

IN THIS ISSUE

The present issue took a bit longer to appear than it was initially planned. Now we are very happy to introduce the print and online edition of the ›Studies in Contemporary History‹ in their new layouts! We have improved the presentation of our contents in various ways (including some details that may only become apparent upon closer scrutiny). Many familiar and established features have been retained, but everything is now supported by a new technical basis. After ten years – an anniversary we celebrated in May 2014 with many of our contributors¹ – the time was ripe to rework the appearance of the ›Studies in Contemporary History‹. Our aim is to account for changing habits in the use of media inside and outside the academic community and to accommodate new technical and editorial demands ›behind the scenes‹. At the same time, we are guided by the desire to create not only a *good*, but also an *attractive* journal. We are very much indebted to the agencies ›ultramarinrot‹ (for the print edition) and ›reinblau‹ (for the online edition). Throughout our productive cooperation, their advice and guidance was invaluable. As is always the case with a ›system change‹ such as this, there are some minor difficulties that have to be resolved down the road. Again, we ask for your patience and also for suggestions that might help improve aspects we have overlooked. Any comments on the new design that you wish to offer are very welcome.

Currently there is one topic that dominates historical research and culture. In the one hundred year anniversary of its outbreak, World War I, its causes and its aftermath are as present in public and academic discourse as seldom before. One might have assumed that, at least for contemporary history, this set of events has lost its topicality with the deaths of the last remaining World War I veterans (the presumably last participants died in 2011/12). But the irresistible pull of the centenary, questions regarding today's world order (e.g. the conflict in Ukraine), new research perspectives on the global dimensions of the ›Great War‹ and, last but not least, the new documentation possibilities the internet offers² have created such broad public interest in World War I that contemporary historians cannot ignore it.

Already in November 2013, there was much talk of the coming ›superlative commemoration year‹, the preparation of which German politicians had purportedly ›idled away‹.³ Nevertheless, contemporary history as an academic discipline should certainly not simply jump on the bandwagon. Particularly the tendency towards a homogenising and on the surface educationally motivated commemoration of the years 1914, 1939 and 1989 should be critically questioned.⁴ ›An unstoppable machinery has

1 Cf. <<http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Inhalt-Sonderausgabe>>.

2 See especially <<http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu>> and <<http://www.1914-1918-online.net>>.

3 Klaus Wiegrefe, Gauck muss das Super-Gedenkjahr retten, in: Spiegel online, 9 November 2013, URL: <<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/gauck-bundespraesident-rettet-super-gedenkjahr-a-932405.html>>.

4 Moritz Schuller, Rückkehr der Erinnerung, in: *Tagesspiegel*, 16 January 2014, p. 6.

been set in motion», Jost Dülffer recently wrote, and he raises a question that stands to reason: »What is the purpose of it all?«⁵ In the search for answers, one might reflect on the logic of these sorts of anniversaries and on the behaviour of historians facing them.⁶ Moreover, it is worthwhile, for example, to question the widespread metanarrative interpreting World War I as the »(great) seminal catastrophe«.⁷

Besides addressing various other topics, we decided to take a double perspective on the history and presence of World War I in this »open« issue. *Werner Suppanz* has compiled a »Visual Essay« contrasting the various ways in which different countries have dealt with this war at different times. The essay deliberately places the focus on images, including their ambivalence and the irritation they can induce. This by no means suggests that images »speak for themselves«; rather, they require contextualisation and historicisation. The new section »Visual Essay« is an experiment that we will occasionally feature in future issues. Here too, we welcome any ideas and suggestions our readers might like to contribute. A second perspective on the secular connotation of World War I is offered in the Roundtable Conversation, for which we have been able to engage renowned historians of different ages and from different countries: *Santanu Das*, *Gerhard Hirschfeld*, *Heather Jones*, *Jennifer Keene*, *Boris Kolonitskii* and *Jay Winter*. Lively international exchange in the research on the two world wars has become common practice today. We easily forget that, for long stretches of time, this was not so.

The Editors
(translation: Eva Schissler)

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- 5 Jost Dülffer, Die geplante Erinnerung. Der Historikerboom um den Ersten Weltkrieg, in: *Osteuropa* 64 (2014) issue 2-4, pp. 351-367, here p. 351.
 - 6 Cf. the forum: Anniversaries, in: *German History* 32 (2014), pp. 79-100, or Marko Demantowsky, Vom Jubiläum zur Jubiläumitis, in: *Public History Weekly*, 27 March 2014, URL: <<http://public-history-weekly.oldenbourg-verlag.de/2-2014-11/vom-jubilaem-zur-jubilaemitis/>>.
 - 7 Oliver Jahraus/Christian Kirchmeier, Der Erste Weltkrieg als »Katastrophe«. Herkunft, Bedeutungen und Funktionen einer problematischen Metapher, in: *Literaturkritik* Nr. 2/2014, URL: <http://www.literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez_id=18875>.