

THE ART OF MEMORY: “SOCIAL BOOKMARKING HAMBURG”

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Abstract: At the end of November 2016, a unique and intruding art project took place in the city of Hamburg, Germany, a result of collaboration between German artists and a Chinese artist, who all seek to commemorate the Chinese victims who lived in the city pre- World War II but had to suffer the injustices of the Nazi regime. The project lasted three days and was presented in various locations throughout the city, while including many artistic mediums alongside scholarly work. By referring to the main events of that weekend, the paper traces after a “forgotten” past that many people refuse to look at, not to say to take responsibility for it, while in contrast, the art continues to extract it from the depths of oblivion and forced amnesia – to the dismay of many.

Keywords: memory, art, Nazi regime, traumatic landscape, Chinatown.

*“Cultures create a contract between the living,
the dead, and the not yet living”
Aleida Assmann (2008: 97)*

MATERIAL AND MORAL (IN)VISIBILITY

The project “Social Bookmarking Hamburg” was a collaboration between contemporary artists, led by the German artist Dagmar Rauwald and the Chinese artist Liu Ding, and took place over the last weekend of November in various parts of the city of Hamburg (25-27 November 2016). The major aim of the project was to commemorate through the artistic act the Chinese immigrants who lived in Hamburg before World War II, and were persecuted and victimized under the Nazi regime. As part of the project, each of them was free to decide what should be the appropriate way to commemorate the victims according to his/her world view¹.

Remarkably, unlike many concentration camps that have become a symbol of the Nazis systematic destruction like Auschwitz-Birkenau, Bergen-Belsen or Dachau, or as oppose to the institutional support in Neuengamme KZ – the labour

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camp to where the Chinese immigrants were sent, is located in an industrial area, not marked or lit, almost as if deliberately remains unseen. Furthermore, as oppose to heritage sites where other victims and survivors' communities, mainly from European states, were used to live – have both historical and physical visibility within the German and the East-European landscape – the neighbourhood where the Chinese immigrants were used to live does not win the same visibility.

It is not only that many people have never heard on the camp to which the Chinese were deported, but also, unlike other “Chinatowns” around the globe, a walk through the area of the former Chinese quarter of St. Pauli does not trigger any special historical awareness. There is a greater chance that a tourist visiting this area in Hamburg may identify the bars or the clubs, while Hamburg's famous port is located in the background; not a thing from a haunted past. Besides a few Asian restaurants or shops, it is very difficult to find almost any evidence of the small immigrants' community that used to be an important part of the social fabric of this region of Hamburg. As a matter of fact, very few public monuments are dedicated to the Chinese victims in Hamburg's cityscape, while almost all of them were created by local artists, with almost no institutional support, if any. Most of these monuments remain almost invisible and hidden from the non-expert eye that does not intentionally look for them.

Since seeing-the-Other, or being-seen-by-the-Other, is a communicative action of institutional power (Foucault 1977), but also can be understood as an interpersonal phenomenon and social interplay, “the Look”, in the sense of Sartre, allows the Other to approach Me essentially insofar as I feel Myself, i.e. as I am responsible for the Other (Levinas 1982: 97). During the Nazi regime, it was this lack of seeing – the loss of “moral visibility”, or the “moral blindness” – played as one of the key factors that made the social distance grow and the responsibility for the Other diminish (Baumann 1989) and led to the humanistic catastrophe of racial persecution and genocide among other reasons. In the present days, viewing the German memoryscape through the lenses of “political correctness” one will reveal that while various persecuted ethnical groups/minorities, like the Jews, the Sinti and Roma and even gendered groups (like Homosexuals), are constantly being commemorated, the persistent forgetfulness of the history of other persecuted ethnic minorities, such as the Chinese immigrants, indicates on the state of dissociation between the Ger-

man host culture and the immigrant minorities who used to live in pre-war Germany. This double-unseen, both as living and as dead people, exposes a hierarchy of victimhood, which, in this case, relays on two infamous pasts that the German residents of Hamburg are not entirely ready to deal with: their colonialist past in association with the Chinese immigrants on the one hand, and the crimes which were committed against this small community during the Nazi period, on the other hand.

But what is this “forgotten” history we all wished to re-live? What does the loss of spatial-history mean in the present days, when the memory of the war has been globalized (Levy and Sznajder 2006), but nevertheless still not the memory of the Chinese immigrants’ community? Why the project had to turn specifically to the traumatic spatiality?

Building upon the recent “spatial turn” the academy has recently been facing, as well as the flourishing of the memory discourse, particularly in relation to the war-timeframe, the discussion in this paper deals with the issue of production, circulation, and consumption of historical spatiality and its narratives. That is, to challenge the politics of memory that are responsible for the decision who is the one to determine whether this specific history will be located in the centre of the Western culture of commemoration, or will be excluded only to remain in its margins. Thus, by focusing on our participation in “Social Bookmarking Hamburg” and sharing from our experiences, this paper wishes to re-examine the relationship between the Chinese immigrants – as the so-called “guests” on the German landscape – and their German “hosts”. It asks to expose the agency that an artistic collaboration has, as well as the importance of site-specific on the traumatic landscape as an artistic practice as it may offer some comfort to the past victims.

HAMBURG’S CHINATOWN: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Naturally, recognizing the atrocities that different minority communities had to suffer is a process that takes time, particularly when it comes to small communities as the Chinese immigrants. But remarkably, only a few historians have turned their eyes to the hard fate of the persecuted Chinese immi-

grants in Nazi Germany, and only fewer to Hamburg's Chinatown, from its very beginning to its vanishing.

Chinatowns around the world are consistently perceived as emblematic icons of the global modern city, and over the years they became popular symbols of the Chinese immigration. Chinatowns are part of a network of real-life diasporic exchanges and are informed by what might be called "a complex transnational imaginary" of sites of mystery and fascination (Mayer 2011: 1-25). Whereas Chinatowns are generally associated with the United States, in particular with the famous Chinese enclaves in San Francisco and New York City, the Chinatowns spread over Europe are both global and local, depending on their geographical and societal situatedness, divergent immigration policies, international relations, colonial histories, and demographic developments. Thus, ever since the beginning of the 20th century, Chinese communities have largely emerged in various European cities, mostly those which were highly attached to the maritime world and the colonization culture (Amenda 2011: 45).

Within Germany, significant Chinese settlements began in the 1870s (Güttinger 2004). Near the end of the nineteenth century, a part of north China (Tsingtao and Kiautschou Bay) was occupied by the German Empire under Prussian leadership. Under the foreign rules, this geographical area became part of the German colonies that were scattered outside the borders of the country and which became an important factor in the globalization and strengthening of the country's economy. As a result, the German steamships sailed back and forth throughout the world, while a considerable amount of Chinese were hired as stokers by the German shipping firms. The Chinese workers involuntarily arrived in port cities such as Hamburg and Rotterdam, and then were left to wait with their ships, until some of them settled down in their "new homes". Since the 1920s, approximately 200 Chinese had taken roots in the city of Hamburg, in particular in the area around Schmuckstraße, which is located at the heart of St. Pauli quarter, close to the city harbour (Amenda 2007, 2009). Therefore, between the two world wars, there were already a few thousand Chinese living in Germany, mostly concentrated in the cities of Hamburg and Berlin (Leung: 2003: 242).

In comparison with the Chinatowns in the United States where at the beginning, the Chinese immigration was almost exclusively male, the majority of the Chinese men who came to the European port cities lived there in inter-racial partner-

ships. They matched with white women and were by no means completely segregated. On the contrary, oftentimes they were quite integrated into the local “host” society (Amanda 2011: 51). While the Chinatown in Rotterdam was presented in the Dutch media and was portrayed to the public as an exotic place of strange but harmless people, or San Francisco’s Chinatown attracted a great deal of tourists already from its very beginning, the Chinese quarter in Hamburg met with much more apprehension. By portraying the Chinese community only from the outside, the German media kept presenting the Chinese immigrants who came to Hamburg as an “alien invasion” and as “the yellow peril” and thus reproduced popular and stereotypical images that presented to the German residents a criminal Chinese underworld in the St. Pauli of the 1920s (*ibidem*: 54-55; Miller 1969: 206). However, while the Chinese seamen in the port city of Hamburg were displayed as unwelcome intruders, the Chinese community in Berlin was relatively welcome as representatives of the Chinese high culture, which had a positive influence on their acceptance by the population of Berlin (Yü-Dembksi 1987; 2011: 65-69). The Chinese community in Berlin was formed by around 200 Chinese traders, merchants and students who arrived in Eastern Germany since the opening of the Trans-Siberian Railroad in 1904 (*ibidem* 2011).

In the early 1930s, when the Nazis came into power, the situation of the Chinese immigrants in Germany did not change immediately; yet, Chinese immigrants were indeed affected by the emerging racial policies and were gradually persecuted. In a number of cases, Chinese men were expelled from the country due to the fact that they were living in “concubinage” with German women (Amanda 2011: 53). In anticipation of the Nuremberg Laws to “protect the German blood and the German honor”, a Chinese academic scholar was refused permission to marry a German woman in October 1933 on the orders of the Prussian Ministry of Justice (Yü-Dembksi 2011: 74). A few years later, a “Central Department for the Chinese” was established by the Reich’s police in Berlin in 1938, in order to monitor and control the Chinese in Nazi Germany, particularly seamen and peddlers (Amanda: 2011: 53). Even further, in January 1938 an explicit decree was issued by the Nazi Minister of Interior specifically against this ethnical minority, which sentenced the Chinese residents who lived together with their German women, ordering them to be

separated and deported. With the outbreak of the war, the Chinese community of Hamburg was subjected to further abuse, as the Chinese stores and restaurants around Schmuckstraße were frequently raided by the Gestapo, while interracial marriages were already legally forbidden (Amenda 2006: 258-281).

With the rupture of the German-Chinese relations in 1941 and the departure of the Chinese Ambassador from Germany, the first deportations of Chinese to labour and concentration camps started to take place. From that moment on, “arbitrary arrests, the persecution of German-Chinese partnership, denunciations, and racial discrimination now marked the everyday life of all Chinese in Germany” (Yü-Dembski 2011: 76). On 13 May 1944, the Gestapo executed their first “Chinese Action” in Hamburg, by collectively arresting the Chinese immigrants who lived in St. Pauli. At least 130 Chinese men in total were transported to the police station Davidwache in St. Pauli, and later to the Gestapo prison Fuhlsbüttel, an urban quarter in the northern part of Hamburg, where many of them were heavily abused and tortured, sometimes until death.

Only a few months later, in September 1944, between 60 to 80 Chinese inmates were transferred again to the *Arbeitserziehungslager* ([AEL], Labor Education Camp) Langer Morgen in Wilhelmsburg, where they had to work as forced labourers in Hamburg harbour firms and in its industrial area. At the same time, any German woman who had a love or employment relationship with a Chinese man was arrested and interrogated as well, and was in some cases sent to the concentration camps, such as the infamous women concentration camp Ravensbrück (which soon became an extermination camp) (*ibidem* 2006). Struggling under the inhumane living conditions and the arbitrary maltreatment executed by the Nazi watchmen, at least 17 Chinese died in AEL Langer Morgen (Amenda 2005: 103-132). However, just as for the entire Chinese Action of Hamburg, the accurate numbers of the Chinese victims in the camp remain unknown until today, and the name of the camp Langer Morgen, which means “long morning” in English, ironically, hides the history of the longest darkness which many Chinese immigrants were not able to survive.

When the war ended, most of the Chinese immigrants who survived the Nazi regime returned back to China while only a few decided to stay in Hamburg, fighting in vain for

compensation. However, in a stark contrast to the principle underlying the Nazi ideology, the post-war German restitution authorities took the view that the persecution of this ethnical minority had *not* been racially motivated. Moreover, the courts that appealed to this twisted worldview, mostly claimed that the *Chinesenaktion* was an *ordinary* police operation (Amenda 2005: 132). Unlike some of the Jewish survivors, who have received over the years monetary compensation for their physical and emotional injuries, and in comparison with the attempts that have been made to reconstitute lost and looted assets, the Chinese immigrants have not received any recognition for the crimes that were committed by their host community, and thus have found it difficult to recover from the traumatic past(s).

MEMORY AND THE LOSS OF MEMORY

The traumatized Chinese survivors chose to leave Germany and never speak with their Chinese fellows about their sufferings in the camps, or tried to fight for a recognition against the German authorities. Either way, the common dominator was silence. Those who returned back home, exactly as those who stayed with their German partners in post-war Germany, refused to speak the German language – the perpetrators' language – ever again (Amenda 2006). The language of the perpetrators, had echoed the traumatic past as well as the absurd present, and therefore, the need to speak the German language in the traumatic landscape once again, was perceived by many of the victims as a violent action that reduced the traumatized survivors' subjectivity to minimalism. For them, the German language was contaminated. At the same time, the way the language breaks down is in itself a significant telling and denouncing process (LaCapra 1994: 47). Along with the feelings of shame or guilt, which characterized many Holocaust survivors, the refusal of the Chinese minority living in Germany to speak the German language once again on the same traumatic landscape might be seen as an attempt to gain back their pre-war identity and to re-establish the borders of their Self, which was desecrated by their host community (Laub 1992: 75-92).

However, not only that speaking the language was necessary in order to function within the social order, but also the

collective Chinese cultural memory mainly revolves around the events of the war that took place in the eastern part of the globe (or the Jewish ghetto in Shanghai). Thus, the linguistic power-relation that existed between the German “host” community and the immigrant “guests” was also reflected on and in Hamburg’s cityscape, since the language’s native speaker were the owners of the landscape as well. The “authentic” residents of the landscape, are usually the ones to dictate the spatial history of the minority, by “othering” them from the national landscape; that is, to determine whether the historical event will be located in the “center of history”, and thereby will gain presence within the cityscape, or will be forcibly pushed aside, just to remain un-seen and un-heard (Van der Laarse 2010: 321-328). And unfortunately, the second is undoubtedly true when talking about the injustices this small immigrants’ community in Hamburg had to suffer, as well as about the camp to which they were sent.

In her article, *Canon and Archive*, memory scholar Aleida Assmann has asked to link the relationship between memory and forgetting as part of cultural institution practices. Since it is not likely to remember every image, event, or an object, from the moment of awakening to the moment of sleep, “when thinking about memory, we must start with forgetting”, says Assmann (Assmann 2008: 97). The capacity of the memory is highly limited, and therefore, memory is activated by a mechanism of selection that is first of all a basic necessity (*ibidem*). But despite the fact that forgetting is an inherent part of the social normality that needs it in order to make room for “new information, new challenges, and new ideas to face the present and future”, Assmann has differentiated between two forms of forgetting; and while the first one is more passive in its nature as it is related to non-intentional acts of neglecting in which the “forgotten” simply falls “out of the frames of attention, valuation, and use”, the second is more active in its essence as it requires a conscious act of forgetting (*ibidem*).

The selection depends on a whole mechanism of filtering and inclusion-exclusion that consists of various actors and involve many party’s interests: from taste-makers, to those who occupy key positions from which they affix certain things in the centre of memory at the expense of others. Correspondingly, according to Assmann, when the act of forgetting demonstrates a deliberate degree of *active* forgetting, it can quickly lead to censorship, violence, and destruction – and

this is already a fascist element of repression, particularly when it is directed deliberately towards a culture that is an alien or persecuted minority, as in the case of the Chinese immigrants' community and their historical spatiality within the Hamburg's cityscape.

In the same way, remembering has its two sides as well. To better understand these memory-dynamics, Assmann has paralleled memory to two different rooms in a museum. In the "exhibition hall" are presented all the exhibits that have successfully passed the threshold of the selectors. Those "exhibits" are placed there with great care for the pleasure of the viewer, as part of the memory-canon, and therefore, present the present. In contrast, those that have failed to pass, raise dust in the store-house, in the archives that preserve the past in the past.

Yet, while the decision of which events, images, stories, and artworks, will go straight into the heart of the canon, and which will be doomed to be thrown away and stored, has its violent side, the history of the Chinese immigrants has not lost forever. With the help of the people who were involved and participate in the project, the artistic act kept maintaining its "archival potential" that prevents their history from being entirely destroyed, as it has allowed it to be re-discovered one day. That means that despite this forgotten history is still in "a state of 'no longer' and 'not yet', deprived of [their] old existence" (*ibidem*: 103), it was actually just waiting for a new interpretation that will assist with stabilizing it in the collective cultural memory (*ibidem*: 97-108).

For these reasons, beside the forgetfulness and the silence – of both the victims and victimizers, the historical research that has traced back the Chinese roots in Hamburg is often ignored or limited in the Western and Eastern political, historical and social discourses. Moreover, the Chinese and the German official institutions and media prefer not to mention this unpleasant chapter in the Sino-German history, but rather choose to mainly focus on the economic aspects of this transnational relationship. Articles about the Chinatown in Hamburg have been published on very limited occasions in Chinese newspapers, such as the *Xinhua News* in its oversea version² and only rarely appear in the local Hamburg media, like in *mittendrin*³. Furthermore, the book *Hamburg-Shanghai. Ein gemeinsames Buch zur Partnerschaft* that was published on the official level to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of partner-

ship between the two cities (Zhang et al. 2006), completely neglected the past of the Chinese community in Hamburg or Amenda's ground-breaking researches that traces back to the Chinese roots in the city. And to complete this avoidance even more, despite the fact that the project was partially supported by the *China Time Hamburg* – a biennial series of Chinese cultural events which is the greatest in Germany in its scope – “Social Bookmarking Hamburg” was entirely marginalized from the program and remained the most inconspicuous event within the half-year-running program of *China Time 2016*⁴.

As such, the insignificant enlisting offered by the city of Hamburg and its culture authorities was neither a successful accomplishment nor a comfort for the Chinese immigrants' community. Even though the project has tried to remind the residence of Hamburg a meaningful chapter(s) from their own past and offered them to join the modest attempt to take responsibility for it, both the people and the institutions chose to forget about Chinatown – either as a deliberate decision not to face their “ghosts”, or as they just let the history of the persecuted immigrants sink into oblivion. Thus, the wish to forget the past in the present, was again a nonfeasance action of violence that in many manners has continued prolonging the crimes which were committed as part of the colonialist past and by the Nazis to this minority more than 70 years ago. Having this in mind, the question arises: are the souls of the Chinese immigrants who died in the labour camp Langer Morgen comforted now?

THE PROJECT “SOCIAL BOOKMARKING HAMBURG”

On Friday, 25 November 2016, a joint exhibition was opened in *Speck Galerie* as the introduction to the entire project. There, German and Chinese artists presented their works to the public, as for example the director Ute Rauwald worked in together with the dancer Lisa Propova and the musician Harald Günther Kainer. The group presented a live performance, *Living Stolperstein* (2016), as an homage to the comprehensive and cross-countries project of the *Stolpersteine*, the stumbling stones made by the German artist Gunter Demnig. *Living Stolperstein* was a sensitive and a special way to *dance* the names of the victims and to commemorate them through a bodily activity while demonstrating a synergetic relationship between artistic mediums and emotional experience. Another



FIG. 1. The former site of Chinatown in St. Pauli, Hamburg (and the only sign to mark it)

example was a presentation of a map created by the Nazis that was found in one's attic, manifesting the topography of terror.

Our counter-answer to the lack of visibility, symbolically and literally, of the Chinese immigrants' community, was to make the spoken events – the historical and the artistic – visible, exposed, and accessible to many people (which also meant/means to liberate it from “academic rigidity”). Therefore, as the closing event for the entire artistic weekend, a podium discussion that included the artists, practitioners and scholars (among them also Amenda) was held⁵.

The core of the entire project took place on Saturday, 26 November. On this day, Rauwald and Liu Ding collaborated in an artist act of commemoration, as they were seeking to mark the Chinese's traumatic landscapes, both where they lived and where they died, as a sort of a present gesture. Thus, it was necessary to return, symbolically and physically, to where it all started, to their geography in the urban space of Hamburg.

The journey was opened in the heart of St. Pauli, on Schmuckstraße, where the Chinese community lived, and the same place where until today the later generation of the Chinese survivor, Chong Tin Lam (fig. 1), runs the bar “Hong Kong” (in Hamburger Berg Straße)⁶. It is this small area that

has been witnessing the arrival of the first Chinese immigrants in Hamburg, the vivid culture they created there, yet also the same landscape from which they were violently forced to get on the German trucks only to disappear forever.

It was not only a symbolic and a material starting point for the day that resonated the historical timeframe that was at the heart of the project, but it was also an important artistic starting point, since exactly there, in a very small meadow that stands empty until today, Rauwald hung two large paintings painted with shiny colours. The artworks were not accompanied by any sign or explanation, but they presented an urban disorder, an alien and uncanny decoration hanging in front of Chong Tin Lam's former residence. Interestingly, many passers were not even aware of Rauwald's paintings nor were distracted by the participants in the event that told the victims' stories, as almost not a single person stopped by.

Within the paintings, one could identify a dragon, the symbol of the Chinese traditional culture, as well as the Greater Coat of Arms, showing the castle, the stars and the church that symbolizes the city of Hamburg. The images blended together with the logo of the cultural authority and the logo of 2016 Chinatown's events. But with strong expressionist brush strokes rich with neon green and pink colours, Rauwald partly covered the surface that was partly hiding the figurative images. On the one hand, the neon green colour absorbed into the ground and echoed the absence and the loss, serving as a form of temporal counter-monument (Young 1992, 1993). Simultaneously, it served as a warning signal, seeking to remind the passers the existence of the paintings and to confront them with their own past. On the other hand, it also hinted at the lack of use in red colour as a plausible Chinese cliché, a traditional and meaningful colour in the Chinese culture that is usually used by the West to stereotype this ethnic community. In this respect, the participants in the project entered a double spatiality and timeframe that linked between the past and the present, as well as between the visibility and invisibility of former Chinatown (fig. 2-3).

As a continuation with the invisibility of the former Chinatown, the Germans' de-historization of the traumatic landscape of the camp where the Chinese victims were sent into, in particular in comparison with Neuengamme KZ in Hamburg, reflects the unbalanced social relationship between the host collective and its different minorities.



FIG. 2. *Rawald's artworks in St. Pauli*



FIG. 3. *Rawald's artworks*



FIG. 4. *The remains of the labour camp Langer Morgen in Wilhelmsburg, Hamburg*

Since the tensions exist between periphery and centre can be easily identified when coming to discuss about the Chinese community, Liu Ding chose to perform his geographic intervention specifically and intentionally on- and in- the remains of the labour camp, as according to him, it turns out that in order to fulfil his idea of the commemorating act, the participants in the project had to go to the suburbs, literally and symbolically. From a geographic point of view, the journey started on the traumatic landscape of Chinatown where the immigrants were an important part of Hamburg's social *living* infrastructure, and finished on the same traumatic landscape the marks their *death*. After being present in the former Chinatown, and talking with the small audience that registered in advance to participate in the events during that day, the participants got on a pre-ordered shuttle and drove together to the remains of labour camp Langer Morgen in Wilhelmsburg, in order to attend the site-specific performance led by the contemporary Chinese artist Liu Ding (fig. 4).

The idea was to imitate the same traumatic trail that the Chinese immigrants were forced to during the 1940s, only now as free individuals, coming from different nationalities, belonging to a wide range of ages and family backgrounds (or

Generations, if to follow Holocaust terminology), who will return later back into the city as post-witnesses with a moral obligation to remember and to remind. All the participants in the project revived the past through a bodywork of walking not only as a daily practice (de Certeau 1984), but rather also as a practice of memory (L. Vergunst and Ingold 2016 [2008]) and as an act of resistance against the *active* forgetting while demanding to reclaim the traumatic topography in the name of its past victims (de Certeau 1984). With the aid of a daily practice, the participants have symbolically asked to change the urban texture of the city of Hamburg (fig. 5-6).

As part of Liu Ding's performance, the participants assisted with the action of burying potatoes and Euro coins in the remains of labour camp. The decision to work with these two materials and to distinguish between their contradictory materiality and its purpose – to eat vs. to buy – was an artistically deliberated decision that had few origins. In the interview we held with Liu Ding, he stressed his wish to work with Western cultural stereotypes, as oppose to the Western understanding of China, as part of his attempt to deconstruct their national meanings by turning them against themselves. He thought that it would be inappropriate to bury in Germany other materials such as rice, for example, as they became too-used symbols and a common attribute for the Chinese people. In contrast, he searched to turn the spotlight onto the victimizer, and with this to revive the lost history and the responsibility for it.

This shift in perspectives has charged the action of commemoration with the action of re-enactment, in which by the mixture of nationalities in the audience that collaborated all together – the performance has enabled to remember but also to create a moment of forgiveness, and thus, was a suitable ending for this long day, and even for the entire project. But why potatoes and Euros?

Actually, potatoes were always a visual motif in art history, one that was mainly associated with the lower social class, as it appears in Jean-François Millet or Van Gogh's famous paintings. Yet, as a direct result of the war, potatoes also became associated with hunger and poverty within the Holocaust imagery. Even further, potatoes, as a symbol, echo to the post-war European collective memory, and the German one in particular. Thus, they became so much associated with the harsh living conditions during the war that in the first decade after it, images of Berlin's Tiergarten (a forestal park in the centre



FIG. 5. *Participants in the performance*



FIG. 6. *Potatoes and Euro coins were buried*

of the city) as a potato plantation immediately may pop into the German's mind.

But as a matter of fact, potatoes were not always considered to be the “food of the poor people” in the German national context. This vegetable was first introduced to the German public by Frederick the Great, the king of Prussia, who genuinely re-branded the “vegetable for the rich”, as “high class vegetable”, in an attempt to market it to his people. Over the years, potatoes have become so associated with *Der Alte Fritz*, as Frederick the Great was famously called, that as a result, and to their dismay, the German people has become identified as the “nation of the potatoes” due to their favourite cooking ingredient. Therefore, it is almost self-evident that Liu Ding's decision to work with this multi-layered material, for all its visible and hidden meanings, delivered to the German residences of Hamburg an ironic wink to their past that they were not ready to face. Moreover, to frame this decision specifically in the commemoration and mourning context, sub-consciously it was also a reference to the German custom of leaving potatoes on Frederick the Great's grave, located in the yard of his Palace Sanssouci in Potsdam (Schloss Sanssouci), as a gesture of mourning and remembrance of their own national past.

Working with a material that is so embodied in the collective memory of the German society, and which is, on one side associated so strongly with the Prussian spirit and the German pride, and on the other side, with the war and post-war imagery, did not pass in silence among the residences of Hamburg⁸. Being the host culture, they were not pleased from the idea a Chinese artist dare to “touch” *their* “precious” national symbol and to challenge *their* customs, while de-contextualizing it in favour of the Chinese' victims. Therefore, perhaps no one should be surprised to learn that unlike Rauwald's work that played with the victims' imagery, Liu Dings' side of the project suffered from a vehement opposition among the local residents. Even though they did not come to participate in the project, the moment they heard about the coming performance, they rushed to demand from the artists (and especially from Rauwald as the organizer of the project), to replace the potatoes with something else. They had other ideas in mind, such as flowers. However, remarkably, and even ironically, it was fascinating to discover that burying Euro coins in the landscape did not encounter any dramatic reactions from the

German side. Around 300 Euro coins were buried, one with each potato – as the estimated number of the Chinese victims.

Nevertheless, despite their opposition, and perhaps because of it, the artists refused to give up to their demands⁷. Nobody search for a provocation just for the sake of provocation, but the artists were also not ready to give up to censorship, since just as Assmann has pointed it out, it was another violent act directed once again against this immigrants' community. For the artists, it was a request to only remember, and specifically, within a limited imagined visual frame of reference, that appropriates the past as it is perceived through the eyes of the collective host, and a one that was originated from an imagined ownership (and authorship) on the traumatic landscape and the events which had taken place on it.

By virtue of being Chinese artist who returns to a spatial history that many German residents still ignore or suppress, Liu Ding functions as a kind of a historical agent, or even a prosecutor, that demands sobriety. Just as with the potatoes, the decision to work with Euro coins, indirectly, pointed on the German need to “pay” for their past actions. However, because monetary compensation cannot delete the events nor the suffer, the reference for the EU also reflected a demand to approach the past along with the future. The decision to work with the coins relied on the existence of the European Union, as a symbol for the post-1990s Western consumption culture. The act of burying manifested the need to bury a practical treasure that needs to be hidden and saved; as if one goes to the bank and makes a deposit for a rainy day to come. It was a hint to the unified post-war effort striving for equality, human rights, and the need to support each other. As such, the site specific symbolized a delicate shift from the regional victims' belonging, to a non-Chinese, global worldview, and thus, a withdraw of a specific national moment in time in favour of universalism.

Working with these materials, Liu Ding has not only challenged the ways the Chinese are being occasionally perceived through the imagination of the “global”-West, but he has dared to challenge the relation with the Western concept of modernism. The German art historian Andreas Huyssen has asked to pay attention to the fact that while the discussion on the transition between the local and the global is extending (especially in relation to the economic domain), only rarely the focus of the discussion is put on the cultural dimension, and even less on the arts. According to him, while “much modern-

ism research in the Western academy and in the museum is still bound by the local [...]. It strikes me that the current debate pays far too little attention to the multiple layers and hierarchies within transnational cultural exchange” (Huysen 2007: 194, 196-197). Paraphrasing Arjun Appadurai’s term “modernity at large” (Appadurai 1996), Huysen has asked to think about these geographies of modernism in terms of “modernism at large” (*ibidem*). Following Huysen’s line of thought, by being the outsider to the host community as well as to the Western art world, Liu Ding’s materialistic decision demands a confrontation with the perception that the West hosts the East generously, as a holistic Western self-understanding.

The movement between past, present and future also created a long commitment to the burying action. The duration of the site-specific took several hours, in open space, in freezing cold, and was part of the emotional and physical experience in the field that felt like a blurring of temporal perceptions. In this way, the different materiality of the two objects also expressed the different memory-dynamics that Assmann has pointed out, as one thing was very clear to us: while on the one hand, the coins will remain in the landscape, embodying in them a potential that will enable them to be reviled one day, to challenge someone, to draw a straight line between the act of burying in the present – soon to be the past – with an unknown archaeological future; the potatoes, on the other hand, were doomed to rot because they could not survive the cold Hamburg’s winter, and the conditions that were given certainly did not help.

Liu Ding’s future perspective in this project is related to his independency from the Western historical narrative, just like the ancient Chinese saying: “To thrive in future calamity and perish in present soft living”; a link that could have already been found in the invitation flyer for the project: “Instead of being fixated on the present and the present concerns, energy, resources and generosity could be put away for the future that is precarious to every one of us”.

THE POWER OF ARTISTIC COLLABORATION AND MEDIA CONVERGENCE

Ever since the end of the war, German artists have returned to the German landscape, pointing on their refusal to

allow the landscape to hide its embodied past wrongs. From Anselm Kiefer's famous paintings to Thomas Demand's photographs, from Joseph Beuys' spatial actions to Horst Hoeisel's proposal to blow up the Brandenburg Gate (1995), many have tried to hold a mirror to the Nazis' atrocities made in the past in front of the German viewers, while turning to the traumatic landscape as a memory-device that is part of the Western material heritage. After the 1990s, the interest in these landscapes has only grown among artists of different origins and biographic backgrounds. The common factor is that they are all a part of younger Generations that grew up in the shadow of this war as an event that shaped, and continues to shape, the way that modern society perceives and understands itself, both on a global- and on a nation-state- levels (Assmann 2014). However, artistic collaboration between artists who come from Germany and China in order to remember and commemorate their shared traumatic past is rare. This uniqueness was expressed in the field, in the different ways in which Rauwald and Liu Ding chose to commemorate and remember the shared past.

Even though both artists have performed a site-specific performance that intervene with the traumatic landscape and deal with memory and contrasting narratives, each side took upon him/herself, consciously or sub-consciously, to operate according to his/her national identity, and with this – they both sharpened the gap between their national belongings: the victims and the victimizer. To describe it differently, in contrast to Liu Ding's work, which in many ways his work was engaged with the victims' position; Rauwald's geographical intervention was fundamentally different.

While Rauwald presented elements and materials such as historical dates and black-and-white family archive photos of the Chinese immigrants in her artworks that were exhibited in *Speck Galerie*, which normally provoke strong association with the past, as well as many other clear symbols in the paintings hanged in Schmuckstraße; Liu Ding abstained from using any archival materials or clear images.

Rauwald hung her artworks on the fence in Schmuckstraße, the heart of the “cool” quarter in the city. However, unlike Liu Ding's spatial practice that could not be created without the participants, Rauwald's artworks remained hanged for around a couple of weeks as a sort of a “modest”, almost unnoticeable interruption. In contrast to Liu Ding's performance, here it was above the surface, gently inviting

random bypasses to ask questions. But at the same the paintings were quietly confronting the bypasses with this past; it was exactly the unspoken demand in active participants that pointed on the wish of many Germans to push this history aside and not to give it a proper place in the spoken narrative. Like an annoying fly that flies next to their ears, not really explaining anything, but forcing to wonder what meanings are hidden in those images, Rauwald has mentioned in the interview for the short documentary that “there is something missing – a piece of culture, and something deep down inside me personally”⁷.

Therefore, whereas Liu Ding’s site-specific functions as “*hidden art with a Public*,” Rauwald’s artwork functioned as “*non-hidden art without a public*” – or at last: without “full awareness of the public”. It was the combination between two artistic world-views that were merged into one project that succeeded creating something new. Thus, the joint-wish to expose a “hidden” (spatial) history, was an attempt to awaken the two nations – both Germany and China – and make them begin to recognize the common past, for the sake of its victims as well as for the few survivors.

Viewing and passive/active participating in those two geographic interventions on the same day, was a meaningful experience for all of the participants, since on one weekend on November 2016, with the help of the artists, we did not let the memory of this history “freeze”. On the opposite, a message from the past and the present was left for the future generation/s – something can be summarized as “we were here to deconstruct the historical narrative; we made room for more voices – now it is your turn to continue”.

After the project came to an end, every participant returned to his/her own everyday life and most chances that the daily routine caused them to forget about these artistic geographic interventions. But something has changed, because the project succeeded in bypassing the institutional exclusion. It did not give up to the enforced forgetfulness coming from above that has pushed aside this small ethnic community and the Nazi crimes that were directed towards it on a pure racial base. Without us as participating audience, the re-enactment with the past would have failed. Together, another layer was added to the traumatic landscapes which has changed the spatial narrative. Even further, something within the participants has changed over that weekend, even if it was almost

unnoticed – the lack of historical awareness, the blank of the memory of the vanished Chinatown, the insensibility about another ethnical group still existing in the present days – they all won their deserved visibility for a moment. The next time when one visits St. Pauli, when s/he will pass by Schmuckstraße or Wilhelmsburg – the past will not be invisible anymore; these landscapes will never look or feel the same; the memory will always be triggered and the experiences that resulted from participating in the project will come back to life for a moment.

In order to stabilize and put the events in a material form – the historical as well as the artistic – it was also very important to present a diversity of media and to document the project for others. During the project, two small groups recorded and filmed the project into parts: a program about the specialists' podium discussion was broadcasted on Hamburg's local free radio station FSK (Freies Sender Kombinat) and a short documentary film was produced by the students of media studies as part of their seminar "Media and Memory" at the University of Hamburg (led by Prof. Thomas Weber), which later was published online as well⁹. Thus, the media convergence of the project has a pivotal role as part of the wish to expose this artistic project, with the attempt to fix the "lost history" in the post-war Western collective memory. Translating and mediating representations created in one medium to another, and in general, working with multiple practices, as were the cases with the flyer, exhibition, documentary film, radio program, social media, podium discussion and even the current paper, reveal the characteristics of working with memory and contemporary media in an era of the digital age (Grusin 1999). The advantages found in this dynamic circulation of knowledge, imagery and materiality are that it allows a process of remediation that has the potential of contributing in stabilizing the memory of a forgotten history, and to create certain narratives and icons of the past (Erlil 2008; Brunow 2015).

By sharing the experiences and delivering the message to the public in different media channels, the artistic project has not only reached a larger audience, but also resulted in actual response. Four months after the project ended, an online live program was produced in Hamburg by a media team of NetEase, one of the leading portals in China¹⁰. Following "Social Bookmarking Hamburg", the Chinese media team consulted with us in order to take a historical journey throughout Ham-

burg – similarly like the artistic actions – beginning with the former Chinatown in St. Pauli and chasing the present footsteps of the Chinese community in the city. With simply smartphones and data volume, they made a live show of their journey through the city which lasted several hours. Over 205,000 users of NetEase watched the program online and interacted with instant comments on the NetEase platform. Thus, with the assistance of the artistic collaboration and media convergence, the project exposed the power of art to become an active agent of historical knowledge, namely, the role of art in reviving suppressed history and triggering a moral investigation in respect to past atrocities, but also its ability to become an active agent of future memories.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

“Social Bookmarking Hamburg” is first and foremost a significance for the Chinese and the German communities as a way of working through their shared-past: those Chinese victimized immigrants asking to be heard by the residents of the landscapes in which these atrocities occurred, at least those few who are willing to take moral responsibility over past actions. For the present Chinese communities not only in Germany, but also worldwide, in London, San Francisco, Jakarta or Melbourne, remembering the events during the Nazi regime is just as crucial as the other dark pages like railroad labourers, the Chinese Exclusion Act or Anti-Chinese riots in the global history of the Chinese immigration. With the economic and social changes of nowadays China, the status of “double absence” continues to protrude (Sayad 2016). Therefore, it is firstly clear that the project helped to recognize the Chinese’ immigrants with re-constructing their identity and their loss, which could be cure, to some extent, by investigating the relationship with their Western host communities.

However, the complexity of centre and periphery relations includes different interests that have determined and manipulated the historical narrative, as well as the spatial one. Although the history of the Chinese victimized immigrants who lived in Hamburg and were persecuted by the Nazis was conjuring up by the artists who are not willing to forget – these Chinese victimized immigrants have no big lobby standing behind them, shouting their injustices. We do not hold the

expectation that the current project will become part of the canon of Holocaust representation of Western (or Eastern) culture, as well as in the historical discipline or in memory studies. The fact that despite the multi-scale advertising and invitation, not one official representative came to participate, as well as the fact that the project was not presented in the mainstream of Hamburg but only received poor institutional support – this all may indicate that “memory hierarchy” still exists in regard to the war’s victims and to those “forgotten” narratives.

This project – and others of that kind – are important also for those who seemingly do not belong to those two collectives whom the current project is allegedly addressed, and for those collective post-war and *postmemory* generations who ask curiously to broaden the discourse and stop excluding others (Hirsch 2012). In contrast to our current “post-factual” era, “Social Bookmarking Hamburg” inspires one to seek to regain the power to have knowledge that is not mediated by institutional-economic manipulation and arranged according to institutional interests – since the events did happen and one should at least be able to remember them.

NOTES

¹ Both authors are members at the research group “Vergegenwärtigungen: Repräsentationen der Shoah in komparatistischer Perspektive” (Recollections: Representations of the Shoah in Comparative Perspective) at the University of Hamburg, and were involved in organizing the project. As such they moderated a specialists’ podium discussion, participated in a short documentary film production, and advised the artists.

² See the online source of the article on *Xinhua News* (under internet sources).

³ See the online source of the article on *mittendrin* (under internet sources). Although there were a few performances before *Hamburg Social Bookmarking*. For example, from a conversation we had with Lars Amenda, we came to learn that the German artist Michael Batz organized a Chinese and Germans football game that was played in the empty meadow in Schmuckstraße in early 2000s. However, it is almost impossible to find a documentation.

⁴ For the complete program schedule of *China Time 2016* see: internet sources.

⁵ The podium discussion was held on 27 November 2016 at the Fabrique in the Gängeviertel, Hamburg.

⁶ The journalist Irene Jung conducted an interview with the daughter of Chong Tin Lam (under internet sources).

⁷ An interview with Rauwald in the short film *Unfreeze* (under internet sources).

⁸ Perhaps, in this context, it would be appropriate to mention the postwar German Sigmar Polke and his artwork *Kartoffel Maschine* (a.k.a. *Apparat, mit dem eine Kartoffel eine andere umkreisen kann*, 1969), who tried to challenge this image as well.

⁹ The short film *Unfreeze* was produced by Xin Tong, Maria Kotylevskaja and Stefanie Schulz of Media Studies in the University of Hamburg, especially documenting this joint art project in Hamburg in 2016 (under internet sources). It was published in both Chinese and German video portals like Youku and Youtube. The first documentary of the history of Chinatown in Hamburg - *Fremde Heimat* - was made

by four students of Kommunikationsdesign in Konstanzer Hochschule Technik, Wirtschaft und Gestaltung in 2010, focusing on the bar “Hong Kong” in St. Pauli, which is still run by the Chinese survivor Chong Tin Lam’s descendants.

¹⁰ The online live program was held on the news portal of *NetEase* on 2 April 2017, when the media team took their journey through the city of Hamburg. The title of the live program towards Chinese online audience was *A German Girl Revisits the Old Chinatown Liquidated by the Gestapo* (Online streaming see Internet sources). In addition, a number of new initiatives that deal with this community are supposed to take place in the city of Hamburg (during 2018-19) - a welcome move, without any doubt; though it is still difficult for us to relate to them. But we hope that they will be a subject for future research and papers.

INTERNET SOURCES

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