seems to me that *Alltagsgeschichte* invites us to probe the limits of such fundamental categories as perpetrator and victim—and to expose their ambivalence. Indeed, if our aim is to produce a history that matters, we should be far more explicit about these fine differences.

**Sweeney:** This is why I think we should explore further the formation of Nazi subjectivities more generally. This would involve taking seriously Nazism's capacity to enter into the various realms of everyday experience and private desires, including the domains of work, quotidian sociability, family life, and consumer entertainment and spectacle. It would also, however, involve exploring the interpellative capacities of Nazi ideology as it formed, or enabled the formation of, new fascist subjectivities, anchored in notions of ethno-racial purity and self-contained *Eigenart*, in response to competing notions of self, the proliferation of cultural difference, and the immediate presence of the other. By taking seriously the ways in which ordinary people imagined themselves as coherent subjects in relation to Nazism, we might address the larger and more disturbing questions, posed by scholars in many disciplines but never convincingly answered: how have the experiences of everyday life in the (post)modern world—with its disintegrating, fragmenting and disruptive conditions of social and cultural life—produced the conditions of possibility for distinctively Nazi subjectivities? And why do radical right and fascist subjectivities seem to thrive under these conditions?