

Jones, Sara: *The Media of Testimony. Remembering the East German Stasi in the Berlin Republic*. London: Palgrave Macmillan 2014. ISBN: 978-1-137-36403-6; X, 233 S.

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What happens to eyewitness testimony when it is performed in, framed by, and transmitted through various media? How do witnesses and mediators of testimony (curators, editors, film directors) construct authenticity for such accounts? And how is this kind of testimony received and decoded by the audience? Sara Jones sheds new light on these ever-urgent questions and their memory-political implications in this insightful study. Structured around the complex triangle of the production, mediation, and reception of testimony, Jones' book skillfully combines approaches from memory studies, communication and media studies, and reception studies to give insight into the interaction between individual memories and the social, cultural and political spheres. The ongoing debates about the collective memory of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in Germany and specifically the highly controversial role of the State Security Service (Stasi) in these memory contests, form the prism through which she addresses these issues; an apt choice since eyewitness testimony and individual experience continue to play an important role in shaping these debates (p. 23). She traces the mediations and re-mediations of 'witnessing texts' (a term she borrows from Paul Frosch) which are products of the act of witnessing in written or otherwise recorded form. Focusing on autobiographies, memorial museums (in particular former Stasi prisons), and documentary film Jones compares how these different media incorporate, remediate, and authenticate testimonies in different ways. Thus, her book presents a counterpoint to studies of the 'mythification' of the GDR and the Stasi that have focused largely on fictional representations such as Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's „The Lives of Others“ or Thomas Brussig's „Sonnenallee“.

The introduction gives a concise but

nonetheless comprehensive overview of the large body of scholarship, in English and in German, on the GDR, its memory, and the main debates since 1989. These revolve on the one hand around the question of how to characterize the GDR as a state (totalitarian or participatory¹), and on the other hand around divergent memories of life in the GDR: memories of victimhood and repression versus more nostalgic attitudes and, between these two poles, a more nuanced, multiperspectival view on different subject positions vis-à-vis the GDR past that includes memories of victimhood and everyday memories of accommodation.² What Jones sets out to find is examples of this multiperspectival representation of the GDR that integrate divergent and conflicting memories in a heterogeneous account of the past without giving preference to one of them over the others. Eyewitness testimony has played an important role in these debates, and several major studies on this issue have appeared in recent years.³ By drawing on and synthesizing these studies, Jones makes their findings available to an English-speaking readership. Surprisingly, questions and theories of (mass)mediation and remediation have played a relatively minor role in previous studies in scholarship on testimony. In this regard, Jones' study presents a significant contribution to the field.

The excellent first chapter provides the theoretical framework: Jones not only synthesizes the main philosophical and theoretical approaches to the figure of the witness and the act of witnessing, she also makes key concepts from communication and reception research productive for memory studies. Jones provides a lucid and compelling account of the transition from social to media frameworks of memory. To this end, she introduces

¹ E.g. Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR*, London 2002; or Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*, London 2005.

² Martin Sabrow, *Die DDR erinnern*, in: Martin Sabrow (ed.), *Erinnerungsorte der DDR*, Munich 2009, pp. 11–27.

³ E.g. Martin Sabrow / Norbert Frei (eds.), *Die Geburt des Zeitzeugen nach 1945*, Göttingen 2012; Christian Ernst (ed.), *Geschichte im Dialog? 'DDR-Zeitzeugen' in Geschichtskultur und Bildungspraxis*, Schwalbach 2014.

two terms to describe the mechanisms by which media and mediators construct authenticity for eyewitness accounts: „mediated remembering communities“ and „complementary authenticities“ (p. 37). Jones endeavors to consider witnessing „from the wrong end“ (p. 189), meaning at the point of mediation and reception, rather than the point of origin. She is thus particularly concerned with how narratives of authenticity and authority are constructed in cultural artefacts through editing, montage, and framing. „Diachronically produced texts on the same theme are brought together by an editor, curator or director [...] into a single cultural product“ in which „the narratives of the individuals appear to overlap and support one another“ (p. 38), thus producing a mediated remembering community. This mutual reinforcement of remediated witnesses' testimony produces what Jones calls „complementary authenticities,“ which in turn generate an affective response in the reader, viewer or visitor which can potentially lead to political action. Conversely, the effect may be one of passivity and closure, which leaves no room for critical reflection or action. In the case studies that make up the remaining chapters, Jones interrogates these dynamics specifically with a view to the openness, heterogeneity, and political potential of the respective cultural artefacts.

The analysis and case-study part of the book is divided into three sections, one dedicated to each memorial medium: two chapters focus on literary autobiographies by Stasi informants (Chapter 2) and victims of state repression (Chapter 3). At times, one might have wanted Jones to analyze the texts in greater detail, rather than focusing exclusively on the testimony and remediation aspects, even though these are of course her primary concern. Two chapters are dedicated to a cataloging and an analysis of memorial museums at former sites of Stasi repression. These „multi-authored texts“ (p. 107) testify through the auratic quality of their material presence, buildings, and original objects (Chapter 4) and through the eyewitness testimony presented there in documentary exhibitions or by the tour-guides (Chapter 5). The final and shortest section consists of one

chapter devoted to an analysis of a number of documentary films which stage testimony by victims and perpetrators of Stasi repression (Chapter 6). Throughout her careful study, Jones finds relatively few positive and productive examples of open and non-homogenizing memory texts. Only Heike Bachelier's film „Feindberührung“ and Heike Otto's memoir „Beim Leben meiner Enkel“ are singled out as successful in this regard. The central section on the memorial sites is notably devoid of such positive examples, which also contributes to a certain repetitiveness in the analysis of these sites, none of which is able or willing to present a nuanced, inclusive, and polyvalent narrative of the past. This is perhaps not altogether surprising as Jones herself acknowledges, given the exclusive focus on former Stasi prisons which of course embody precisely the repressive authoritarian aspect of the GDR. Nevertheless, the author rightly criticizes these sites for presenting this narrative of repression and suffering as the true and only face of the GDR, and furthermore asks whether „museum audiences [cannot] be trusted to construct their own understanding of the GDR based on known historical facts, combined with negotiation of divergent perspectives?“ (p. 160). As she observes, „[a] museum experience that permits individual meaning-making“ (ibid.) would involve visitors in the active process of constructing a memory of the past in the present.

All three sections find a balance between production and reception analysis. Particularly the latter remains underexamined within cultural memory studies, in part because it is difficult to gain access to reliable or representative information on reception. Jones is nonetheless able to draw productive conclusions from the materials she does have available – written reviews in the case of the autobiographies and documentary films, and guestbook entries and visitor survey data in the case of the memorials. This aspect, coupled with the meticulous attention to a large number of sites and texts as well as her comprehensive synthesis of existing scholarship within memory studies which she brings to bear on her corpus make this an important and necessary contribution to the study of tes-

timony and its (mass) mediation and remediation in memory culture.

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