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**Social Content of the International Sphere:
Symbols and Meaning in Franco-German Relations**

by

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“The Franco-German friendship is rich in memories and gestures that are at once important and symbolic, and that characterize the exceptional nature of the relationship between our two countries,” reflects former French economics minister and European Commission President Jacques Delors.¹ Such symbolic acts and joint memories are not primarily about cooperation in specific instances. Rather, more generally, they denote what it means to act together. They lend significance to a relationship; they signify what is “at stake,” or what it is “all about.” They are about a deeper and more general social purpose underlying specific instances of cooperation.² They are about the value and intrinsic importance that social relations incorporate. Symbols contribute to the institutionalization of social meaning and social purpose in dealing with one another. In this paper I clarify the concept of “predominantly symbolic acts and practices among states,” systematically explore such acts for the bilateral Franco-German relationship between the late 1950s and the mid-1990s, and scrutinize the specific meaning and effects that these practices have helped to generate and perpetuate.

Predominantly symbolic acts are gestures, rituals, and ceremonies that do not directly aim at the solving of problems, the formulating of interests and positions, or the making of policies. Typically, such acts make reference to a larger historical and cultural context which reaches beyond the time horizon of immediate daily politics. Principally symbolic acts are a distinguishable class of practices.

Symbolic practices generate and perpetuate meaning and social purpose in the international sphere. They construct normality and normal expectations, shape reference points for the success or failure of specific policies, and engender rudiments of collective identity at the international level. Thus, they affect what states want and do, and foster international stability and order. In the Franco-German example, symbolic acts help to institutionalize Franco-German relations as a value and, often, as an end in themselves.

The dominant Franco-German post-War meaning originates in a string of symbolic acts between 1958 and 1963. During this period, in a series of often stirring gestures and speeches, Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer generated and instituted new and transformed meaning and social purpose for an incipient era of Franco-German proximity.

A host of chiefly symbolic acts has reproduced, perpetuated, and corroborated the meaning and purpose of the Franco-German relationship that these two men instituted. Some of these practices are more or less regularized and recurrent. Their dates are marked on the calendar, such as the commemorations and celebrations of the signing of the Elysée Treaty, and the custom of first visits or first receptions of new top personnel after changes in key public positions. Others, including Kohl and Mitterrand’s memorable holding hands in Verdun in 1984, among many more, are as single events meaningful integral threads of an overall fabric. Singular, they are part of a whole.

The dominant Franco-German purpose of the past four decades has its characteristic normative justifications or explanations in the two countries’ political discourses. For the most part, these appeals are historical. They refer to the necessity to overcome a long history of anguish and suffering; allude to cultural affinity; or hint at the Franco-German role in providing stability or consolidation in European affairs.

The symbols of the Franco-German post-War relationship give answers to questions such as: What is the meaning of references to France and Germany as “tandem,” “couple,” or “pair”? What is the social purpose institutionalized by this “special relationship”? Symbols help us understand why these relations matter. They clarify why this relationship is sometimes an end in itself, and why it is often a reason for and an underlying influence on the goals and actions of France and Germany. Without comprehending the status of symbols, their substance, and their effects, it is not possible to capture sufficiently what makes relations meaningful and gives them purpose.

The issue of the presence and potential relevance of the social content (or non-content) of the international sphere is a central point of contention between social constructivism – or “thick” institutionalism in its various formulations – and materialist and rationalist perspectives on international affairs. Many now consider the cleavage

¹ Delors 1998c, 3. All translations from French and German into English in this article are my own.

² As Delors elaborates: “... so many moments when France and Germany have not simply cooperated with each other, but where the fact of having acted together has profoundly changed the perception of the other.” Ibid.

between these theoretical macro-perspectives on things social among the most fundamental and intellectually stimulating in the field of international relations.³ In contrast to materialist approaches, where structures are primarily or exclusively viewed as material, constructivists think of structures in social terms: interaction processes, understandings, knowledge, “relationships.” As opposed to rationalism’s individualist ontology, constructivists operate with a holistic and relational ontology of intersubjective meanings and shared practices, irreducible to the properties, preferences, or choices of the atomized actors in the system. For those concerned with identifying and empirically substantiating social content in the international sphere, these questions are crucial: Where does certain institutionalized meaning come from? When, why, and how did it become dominant and persistent? How is it re-created, re-produced, perpetuated?

Differing with rationalism and materialism on ontological, empirical, and explanatory grounds, much constructivist work focuses on “the social fabric of world politics.”⁴ Practices produce intersubjective meanings that shape the features of the international community and features of “the many communities of identity found therein.”⁵ However, even though the social meaning that such activity contributes is irreducible to the effects of other international practices, constructivist scholars have not yet conceptually addressed chiefly symbolic practices and their effects on the international institutionalization of meaning and purpose.⁶

In theorizing and empirically analyzing international social structures, their practices, and their effects, scholars working in different constructivist veins have proceeded in a variety of ways. Alexander Wendt, for example, broadly distinguishes among three systemic macro-cultures, Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian. Distinct logics of anarchy, they are defined by variations in basic relationship patterns among states as enemies, rivals, or friends respectively.⁷ Sociological institutionalists have explored the content and effects of a set of system-wide institutions enmeshed in an expanding and deepening Western world culture. Such global social structures constitute actors, shape actors’ properties, and define legitimate goals for them to pursue. For example, they define the meaning of modern statehood, with both organizational and behavioral implications in international relations.⁸ And adherents of the English school of international relations have investigated formal and informal rules, procedures, and principles constituting and regulating modern international relations. Originating in early modern Europe, these historical creations have become defining institutions of the global society of states.⁹

However, many patterns of interaction and meaning in the international system are historically and spatially more differentiated than Wendt’s tripartite vision is able, or even aspires, to grasp. Much institutionalized systemic meaning and purpose is also regionally and even bilaterally considerably more variable than the sociological institutionalists’ focus on the world polity’s dominant cultural constructions allows for. The same applies to the scope of the set of originally European, then global institutions and organizing principles that the English school has explored.

Building upon existing constructivist scholarship, this paper draws attention to symbolic acts and practices. Doing so implies a taxonomic differentiation that broadens and is a useful conceptual addition to systemic constructivist thought. The concept of symbolic practices enables us to capture consequential institutionalized meaning and purpose – social content of the international sphere – which a conventional analytic apparatus, constructivist or rationalist, is unable to reveal.¹⁰

³ They include Fearon and Wendt 2002; Katzenstein 1996; Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1998; Keohane 1989; Ruggie 1998b; Wendt 1999, chapter 1.

⁴ Checkel 1998, 324, see also 327. For basic works outlining the constructivist-institutionalist perspective on social phenomena, see Jepperson 1991; Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein 1996; March and Olsen 1984; March and Olsen 1989; Ruggie 1998a; Wendt 1999. For this perspective’s theoretical roots and philosophical underpinnings, see Berger and Luckmann 1966; Ruggie 1998b; Searle 1995.

⁵ Hopf 1998, 179.

⁶ Symbolically generated Franco-German meaning, for example, is irreducible to regularized intergovernmental interaction and international relations’ parapublic underpinnings, which I conceptually differentiate and empirically substantiate in Krotz 2002c and Krotz 2002d.

⁷ Wendt 1999, chapter 6.

⁸ See, for example, Meyer et al. 1997; Scott and Meyer 1994; Thomas et al. 1987. For an overview, see Finnemore 1996.

⁹ See, most notably, Bull 1977; Bull and Watson 1984; Reus-Smit 1999.

¹⁰ The abundant European literature on Franco-German affairs, which has described the empirical reality of

With respect to the particular empirical domain and historical period that this paper examines, a conceptual focus on symbols makes it possible to construct a narrative that brings together a host of symbolic Franco-German practices between the late 1950s and the end of the century. As isolated events all of these episodes and pieces are well documented. However, only the conceptual tool that this article develops provides the means to assemble these manifold incidents and occurrences into a coherent whole, to comprehend their connectedness, and to appreciate the social meaning with its characteristic effects that these symbolic acts generate and perpetuate in their entirety.

In sum, in this paper I pursue three goals. First, I distinguish the concept of “predominantly symbolic acts and practices among states” and define symbolic acts as a distinct category of international practice. I provide the conceptual framework to capture important international social content as well as to appreciate the effects of such meaning and social purpose. Second, with this conceptual addition, I systematically explore the empirical manifestation of such acts, and the meaning and purpose they help to institutionalize, for the bilateral relationship between France and Germany between the late 1950s and mid-1990s. I specify their substance and review their meaning. Third, I propose to view symbolic practices and their effects as elements of international social structure of interaction and meaning, and, as such, to consider them and the meaning they embody as ontological building blocks of international life. Doing so, in this paper I connect symbols to a social-structural style of international analysis. Both conceptually and empirically, this article attempts to fill a gap in the literature. It is as much about the “special” Franco-German relationship as it is about important ontological issues in international relations theory.

I. Symbolic Acts as a Category

Symbolic acts are a distinct category of international political practice. Their effects are not reducible to other types of international activity. They help to shape the stage on which much of daily politics unfolds.

What They Are

Predominantly symbolic acts and practices among states are international interactions by public officials, representing their states, that do not directly aim at solving political problems or serving immediate policy-making. Chiefly symbolic practices further differ from other international activity, such as regularized intergovernmental relations or crisis diplomacy, in that they follow their own schedule. This schedule is often disorderly and incongruent with the calendar of regular intergovernmental working relations. Together symbolic practices form a distinguishable class of phenomena. They have their own reality and tradition.

Symbolic acts are not necessarily restricted to sets of relations with only two or a few parties involved. However, as political scientist Wilfried von Bredow maintains, they may be of particular relevance in bilateral affairs. For example, the “staging of bilateral relations, such as official state visits, very often transcends the dimension of sober working relations of

Franco-German relations in detail, at times focuses on the social meaning and purpose institutionalized by symbolic practices. Conversely, however, this body of literature, while it suggests similar arguments to those which I put forth in this paper, neglects its findings’ conceptual and theoretical implications.

interstate politics.”¹¹ “The present behavior of state actors is determined to a high degree by perception patterns and experiences of the past. The ‘foreign policy memory’ is fed in the first place by – more or less positively or negatively assessed – bilateral experiences.”¹²

The symbolic practices, meaning, and social purpose that this paper empirically details indeed refer specifically to *Franco-German* relations, rather than Franco-German *relations*.¹³ This does not mean, however, that this paper makes the case for “special” or “unique” relations between the two – irrespective of the standard practice in France and Germany. Symbols endow relations with a consequential qualitative dimension. This is not specific to the Franco-German relationship.

What They Do

Predominantly symbolic practices generate, reproduce and perpetuate, and corroborate or extend social meaning and purpose in the international sphere. They construct international social content. They lend significance, for example, to relations among specific states. They frequently make reference to a larger historical and cultural context that reaches beyond the time horizon of immediate daily politics. They take on some historical raw material that they interpret in a certain way (rather than other possible ways) through their very exercise. Thus they connect the present dealings of a relationship with the past and provide direction for the future.¹⁴ By infusing meaning and social purpose into relations, symbols affect international relations in three important ways.

First, symbolic practices generate standards of normality and deviance. Such standards include normal expectations and “normal demands” from certain relations – by those directly involved as much as by those surrounding the institutionalized relationship. Elements of normality encompass the framing of what can and cannot legitimately be wanted and done, and what can and cannot reasonably be expected and achieved. They also include the definition of normality of conduct in major and minor, general and

¹¹ von Bredow 1996, 110.

¹² *Ibid.*, 109.

¹³ The difference in emphasis is adapted from Ruggie 1993, see especially 8.

¹⁴ Predominantly symbolic practices, and the institutional reality of meaning and purpose of relations among specific states more generally, are often embedded in a broader historical and cultural context to which they refer and in which they take place. In the Franco-German case, this historical-cultural context comprises its own terminology, common “places of memory,” and emblematic personnel. I empirically and theoretically explore this cultural-historical context that embeds relations among states for the Franco-German experience in Krotz 2002a.

specific matters among those involved in a relationship. They elucidate: What is normal behavior? What surprises and irritates? And they help to define “normal,” acceptable, and bearable levels of harmony, tension, and conflict in relationships.

Sets of relations, whether bi-, mini- or multilateral, vary widely regarding normality of conduct or normal levels of harmony and conflict. They also differ widely in what satisfies normal expectations. In the Franco-German experience of the past four decades, one side may, for example, accuse the other of acting against the spirit of the relationship – a violation of self-constructed normality standards with its pre- and proscriptions – to which the many symbolic practices have substantially contributed.

Second, the meaning institutionalized by symbolic practices shapes reference points for evaluating the success of policies or sets of policies in given time periods. It is the social context of legitimate purpose, which symbols co-constitute, that establishes this yardstick. Such reference points vary across time and space.

Because “Franco-German friendship” has been a widely shared value for some four decades in both countries, the achievement of communal projects or joint initiatives could be listed as political successes. Similarly, those politically responsible have taken credit for avoiding Franco-German disagreements or tensions, especially in times when this appears difficult. Paradigmatically, former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt still proudly pronounces – almost two decades after he left office – that while he was chancellor and Giscard d’Estaing the French president, “one will find no differences in views between the two of us in the archives for the seven common years, but a number of successful joint initiatives.”¹⁵ The motivation for this and innumerable similar statements from dissimilar personalities in a wide range of positions from both sides of the Rhine would make little sense apart from a social context of shared meaning that licenses such fixtures of normative reference.

Third, symbolic practices engender rudiments of collective identities on the international level, however embryonic or tenuous, and help to define “otherness.” They frame who belongs to whom, for what reason, and for what purpose. Symbols are part of a social fabric that provides reasons for actors to hang together and act together. Conversely, symbols also clarify who does not belong together, who are “the others,” opponents or

¹⁵ Schmidt 1999.

enemies.

In the recent Franco-German experience such effects find expression when ex-Chancellor Schmidt argues with reference to the according social meaning that “it is true for today as it is for entering the next millennium: Our place is on France’s side.”¹⁶ Such meaning makes France and Germany belong together and gives the two states reasons to do things together. It also helps to explain why German social democratic icon Herbert Wehner refers to collective belonging in his now classic verdict on Franco-German relations: “Without France everything is nothing.”¹⁷

The effects of symbolic acts along all of these dimensions may vary widely. However, via these three causal pathways, symbolic practices breed social meaning and purpose that are consequential and effective in their own way: they affect what states want and do, and foster international stability and order.

As an integral part of an international social structure, symbolically generated meaning helps to frame state interests which shape policy. Symbolic practices engender meaning and social purpose which, in specific policy areas and time periods, affect what states want and do; i.e. what governments define as national interest and their policy conduct resulting therefrom. Meaning and purpose legitimize and make intuitive certain wants and deeds, and delegitimize and make less plausible others.

Some of the best informed long-standing observers of Franco-German affairs have noted for some time the effects of the Franco-German relationship, a specific pattern of interaction and meaning, as a motivating factor on what the two states’ governments define as the respective French and German interests. For example, “The imperative of Franco-German cooperation,” observes newspaper editor Günther Nonnenmacher, “is in both countries firmly and above all political parties firmly anchored as a foreign policy ‘reason of state.’”¹⁸ Grasping their deeper purpose, he reflects that they “have defused innumerable crises of the everyday business of politics, as the principle of cooperation has been put up on so high a pedestal so that it could after all no longer be touched by current quarrels.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Schmidt 1996.

¹⁷ Quoted, for example, in Schmidt 1999.

¹⁸ Nonnenmacher 1997. “Franco-German cooperation is being judged so highly in its significance,” Nonnenmacher notes elsewhere, “that both sides care about not letting any dark spots fall on it.” Nonnenmacher 1993.

¹⁹ Nonnenmacher 1998.

Political scientist Gunther Hellmann records that the maxim of searching for “consensus and moving together (*Zusammenrücken*) between French and Germans” has remained intact after the Cold War; he considers it a “central pattern of thought that shapes behavior (*zentrale handlungsleitende Denkmuster*) ... [and] that coins the vast majority of the foreign policy establishment of the Federal Republic, beyond the borders of party affiliation.”²⁰ Symbols preserve and perpetuate the desirability and legitimacy of Franco-German cooperation and friendship well beyond immediate objectives. Inducing interests and policies, they make specific instances of cooperation intuitive and plausible.

Finally, the meanings that symbols produce by constructing normality, anchoring failure and success, and generating collective identity in specific sets of relations, lend stability to international affairs. Whatever symbolic practices’ particular manifestations, they “produce predictability and so, order.”²¹ Such stability and order is not defined as harmony or the absence of conflict or even violence, but as the absence of randomness, excessive fluctuation, and chaos. Institutionalized meaning and social purpose provide a stage on which much of daily politics unfolds. Such meaning structures, conditions, and channels the flow of everyday politics.

II. Franco-German Meaning and Purpose

Franco-German relations are value-charged. Often they are more than mere instruments to specific ends. “I want to remind with solemnity,” Delors puts it plainly, “that Franco-German relations constitute their own value, irreplaceable for each of our two peoples.”²² It is “a friendship for its own sake,” he submits and reminds of the often “emotional character of the relation that goes beyond reason and necessity.”²³ Hubert Védrine, key foreign policy advisor to François Mitterrand, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, comprehends “this bilateral relationship ... [as] already an objective in itself.”²⁴ Karl Lamers, CDU foreign policy spokesman and advisor to Chancellor Kohl, elaborates: “This value is anchored in the will of the two peoples to establish between them a bond that goes beyond a thousand and five hundred years of history, made of periods of coexistence as of confrontations, and their

²⁰ Hellmann 1995, 19.

²¹ Hopf 1998, 178.

²² Delors 1998c, 2.

²³ Delors 1998a, 205-206.

²⁴ Védrine 1997, 67.

common future.”²⁵ What is this value in itself, end of its own, friendship for its own sake? Why is this relationship itself frequently taken as something valuable, “good”? What is the meaning that Franco-German relations embody? What does the meaning *mean*? What is the deeper social purpose of these relations that explains why they matter? France and Germany’s is a close relationship between dissimilar collective personalities. Their relations’ underlying social purpose has at least three specific normative anchors.

France and Germany

Their generally cooperative relationship since the 1960s notwithstanding, France and Germany have remained – in many respects – deeply dissimilar social compacts. The way French and German elites have thought about their countries and the roles of their respective states in the international arena have continued to diverge profoundly. As a result, French and Germans have frequently upheld fiercely disparate foreign policies. There are strong forces that often push France and Germany apart in what they want and do.²⁶

Many of those involved in Franco-German affairs sense that there is nothing “natural” about tight Franco-German relations. Because they apprehend that there are consequential forces that frequently induce diverging French and German interests, positions, and reflexes, they know that mastering Franco-German relations remains an ongoing process. As Védérine perceptively notices: “One always must reintroduce energy and, if I further may say so, pass the baton from one generation to the next.”²⁷ President Mitterrand similarly expresses this understanding: When interviewed a few days before the 25th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty he was asked, “What do you see as the necessary priorities for the 25 years ahead?” He responded archetypically: “going ahead, persevering.”²⁸ This attitude finds expression in various formulations. They state that in order not to fall back into rivalry or yet worse historical evils, that which the two countries have together achieved over the past half-century requires permanent defense by “moving ahead” with joint activity. Franco-German affairs remain an ongoing task to be mastered: French and Germans have done much, but they need to do more.²⁹

²⁵ Lamers 1998b, 183.

²⁶ On French and German domestic collective constructions and the effects of such constructions on foreign policy, see Krotz 2002b.

²⁷ Védérine 1997, 67.

²⁸ Mitterrand 1988.

²⁹ Compare Lamers 1998a. I quote these instances as representative of many others that could be cited. An-

Properly, one may term this shared understanding the “moving ahead for a task to be mastered” or the “unfinished business” aspect of these relations. It implies the constructed imperative “to continue to keep going (*Weitermachen, Weitergeben*)”³⁰ – by infusing new energy and substance into the relationship: “stagnation is stepping backwards.”³¹

What the Meaning Means and Why It Matters

Although largely outside the tides of domestic political dispute, there are at least three major normative anchors that justify the Franco-German relationship’s intrinsic value and explain why it matters. Sometimes these particular justifications, explanations, defenses come in combinations: the necessity to overcome a bloody history of war and suffering; the cultural affinity between France and Germany; and the view of France and Germany as the cornerstones of stability of European international affairs or European integration. These are very strong justifications. Perhaps with minor exceptions regarding the second one, there has been no real opposition to them in post-war Europe.

Overcoming a History of Anguish and Suffering (“A Centuries-Old Rivalry”). The most important and frequently-cited explanation of the intrinsic value of good and fruitful Franco-German relations is grounded in the shared social purpose of the need to “overcome history” of war, conflict, and cruelty – to set aside that “which has separated us for centuries,” as Adenauer puts it in his memoirs.³² “The three devastating wars which France and Germany have fought within less than eighty years must be the end point of a history of anguish and suffering,” is a typical reference to this element of meaning. Veteran reconciler Joseph Rovon places Franco-German relations in a wider historical context: “It took twenty-three Franco-German wars since the époque of Charles V and François I to finally create Europe. Nineteen of these wars took place on German territory, four on French territory.”³³

As the Rovon quote illustrates, this justification frequently refers to the long historical period beginning with the split of the empire in 843. The rivalry between François

other typical way to put the matter: “The Elysée Treaty remains a task to be fulfilled.” See, for example, Delors and Lamers 1998; Lamers 1998b, 184. Along the same lines, President Chirac writes about the need to “give new soul to our relationship” and argues “for a renewal of Franco-German relations” after the German federal elections of September 1998 – Chirac’s way to put the “moving ahead” matter. Chirac 1998.

³⁰ Hellmann 1995, 22. Hellmann critically paraphrases this element of meaning “flight ahead.” Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Adenauer 1967, 408.

I and Karl V is now often seen as the beginning of a long era of fraternal rivalry and war. An end to this conflict has long been overdue, this first explanation stresses. It also implies that the post-1945 achievements demand continuous effort and commitment, defense and consolidation.

However, it is the First World War – still present, particularly in the French, but also in the Franco-German collective memory – which remains a main crystallization point. This war, with its system of trenches from Switzerland to the North Sea, is the most Franco-German of all wars in which French and Germans, their ancestors – or at least participants later claimed as ancestors – have fought and killed on opposing sides. Although it is now commonly considered the first mechanized mass war in history, more French and Germans killed each other with direct enemy contact than in any other war – with gunshots on sight, hand grenade fighting of few meters distance, bayonet or saber stabbing, or, as we know from the works of Ernst Jünger, beating each other to death with their bare hands or any available object.³⁴ The First World War remains the “Great War,” *la Grande Guerre*.

Residents of those parts of France and Germany that belong to that former Lotharingian-Frankish middle strip, where “the dream of the lost Carolingian unity has never fully become extinct,”³⁵ remember this war more strongly than in Germany’s Eastern and France’s southwestern areas. Yet, every little French and German town has its war memorial listing “those who fell.” These memorials typically begin with names indicating deaths from 1914 to 1918. There are usually more names connected with dates beginning in 1939. However, the memorials start with those of late 1914; they frequently evoke the impression that 1939 and the following years were only the bloody continuation of a memorial, which is, in the first place, about the First War.

This most relevant explanation of the intrinsic value of the friendship for its own sake is expressed in various ways. Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer, however, coined the classic expression on the matter, which remains a standard Franco-German quote. In their Common Declaration at the beginning of the Franco-German Treaty in 1963, the two statesmen speak about terminating “a centuries-old rivalry.”³⁶ Many have employed the

³³ Quoted in Delattre 1997.

³⁴ Jünger 1978 (1921); Jünger 1980 (1922).

³⁵ Scholl-Latour 1988, 127.

³⁶ For the quotes and the entire declaration, see *Dokumente, Documents, and Deutsch-Französisches Institut Ludwigsburg* 1993, 136-137. See also Kageneck 1994.

formulation since.³⁷ Overcoming a centuries-old rivalry, a history of anguish and suffering, of beating each other to death, is a shared social purpose. It is an important element contributing to the institutionalized Franco-German meaning.

The Occident's Two Wings. A second justification of the Franco-German bond as valuable in itself relates to French and German cultural heritage. This explanation rests on the idea that France and Germany belong together or have much to give to each other, as cultures, as ways of life, in their shared but also different historical experiences; that separating them is artificial; or that together they form the kernel of Western culture or civilization (or a combination of these elements). “France and Germany,” Victor Hugo formulated already in 1841, “are essentially Europe. Germany is its heart; France is its head. ... Germany feels, France thinks.”³⁸ Although such ideas have been around for some time, during the past four decades this explanation has become a standard platform that has been directly related to the public relations between France and Germany.³⁹ This explanation refers to a Western cultural heritage, which “they communally own and have to jointly preserve.”⁴⁰

Although evoked less frequently than the first, this justification is strong particularly because it is little contested across the spectrum of political orientations and because it refers to a diverse range of cultural domains. French and Germans of the right, center, and left frequently make similar cases for this explanation of Franco-German togetherness: from the German zealots of existentialism in the 1950s and 1960s; to French perceptions of the variants of the Frankfurt School in all its adaptations; to postmodern tempests with their origins under French skies; to the Ernst Jünger admirers in France, his German followers and their exchanges across the Rhine.

This explanation again comes in diverse variations. Novelist Marcel Jouhandeau reports one stark manifestation. In his *Journal Sous l'Occupation* he recounts a dinner he

³⁷ President Mitterrand and Chancellor Kohl, for example, alluded to it during the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 January 1988, 1-2.

³⁸ Quoted in Große 1996, 327.

³⁹ The Hugo passage, as well as other formulations expressing what I subsume in this section, may leave some readers with an aftertaste of French, German, Franco-German (cultural or intellectual) self-centeredness and solipsism. Such egocentrism and solipsism, however, are often very tenacious. They, too, are elements of social meaning.

⁴⁰ Herre 1983, 10. De Gaulle and Adenauer alluded to this normative anchor in their Common Declaration to the Elysée Treaty, referring to a “strong solidarity that unites the French and the German people ... and connects them in their cultural development.” Printed in *Dokumente, Documents, and Deutsch-Französisches Institut Ludwigsburg* 1993, 136-137.

attended with Jean Giraudoux and Jünger during the German occupation of Paris: “Giraudoux does not hide that for him the pivots of civilization are France and Germany. If they are saved together, everything is saved; but we must seriously fear for the future should humanity fall under American or Russian domination.”⁴¹ Literature Nobel laureate Romain Rolland formulates it differently: “We are the two wings of the occident; if one breaks, the flight of the other will cease.”⁴²

Two for Europe. The third main explanation of Franco-German relations I term “two for Europe.” The conventional wisdom is almost a cliché: within the framework of the EC/EU, “nothing goes without, nothing against Germany *and* France”—that while “France and Germany finding a common position might not be a sufficient condition ‘for Europe,’ it is a necessary one.” The explanation is clear: relations between France and Germany are valuable, as there can be no progress in either deepening, widening, or even consolidating the achievements of European integration – however loosely defined – without basic agreements on fundamental positions between the two big continentals: “the Franco-German entente as the cradle of European integration.”⁴³ In this third justification another end, “Europe,” helps to explain the intrinsic value of the Franco-German bond.

One may counter that if Franco-German relations are an inherent good because they serve “Europe,” however loosely defined, they are a means, not an end on their own. This would be a correct interdiction, if between the defined necessity “good Franco-German relationship” and “Europe” were a tight coupling on a case-by-case basis. But nothing could be further from the actual state of things. The goal of a “good Franco-German relationship” is in daily Franco-German dealings so loosely coupled or altogether decoupled from specific identifiable European projects, that this “explanation” in fact contributes to constructing Franco-German relations as an independent value in itself.

⁴¹ Jouhandeau 1980, 165. Contemporary variations on the theme often do sound similar to Giraudoux’s. For example, when during the GATT Uruguay Round trade agreements on cultural goods including movies and pop music were in the process of being negotiated, there were frequent references to the “flat and aggressive Hollywood barbarism” – in France perhaps more so than in Germany (“culture is not a trading good as any other”).

⁴² Quoted in Herre 1983, 206.

⁴³ Le Gloannec 1991, 121-124.

III. *Where It Comes From and How It Came About*

In a string of frequently moving gestures, rituals, ceremonies, and speeches between their publicly private first meeting in September 1958 and their fraternal kiss after signing the Franco-German Treaty in 1963, Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer initially generated and instituted new and radically different Franco-German meaning and purpose. Together, these grand meaning-generating gestures contributed to a momentous transformation of the meaning inherent in the relationship between France and Germany. They constitute the overtures of an incipient era with France and Germany considered a “tandem,” “couple,” and “pair.”

After “centuries of rivalry,” some eighty years of “hereditary enmity” between 1870 and 1945, and roughly fifteen years of “reconciliation” (*réconciliation*, *Aussöhnung*) following the end of World War II, the symbolic acts of 1958-1963 contributed to the social construction of an entirely new Franco-German reality. During these years “the two old occidentals”⁴⁴ laid the groundwork for a transmuted Franco-German structure of value, meaning, and purpose.⁴⁵ “Through us,” de Gaulle writes about his meetings with Adenauer beginning in 1958, “the relations between France and Germany will establish themselves on a basis and in an atmosphere unknown in their history.”⁴⁶

Just as historical reasons have been put forth to justify the enmity between France and Germany before 1945, de Gaulle and Adenauer’s symbolic acts are at the root of a historical explanation of Franco-German rapprochement and then friendship.⁴⁷ “With the demonstrative gestures and speeches during Adenauer’s state visit in France in July 1962 and de Gaulle’s return visit two months later,” historian Wilfried Loth evaluates, “the French president made sure that the reconciliation between Germans and French became deeply anchored in the cognizance of both peoples.”⁴⁸ Political scientist Gerhard Kiersch asserts that de Gaulle and Adenauer’s gestures “are about historical memories, symbolic actions,

⁴⁴ Scholl-Latour 1988, 58.

⁴⁵ The magnitude of this transformation is not adequately appreciated, either by historical and descriptive or by theoretical analyses of Franco-German affairs, whether on Franco-German affairs in general or the “couple de Gaulle-Adenauer” in specific. Along with their other historical achievements, including codifying new political processes between France and Germany with the Elysée Treaty, the institution of this new base of meaning and purpose belongs to the heritage bequeathed by the Federal Republic’s first chancellor and the Fifth Republic’s first president.

⁴⁶ de Gaulle 1970b, 192.

⁴⁷ Aron 1965, 3.

⁴⁸ Loth 1991, 15.

and emotions that are mirrored in collective identity.”⁴⁹ It is the symbolic acts of 1958-1963 that form the kernel of the “communal foundational myths” about which *Le Monde* commentator Lucas Delattre writes some four decades later.⁵⁰

The Significance of a Family Home: Colombey-les-Deux-Eglises (September 1958)

The seeds for the new institutional time were planted at the first meeting between de Gaulle and Adenauer in September 1958, the year de Gaulle returned to power. The chancellor prepared for the meeting with de Gaulle with unease. He expected the General to be difficult to approach, militarist, and anti-German.⁵¹ Adenauer was “full of great worry about de Gaulle’s way of thinking,” and anxious about the personality he would encounter.⁵² The statesmen met on 14 and 15 September 1958 at de Gaulle’s private home *La Boisserie*, a country house within a stone-wall fortified park in Colombey-les-Deux-Eglises – a tiny village in the southeastern corner of the Champagne halfway between Paris and the Rhine.

Adenauer’s worries were not well founded: the two leaders instantly respected and liked each other. The small circle of ministers and advisors present before and after their private meeting noted their quickly developing and deepening mutual appreciation.⁵³ The gathering marked the beginning of a lasting friendship between them, and signaled the opening of a new historical period between France and Germany. Adenauer was the first and only foreign statesman to be received in the General’s private domicile⁵⁴ – not standard practice in international politics, let alone between the highest representatives of states looking back on a recent vicious history of “hereditary enmity.” In addition, he was honored by being invited to stay overnight.⁵⁵

The grand old conservative de Gaulle, deeply molded into thinking of politics – and social life at large – in symbolic terms, was fully aware of the significance accorded to his publicly private invitation: “Because it seemed to me,” he writes some ten years later, “that it would be appropriate to give the encounter an exceptional mark, and that, for the historical

⁴⁹ Kiersch 1991, 182.

⁵⁰ Delattre 1997.

⁵¹ Adenauer 1967, 408-436; Schunck 1998, 509-511.

⁵² Adenauer 1967, 424, 434.

⁵³ See, for example, the notes of then French ambassador to Germany Seydoux 1975, 209-234.

⁵⁴ Scholl-Latour 1988, 58.

⁵⁵ Adenauer 1967, 424 and 434.

explication between this old Frenchman and this very old German in the name of their two peoples, the surroundings of a family home has more significance than the setting of a palace would have. My wife and I, thus, offer the chancellor the modest honors of the *Boisserie*.”⁵⁶

De Gaulle further reports that between their groundbreaking first encounter in Colombey and the middle of 1962, he and the chancellor wrote each other about forty times, met fifteen times (most often in Paris, Marly, Rambouillet, Baden-Baden, and Bonn), and spent altogether some one hundred hours talking to each other – either by themselves, in the presence of their ministers, or in the company of their families.⁵⁷ The ostentatious cordiality between the two gave an extra edge to the growing ties between chancellor and president. It reinforced and intensified the sense that relations between France and Germany could be based on a fundamentally different historical footing from the one the two old politicians knew only too well. With more than thirty-five years of temporal distance, political analyst Maurice Vaisse concludes that the “affectionate and very strong connection” that was created in Colombey would be turned into cement for the Franco-German entente.⁵⁸ However, the social meaning of the value, importance, and beauty of the Franco-German friendship, and of the normative desirability of Franco-German bondedness, would become even more pronounced and would attain truly dramatic heights in the years to come.

Parading, Kneeling, Uniting the Prayers: Adenauer in France (July 1962)

Mourmelon, 8 July 1962. In July 1962, Chancellor Adenauer accepted de Gaulle’s invitation for an official visit to France. De Gaulle accompanied him along much of the way. The symbolism and meaning-creating effects of two way-stops are elemental. The first was the joint parade of French and German soldiers on a military training ground in the Champagne. “For the first time in history, French and German troops paraded jointly in front of representatives of their states” – “a visible expression of the conclusive overcoming of the military enmity between the two countries.”⁵⁹ “At the camp at Mourmelon,” Ambassador François Seydoux describes the scene, “the troops of the two countries were lined up side by side, thus showing, in contrast to the combats of the past, the image of their new

⁵⁶ de Gaulle 1970b, 184.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁵⁸ Vaisse 1993/94, 964.

⁵⁹ Kiersch 1991, 183.

fraternity.”⁶⁰

The Te Deum of Reims, 8 July 1962. The last stop of the trip led de Gaulle and Adenauer to Reims in northern Champagne, a city rich with historical memory and symbols: a “demonstration of commonality in front of a historical scenery of occidental culture, a grandiose finale to a remarkable state visit.”⁶¹ It culminated in the joint celebration of a *Te Deum* in its imposing thirteenth century cathedral with president and chancellor, both practicing Catholics, kneeling and praying next to each other.

Reims had been the location of many events that are accorded great import in French national and Franco-German historiography: In Reims around the year 498, Clovis – as the legend has it, under the pressure of his wife Clothilde – was baptized together with some hundreds or thousands of his followers by bishop Remigius (Rémi), an event which still leads many to consider France the Catholic church’s eldest daughter, *la fille aînée de l’église*. From the Capetians in the 10th century until the 19th century, almost all French kings were crowned in Reims.⁶² During the First World War German fire destroyed its majestic cathedral, one of the most magnificent achievements of gothic architecture. For four years the trenches cut through the land just outside the city. By the end of the First World War the city had been almost entirely destroyed. This war left some 8,000 of its formerly more than 100,000 citizens scattered and hiding in the subterranean wine caves hammered into the Champagne’s chalky soil. And another war later, on 7 May 1945 in the headquarters of the allied forces, in a brick stone building that today houses a high school with the name *Lycée Roosevelt*, German General Jodl handed over the unconditional surrender of what the national socialists called the “Greater German Empire.”⁶³

For all the significance that Reims holds for French national history, it has also been a long-time crossroads for exchanges between what became France and Germany, and where French and Germans fought for a thousand years. Here, the two leaders jointly sought rapprochement with the help of religion for a new, different (institutional) future (of meaning) in the middle of a huge battlefield, by together celebrating a mass, kneeling next to

⁶⁰ Seydoux 1977, 13.

⁶¹ Kraus 1988, 15.

⁶² See Guinle 1997.

⁶³ For an excellent discussion of Reims’ symbolic significance as a ‘*lieu de mémoire*,’ see Le Goff 1997. See also Scholl-Latour 1988, 122-133.

each other, and “uniting their prayers.” Especially with this gesture, they also turned the city into a symbol of the new Franco-German meaning for a new era “founded on union and brotherhood ... the diffusion point of another Franco-German message consisting of conciliation and peace.”⁶⁴

Again, the two statesmen were aware of the deep symbolic meaning of the scene: “The trip finishes in Reims,” de Gaulle reveals, “symbol of our ancient traditions, but also arena of numerous confrontations of the hereditary enemies from the ancient Germanic invasions to the battles at the Marne. At the cathedral, the wounds of which are not yet entirely healed, the premier French and the premier German unite their prayers that from the two sides of the Rhine the works of friendship may forever replace the miseries of war.”⁶⁵

Indeed, if one delegated the task of finding collective identity-creating measures to a consulting firm, it could propose no better scenario than having the two most powerful men in the highest offices of their countries kneeling next to each other, “uniting their prayers,” demonstratively proclaiming by communally celebrating a *Te Deum*: Look, our citizens and look, rest of the world, we have the same god, we have the same heaven. We are close and we should move closer together in this world too, overcoming the hell that we have produced and put each other through in the past by giving each other a promise for the future.

The Triumph of Franco-German Friendship: de Gaulle in Germany (September 1962)

De Gaulle returned the chancellor’s “unforgettable voyage”⁶⁶ some two months later between 4 and 9 September. The triumphal trip led the president from Bonn and Cologne through Düsseldorf and Duisburg to Hamburg and Munich, culminating in Ludwigsburg. Kiersch declares it the most important visit of a foreign statesman to Germany after 1945: an “identity-generating state visit.”⁶⁷ Greeted enthusiastically wherever he appeared during this trip full of “demonstrative gestures and speeches,”⁶⁸ de Gaulle purposefully attempted to

⁶⁴ Susini 1995, 175, 185.

⁶⁵ de Gaulle 1970b, 191.

⁶⁶ de Gaulle 1970a, 234.

⁶⁷ Kiersch 1991, 182.

⁶⁸ Loth 1991, 15.

approach the panoply of German society. He addressed speeches to the German political class, German workers, the German army leadership, and finally the German youth from the yard of Ludwigsburg's baroque castle.⁶⁹

The extraordinary value of the reconciliation, friendship, and bonding between France and Germany is the *Leitmotiv* of de Gaulle's speeches and gestures. It is the essence of the statesman's entire journey. Beginning with the welcome reception in his honor at the castle Brühl, he emphasized that "the rapprochement in friendship of our two countries is without question one of the most important and brilliant events of all those that Europe and the world have seen in the course of centuries."⁷⁰

This motive had come up often before and was to re-appear after this trip to Germany. However, de Gaulle pushed it to a boiling culmination in his speech to the workers at the Thyssen steel factory in Duisburg-Hamborn. Symbolic for its location in the heart of the Ruhr area, this long-time leading arms producer represented German militarism. As he had done before and would do again, de Gaulle addressed his German audience with a speech entirely in German. After declaring that what "is produced on the Ruhr and in these factories, today evokes only comfort and satisfaction in my country," de Gaulle exclaimed, only to be interrupted by the ebullient ovations of his listeners: "I ask all of you to join in and to celebrate, together with me, a new event, the greatest of our modern era, the friendship between Germany and France."⁷¹

De Gaulle gave his last speech of this voyage through Germany in Ludwigsburg on 9 September 1962. Addressed to the German youth, it concluded a trip which the general had turned into a triumph for the new institutional meaning of an incipient social era between France and Germany. This sermon remains one of the most affecting addresses that a foreigner has directed to Germans after the physical destruction and moral devastation of World War II and Holocaust.

⁶⁹ For a collection of all official talks, speeches, and statements of the French president during this trip to Germany, see de Gaulle 1970a, 3-18.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁷¹ Ibid., 10. It is worth noting that there is a discrepancy in this last sentence between the words actually spoken by de Gaulle in German and the French text on which it was based. In his speech, de Gaulle spoke of "the greatest event of our modern time (*das grösste unseres ...*)," while the French text refers to "one of the greatest (*l'un des plus grands ...*)."⁷¹ Ibid., 10-11. Whatever led de Gaulle to choose the unqualified superlative in his speech, it surely was not a slip of the tongue in an orator so gifted and experienced as he was. Nor can difficulties with the language explain the change. De Gaulle had acquired a high level of proficiency in German during trips to Germany in his youth, and during thirty-two months as a prisoner of war during and after World War I. See Schunck 1991, 22-29.

“I congratulate all of you!” the president began by proclaiming; “I first congratulate you for being young,” he continued, and went on to speak about mastering life and about the promises of the future.⁷² Then, de Gaulle returned to the theme a second time with a variation: “I further congratulate you for being young Germans, which means children of a great people.” The audience was puzzled. The younger ones had never heard anything like it. And the older ones probably could not help but experience a flashback to other times that they had suppressed for the last seventeen years. De Gaulle’s pause after this sentence still appears long. And it still appears to be filled with amazement and sorrow by an audience that did not know how to feel or how to react to such formulations. De Gaulle repeated: “Yes! of a great people! that sometimes, in the course of its history, has committed great mistakes and that has caused much condemnable misery.” He then talked about German contributions to science, art, and philosophy, concluding the paragraph with the exclamation that “the French people knows to fully appreciate all this, as it too knows what it means ... to give and to suffer.” Finally, de Gaulle came back to his opening theme yet a third time: “Finally, I congratulate you for being today’s youth. At the moment when you enter professional life, a new life for humankind will begin” – closing this introductory part with a reflection on mastering material progresses and the possibility for humans to become “freer, more dignified, and better.”

Concluding his speech, de Gaulle related everything mentioned during his address to the relations between French and Germans and France and Germany. Simultaneously, he condensed the substance of his entire state visit, stressing that “this solidarity, now entirely natural, of course needs to be organized. This is the task of governments. Most of all, however, we need to give it viable content. And that shall be in particular the task of the youth.” De Gaulle finished this second-to-last paragraph by calling upon his listeners: “... it is up to you and the French youth, to get all groups from you and from us, to get closer and closer to each other, to get to know each other better, and to knit tighter bonds.” Finally, he summed up with the crescendo that he had mastered so well and that led his listeners to ovations: “The future of our two countries, the foundation stone on which Europe’s unity can and must be erected, and the highest trump for the freedom of the world, remains the mutual respect, the trust, and the friendship between the French and the German people.”

⁷² The entire speech is reprinted in de Gaulle 1970a, 15-18. All of the following quotes are excerpted from those pages.

Why Then?

Why did the transformation of meaning for a new institutional time take place between 1958 and 1963, and not earlier or later; why in the aftermath of World War II, but not after World War I or after the 1870/71 war? Why did it take place at all? The more general aspects of these questions are of an imposing magnitude. They concern the emergence and transformation of social meaning and purpose in the international sphere. Generally answering them would lead toward a theory of international social facts, and of the emergence, transformation, and potential decay of social meaning and purpose as institutionalized in the international sphere.

However, the case at hand suggests that the deep transformation of meaning then required the combination of at least three necessary conditions. Their co-presence might be coincidental. The first seemed to be a widely shared sense of rupture, and a perceived need for a break with the past. Three wars in less than eighty years, culminating in the moral as much as material catastrophes of the Second World War (and the Holocaust on the German side) constituted exactly that.⁷³ Perhaps the rupture was even so deep that it signified an end to a historical period of almost five hundred years in which Western Europe had self-confidently and as a matter of course viewed itself as the center of the world. With American troops from the west and south and Soviet troops from the east overrunning the continent, such political-cultural imaginations were no longer viable. “After 1945 all people on the continent had been defeated. ... On the debris a new world took shape.”⁷⁴ The sense of historical rupture after 1945 was fundamental.

The availability of personalities with the charisma and the moral caliber to credibly execute the generation and initial installation of new social meaning and purpose appeared a second necessary condition. Major historical breaches, both in their symbolic and political-administrative business-like aspects, require the proper personnel. De Gaulle and Adenauer were such figures.

The presence of an appropriate social turf, apparently indispensably including elites as much as larger publics, that allowed the seeds for a new social time with a new meaning to grow, seemed a third necessary requirement. In post-1945 France, for example, historian

⁷³ On the other hand – aside from the Holocaust, which cannot be viewed as a specifically Franco-German matter – there remains the daunting question of why the rupture of World War II would make reconciliation possible whereas those of WW I corroborated the sense of enmity.

Reinhart Koselleck perceptively notes, not “the Germans,” but the Nazi terror-regime, had been defined as France’s World War II enemy.⁷⁵

IV. Reproduction, Perpetuation, Corroboration

Social structures exist in processes. Patterns of interaction and meaning, they require reproduction and perpetuation or risk withering away and disappearing. The Franco-German meaning initially generated in the late 1950s and early 1960s did not wither away. A host of symbolic practices have reproduced and perpetuated, corroborated and extended it. Some of these practices are more or less regularized and recurrent. Others, single events, are meaningful as integral parts of the overall fabric.⁷⁶

Treaty Anniversaries and Other Marks in the Calendar

Among the recurrent Franco-German symbolic practices are the celebrations of the Elysée Treaty and other bilateral achievements. They follow a rather orderly schedule. Their dates are marked on the calendar. After a more general discussion of treaty anniversaries, I will take a closer look at the 20th and 25th Treaty anniversaries in 1983 and 1988 respectively.

Treaty Anniversaries as Franco-German Holidays. Elysée Treaty anniversaries, one element re-creating Franco-German meaning, are on the yearly calendar of events. However, especially on the “round numbers,” such as the Treaty’s tenth, twentieth, and twenty-fifth anniversaries (and so forth), there is a large variety of commemorative Treaty activities. In addition to official celebrations honoring the value and importance of Franco-German cooperation and friendship, a diverse range of publications accompany these occasions, observing the bilateral relationship and recalling the value of Franco-German accomplishment.

Many of these writings – three types in particular – focus on critically examining this relationship’s history and present state. First, the leading newspapers and magazines review the relationship’s recent results, analyzing failures and disappointments and reviewing

⁷⁴ Aron 1965, 10.

⁷⁵ Koselleck 2000, 283-284. Interestingly, de Gaulle had already staunchly drawn the distinction during the war. Still, the question remains why and how this sea change was possible after 1945, whereas after 1871 and 1918 enmity and hatred between Germans and French had been a mass-based and broadly shared social reality.

⁷⁶ The bulk of material that could be listed demands discipline in presentation. I attempt to give a representative overview of practices belonging to both categories.

achievements. They frequently publish special sections or entire special issues dealing with various aspects of Franco-German matters.⁷⁷ Second, there are publications in academic or semi-academic journals that focus on Franco-German affairs and reflect upon historical and political matters with greater distance.⁷⁸ Third, the public or semi-public units of the Franco-German interaction network themselves, as well as French and German governmental entities, submit various types of publications that review certain aspects of the bilateral relationship.⁷⁹ It has already become a tradition for the French and German coordinators for Franco-German affairs to publish thorough reviews of all domains of Franco-German affairs and make suggestions for the future.⁸⁰

What unites most of these diverse publications is a generally implicit normative orientation, a tacitly assumed value frame, that presents Franco-German cooperation as a value, a “good,” a precious achievement on its own that deserves care and nurturing. They criticize and regret failures, whereby the scope of “failure” and “disappointment” is wide, and the level of expectations typically high. They praise successes and achievements (read: functioning interaction; “products-outcomes-results”), although not as ardently as they lament failures. And they frequently suggest potential future Franco-

⁷⁷ For example, at the 25th anniversary, the biweekly review of the German press in French *La Tribune d'Allemagne* published a special with articles from twenty-five years of life with the “friendship treaty”; see *La Tribune d'Allemagne* 1988.

⁷⁸ See, for example, the book edited by Jacques Delors at the 35th anniversary of the Treaty. Delors 1998b.

⁷⁹ For the 25th anniversary, for example, the German defense ministry published a substantive volume entitled “Franco-German Cooperation. 25 Years Elysée Treaty.” The cover of the book shows the French rooster and the German eagle happily arm in arm. Contributors to the volume included many who had been intimately involved in Franco-German affairs. The book’s front page displays a Carl Zuckmayer quote: “As it was our duty yesterday to be enemies, today it is our right to become brothers.” I cite the quote as indicative of the normative charge of such publications, irrespective of its historical and moral accuracy. Bundesministerium der Verteidigung (German Ministry of Defense) 1988. For the 30th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty, the secretariat of the Franco-German Defense and Security Council published a historically oriented volume evaluating thirty years of Franco-German cooperation in defense and security. Secrétariat du Conseil Franco-Allemand de Défense et de Sécurité/Sekretariat des Deutsch-Französischen Verteidigungs- und Sicherheitsrates 1993. For details on Franco-German public and parapublic entities, see Krotz 2002c; Krotz 2002d.

⁸⁰ For example Barzel 1988; Lapie and Schmid 1973; Lenz and Wex 1983. It has long been customary that at Franco-German anniversaries (as well as beyond), French and German policy analysts and public figures publish together in leading French and German papers and magazines. On 22 January 1998, the Elysée Treaty’s 35th anniversary, for example, Delors and Lamers co-authored articles simultaneously appearing in *Le Monde* and in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* under the (German) headline “A Friendship that Needs to be Filled with Life.” Delors 1998d; Delors and Lamers 1998; Lamers 1998a. Günter Verheugen, then German social democratic international relations coordinator, subsequently *Staatssekretär* in the foreign ministry and EU commissioner, and Paul Quilès, chair of the national assembly’s defense committee and spokesman of the French PS for defense matters, co-published under the heading, “Partners in and for Europe. What France and Germany have to achieve communally.” Quilès and Verheugen 1997. Finally, it has become almost commonplace that the leaders of one country, including those in the highest offices, address the publics in the mass media of the other country.

German projects or directions. All this is part of a social structure of meaning, at once expressing, perpetuating, and corroborating it.

Mitterrand in the Bundestag: The 20th Anniversary (January 1983). French President François Mitterrand came to Bonn on 20 January 1983 in order to venerate the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Elysée Treaty with a speech before the German *Bundestag*. The scheduling of the address was meant as a sign of special honor for the French president. More uncommon is that a speech on such an occasion – which would typically focus on uncontroversial or self-congratulatory matters – would address a hotly debated political issue. And this is exactly what Mitterrand did. The lion's share of his speech was about the politically most controversial issue in Germany in the early 1980s: NATO's two-track decision and the resulting stationing of American intermediate-range nuclear missiles (Pershing II) on German soil. And Mitterrand took a very clear position on the matter, arguing decidedly in favor of the stationing.

The decision to do so was daring, not just because he knew only too well that close to half of the German parliamentarians (notably those of his PS's sister party SPD) had great difficulty with the position for which he so determinedly argued.⁸¹ Mitterrand's decision rested on a self-assured cognizance of the stability of Franco-German ties, a necessary condition for this kind of political debate across borders. One simply does not do such things without confidence in a relationship, its intimacy, and the unlikelihood of potential misunderstanding. This, too, is how the speech was understood.

One needs to consider what did *not* happen after Mitterrand's speech: those Germans who disagreed with Mitterrand, including the German parliamentarians, did not chastise the French president for involving himself in another state's internal affairs. They might very well have criticized the speech and its orator on such grounds. Instead they basically admitted the French president's legitimacy to intervene (even so forcefully) in what really was a German domestic issue of *Meinungs-* or *Willensbildung* (position- or will-building) – “no chief of state of another country could have permitted himself to take sides so openly, without a sharp rebuke.”⁸²

However, Mitterrand turned this speech into a Franco-German symbol for still

⁸¹ For the full text of the speech, see Mitterrand 1983.

another reason. He did *not* emphasize what France wanted, the French position, French interests. Instead, he approached the entire debate in an exclusively argumentative way without acknowledging the differences in perspective that might arise depending on one's side of the Rhine. He treated the entire missile debate as an internal, amalgamated Franco-German subject – no “we” (French) and “you” (Germans) in his key arguments, but only “us” (Frenchmen *and* Germans), expressing rudiments of collective identity. The “speech makes evident that for each of us security is a shared concern,” Delors comments.⁸³ Mitterrand's speech became a milestone of Franco-German intimacy, with the top public functionary of one country taking a strong position in a highly contested domestic political issue of the other.⁸⁴ A day later, on 21 January 1983, Chancellor Kohl visited Paris, honoring the Treaty there as the kernel of Franco-German reconciliation.⁸⁵

Celebrated in Style: The 25th Anniversary (January 1988). 22 January 1988, the Elysée Treaty's twenty-fifth anniversary, was turned into a true Franco-German holiday. The celebrations of the 25th anniversary self-confidently demonstrated a Franco-German normality of proximity and belonging. The Treaty was “celebrated in style.”⁸⁶

The official celebrations began with a troop parade in the yard of the *Dôme des Invalides*, where in the presence of the French and German delegations the French Republican guard played the German national anthem (*Le Figaro*: “more majestic than one is used to in Germany”), and a German military music group the *Marseillaise* (*L'Humanité*: “intoning the French anthem already in Bavarian style”). After the regular working sessions of the parallel 51st Franco-German summit consultations, a short commemorative celebration followed in the Elysée Palace's *salon Murat*, where the Treaty had been concluded a quarter century earlier. There, Kohl and Mitterrand signed – in the presence of Maurice Couve de Murville, as de Gaulle's foreign minister one of the Treaty's signatories – the protocols on the creation of a Franco-German Defense and Security Council and a Franco-German Financial and Economic Council, amending the 1963 Treaty.

⁸² Friend 1991, 70.

⁸³ Delors 1998c, 3. On the same issue, Delors does not hesitate to add that for France, among others, that means “a change in the conception of its ‘sanctuaire nucléaire.’” Ibid.

⁸⁴ Another such instance is Chancellor Kohl's forceful intervention supporting the political forces in France promoting the “yes” in the political campaign in France before the referendum on the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty (TEU). See Delors 1998c.

⁸⁵ Deutsch-Französisches Institut and Deutsche Frankreich-Bibliothek 1995 (and after), 74.

Subsequently, the German chancellor and the French president retreated for one hour of private discussion. In the early afternoon, Chancellor Kohl drove over to the *Hôtel Matignon*, where he spoke for one hour with Prime Minister Jacques Chirac. Chancellor and president then jointly visited French and German high school students at the Goethe Gymnasium and the Lycée Henri IV. The festivities continued with an official reception back at the Elysée palace, where the French president had invited some five hundred guests who “had rendered outstanding services to Franco-German cooperation.”⁸⁷ They included the 1963 signatories, Foreign Ministers de Murville and Gerhard Schröder; ninety-two year old Ernst Jünger, recipient of the *Pour le mérite* medal of the First World War, was invited according to Mitterrand’s personal wishes.⁸⁸ A concert by French and German choirs in the church *Saint-Louis des Invalides*, organized by the Franco-German Youth Office, again with numerous Franco-German honoraries present, concluded this anniversary. Stamps of both the French and the German public mail services commemorate the occasion.⁸⁹

First Things First: The Tradition of “Symbolic Firsts”

Another set of recurrent symbolic practices that re-creates Franco-German meaning are the various kinds of “symbolic firsts.”

Federal Chancellors and Presidents of the Republic. Over the past three decades, it has become a symbolic tradition that the first trip abroad of new German chancellors and French presidents will be taken to the respective other country very shortly after having taken the position. Alternatively, the first visitor that is received in the new office will be from the new colleague across the Rhine. Helmut Schmidt and Valéry Giscard d’Estaing came to office at almost the same time in May 1974. President d’Estaing invited Chancellor Schmidt in a telephone call on the very day when he took office – “a form of invitation that is more than

⁸⁶ DePorte 1991, 267.

⁸⁷ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 22 January 1988, 1.

⁸⁸ See de Bresson 1988, 4-5; Scholl-Latour 1988, 517-523.

⁸⁹ de Bresson 1988. In addition to the predominantly symbolic practices and the signing of the protocols to the Treaty installing a Franco-German Defense and Security Council as well as a Finance and Economic Council, 22 January 1988 saw the exchange of notes on the creation of a Franco-German Cultural Council, the ultimate decision to install a mixed and integrated Franco-German brigade, an exchange of notes on the foundation of a “de Gaulle-Adenauer prize” to honor special achievement regarding Franco-German cooperation, a common declaration on the coordination of German and French development aid in Africa, the confirmation of the foundation of a Franco-German university college, and the inauguration of two translation prizes (one for each language) in order to support the spread of each country’s literature in the respective other country. See Presse-

unusual for the diplomatic protocol.”⁹⁰ And the two met shortly thereafter. “It was for both of us the first talk in the new office that we led with a foreign head of government: Giscard received his first foreign visitor,” Schmidt records in his memoirs, “and I myself made my first visit abroad. The instantaneous gathering came as a surprise for Europe’s public opinion, although it was presently recognized as a matter of course.”⁹¹

The same proceeding took place seven years later in 1981, after Mitterrand had defeated Giscard in the presidential election and succeeded him as President of the Republic: “The new President François Mitterrand took office on 21 May; three days later, I was his first foreign visitor.”⁹²

Again a year and a half later, in an attempt to break the record, Schmidt’s successor Helmut Kohl traveled to Paris on 4 October 1982, three days after having been elected chancellor, a day after having sworn his oath⁹³ – “a *blitz*visit to Paris in order to stress the continuity of the tight German-French relations.”⁹⁴ Note that the next regular summit consultations had already been scheduled for 21-22 October. In other words, the new chancellor would have met the French president shortly thereafter as part of the regular Franco-German consultations. But for Franco-German standards, soon was not soon enough. “It was meant as a drum beat and that is how it was perceived. ... Still faster was impossible.”⁹⁵

When, sixteen years later, Social-Democratic contender Gerhard Schröder defeated Kohl in the federal elections, Schröder traveled to Paris three days after the election – before taking office.⁹⁶ “Indeed, from the Franco-German perspective Schröder’s start went almost according to the ritual.”⁹⁷

Ministers, Federal Presidents, and Other Firsts. The “first things first” ritual extends well beyond chancellors and French presidents. When the eighteen-year German Foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher resigned on 18 May 1992, his successor Klaus Kinkel met his French

und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung (Bulletin) 1988, 82-88.

⁹⁰ Ecker-Ertle 1998, 125.

⁹¹ Schmidt 1990, 168.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 241.

⁹³ Becker 1983.

⁹⁴ *Dokumente, Documents, and Deutsch-Französisches Institut Ludwigsburg* 1993, 71.

⁹⁵ Ziebur 1997, 328.

⁹⁶ See Woyke 2000, 173.

⁹⁷ Altwegg 1998.

counterpart Roland Dumas and French prime minister Pierre Bérégovoy on the very same day, just after his appointment.⁹⁸ This meeting was entirely independent from the next summit consultations in La Rochelle, scheduled to take place only three days later on 21-22 May 1992. Six years later, the new German foreign minister Joschka Fischer met his French counterpart Hubert Védrine on 28 October 1998, a few hours after having taken over his new position.⁹⁹

The “first visit” tradition also extends to German presidents. For example, Richard von Weizsäcker’s first trip abroad after Germany’s 1990-unification was to France.¹⁰⁰ Johannes Rau’s first official trip abroad as German president brought him to Paris on 27 July 1999, soon after his inauguration. A number of other practices complement this Franco-German “symbolic firsts” tradition. President Jacques Chirac, for example, was the first foreign statesman to speak in front of the German parliament after it moved to the Reichstag in Berlin. Chirac acknowledged the symbolic first in his speech, stating that he felt “deeply touched” to be the first foreign head of state “to address all of Germany from this spot. ... Thank you for this moment which neither I myself, nor my fellow citizens will forget.”¹⁰¹

Single Events and Overall Fabric

In addition to more or less regularly recurrent symbolic practices, a range of singular symbolic acts have contributed to perpetuating and corroborating Franco-German meaning. Considered isolated occurrences, “single events” remain underappreciated. Understanding them as types of a category allows us to adequately appreciate their significance for the overall fabric. They are not merely a series of separate, dissociated events. Viewed as a constitutive part of a normalcy that is taken for granted, some of them might be noted only in passing. Others, seemingly carrying the mark of the (at least somewhat) extraordinary, receive considerable media attention.

⁹⁸ See Deutsch-Französisches Institut and Deutsche Frankreich-Bibliothek 1995 (and after), 114.

⁹⁹ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 October 1998, 1. Fischer’s first real working sessions with Védrine, as was demonstratively made public in Bonn and Paris, included discussions that lasted for more than five hours and covered all foreign policy issues. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 November 1998, 9.

¹⁰⁰ *Pariser Kurier* 40 May/June 1991.

¹⁰¹ Referring to a speech de Gaulle gave in Germany stating that “our rapprochement, then our union are among the most striking events of the entire history,” Chirac places himself into the tradition of meaning that the General initially installed, and reproduces it. All quotes are from the speech delivered on 27 June 2000. *Le Monde*, 28 June 2000, 16-17; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 June 2000, 10-11.

Laying a Foundation Stone in Berlin (July 1998). In July 1998, German and French German foreign ministers Kinkel and Védérine gathered at the *Pariser Platz* in Berlin to together “set the first stone (*Grundsteinlegung*)” of the new construction of France’s future embassy at the Brandenburg gate and in view of the new governmental district around the *Reichstag*.¹⁰² In the course of the German government’s move to Berlin, the French embassy also had to be transferred. Located on the strip of no-man’s-land that had cut through the divided Berlin from 1961 on, the old French embassy building had been destroyed. After 1990, France and Germany agreed to build a new French embassy at the distinguished former location. With the two ministers’ joint laying of the foundation stone the construction began.¹⁰³

German Soldiers on the Champs-Élysées (July 1994). Already at the 63rd Franco-German consultations of May 1994 in Mulhouse/Alsace, Mitterrand announced that he had invited German soldiers to parade together with French troops in celebration of France’s national holiday.¹⁰⁴ On 14 July 1994, French and German soldiers of the Franco-German Brigade/Eurocorps jointly paraded on the Champs-Élysées.¹⁰⁵ The French soldiers were in French uniforms, the German soldiers in German uniforms; they were united by the same beret that indicated their common belonging to the Eurocorps. Fifty years after the liberation of Paris, German uniformed soldiers had returned to France’s capital. But the meaning of their presence was radically transformed. Now, they came together with their French brothers in arms and belonged to the same military unit. When the troops paraded by their political leaders on that day, the scene became a self-confident demonstration of Franco-German belonging and intimacy, as much as one commemorating the storming of the Bastille.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² For example, *Die Welt*, 11-12 July 1998, 2.

¹⁰³ After the symbolic act, the two ministers took the opportunity to emphasize that “nothing could replace the very tight relations between France and Germany.” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 July 1998, 4.

¹⁰⁴ Deutsch-Französisches Institut and Deutsche Frankreich-Bibliothek 1995 (and after), 125.

¹⁰⁵ Also, it has been pointed out that on that day the squadron that sprayed the blue-white-red color during the parade consisted of Alpha Jets, a Franco-German military aircraft cooperation of the late 1960s and 1970s. See Bittner 1986, 118-119; Couapel 1994.

¹⁰⁶ This is a prime example of what Max Weber has in mind with his important insistence on the element of meaning (*Sinngehalt* or *Sinnhaftigkeit*) in social relations or what John Searle stresses in pointing at an ontology that is inadequately described in physical-chemical terms on the surface level of brute facts. Especially clearly, see Weber 1972 (1921), 13-14. Searle 1995, very basically on 2-3. Searle might emphasize that one could describe the scene as a group of men walking down a street in an orderly and organized fashion, wearing a standardized type of clothing, while a certain type of music is being played. Intersubjectively shared knowledge tells

Schmidt and Giscard at Charlemagne's Throne (September 1978). In the course of the 32nd Franco-German summit consultation, on 14 September 1978 Chancellor Schmidt and President Giscard d'Estaing jointly attended a concert in Aachen's cathedral. At the throne and grave of Charlemagne, whom "we Frenchmen know as a Frank, and whom you consider a German Kaiser,"¹⁰⁷ Giscard evoked "Charlemagne's spirit"¹⁰⁸ "for the strengthening of the good understanding between the Federal Republic of Germany and France."¹⁰⁹ And Schmidt, at this "symbolic soil for such a Franco-German encounter" tied to the "remembrance of the joint historic origins of both the French and German nations,"¹¹⁰ toasted "the peace among French and Germans and the friendship and cooperation among our two peoples":¹¹¹ "The most important form of coming to terms with the past is to master the presence and to prepare for a good future. On this joint insight, ... perhaps even joint experience, rests our [Franco-German] friendship. ... indeed since Robert Schuman, since Adenauer, since de Gaulle a tradition has grown, which for our two peoples ... and Europe as a whole is of high value. We should endeavor to augment this tradition and subsequently pass it on as a binding heritage to those who come after us."¹¹² Observers noticed the Aachen meeting's association with prior Franco-German gestures, reminiscing particularly about the great scene with de Gaulle and Adenauer after two world wars in Reims's cathedral:¹¹³ "A touch of Reims at Charlemagne's throne."¹¹⁴

The Adhesive Force of Joint Memory: Hand in Hand in Verdun (September 1984). On 22 September 1984, President Mitterrand and Chancellor Kohl gathered in Verdun, site of the most gruesome slaughtering of the First World War, where between February and December 1916 some 700,000 French and Germans had lost their lives. Mitterrand had previously declared

us that what we are dealing with is a military parade. Knowledge of uniforms and other symbols tell us that what we see are French and German soldiers. But the point is that to really grasp the decisive features of what is happening here and to understand European international political organization, this is still not enough. In order to understand the stage on which much of European international politics takes place, it is essential to know about the difference in meaning that such practices convey, between, say, 1940 and 1994 – instead of treating the events as brute facts "taking place as such."

¹⁰⁷ Giscard d'Estaing 1978a, 950.

¹⁰⁸ Giscard d'Estaing 1978b, 953.

¹⁰⁹ Giscard d'Estaing 1978a, 951.

¹¹⁰ Schmidt 1978, 949.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 950.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 949.

¹¹³ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 September 1978, 10.

¹¹⁴ So titles the same paper a historical reflection on Franco-German affairs at the occasion. Winandy 1978.

in a press conference that he intended to meet the chancellor in Verdun for a ceremony in which he and Kohl would “demonstrate in an unshakable fashion that on the basis of the Franco-German friendship, on which much depends, we would be committed for the future.”¹¹⁵

President and chancellor convened there in order to honor the dead German and French soldiers of both world wars, and to publicly express the “reconciliation across the graves (*Versöhnung über den Gräbern*).” They together promulgated a “declaration of Verdun (*Erklärung von Verdun, Déclaration de Verdun*),” stating that with their “joint honoring of the dead of past fighting at this historical site they set a mark that both peoples irrevocably have embarked on the route of peace, reason, and cooperation in friendship.”¹¹⁶

With the two leaders standing next to each other at the mortuary of the old Fort Douaumont, in the Champagne’s early autumn, there came that stirring gesture which, as Kohl later would insist, was neither planned nor staged, and which has been branded ever since in the collective memories on both sides of the Rhine: François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl standing hand in hand in the middle of one of Europe’s bloodiest sites, in front of coffins covered with French and German flags.

The picture was widely published in newspapers and magazines, in new editions of history books, and on posters for a diverse range of purposes. Arguably, together with the picture of Willy Brandt kneeling at the memorial of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1970, the picture with Kohl and Mitterrand was the most important post-World War II photograph containing meaning for Germans. In the Verdun case it was shared Franco-German meaning: From the day it was taken, the image of Mitterrand and Kohl hand in hand in Verdun became part of the collective Carolingian memory.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Archiv der Gegenwart 1984, 27726.

¹¹⁶ Dokumente, Documents, and Deutsch-Französisches Institut Ludwigsburg 1993, 78-79. Full text of the declaration (my translation): Declaration of Verdun: We have reconciled. We have understood. We have become friends. Today, on 22 September 1984, the chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and the president of the French Republic have gathered in Verdun in order to bow down before the graves of France’s and Germany’s sons who fell here. With their joint honoring of the dead of past battles at this historical site they set a mark that both people irrevocably have embarked on the route of peace, reason, and cooperation in friendship. Ibid.

¹¹⁷ I do not attempt a ranking of the relative importance of picture-images as part of memory and meaning. Other pictures that might rank in the same league in terms of importance are the fraternal kiss between de Gaulle and Adenauer after the signing of the Franco-German Treaty in the Elysée palace in 1963, and U.S. president John F. Kennedy at the Rathaus Schöneberg in Berlin proclaiming the well known reasons for his pride in being a Berliner.

There is another, mainly French Franco-German image, or sequence of pictures, which pertains to this sec-

Irrespective of whether or not the gesture came spontaneously, the two statesmen, just as their predecessors de Gaulle and Adenauer, were quite aware of the symbolic content of what they did. The symbolic holding of hands was at once the documentation of a past sealed, and an expression of the value of the present's close relations between the two states and peoples, interwoven and interconnected. And the gesture carried a promise for the future, as an encouragement and announcement that this relationship would bear more and new fruits in the time ahead. That Mitterrand and Kohl understood their gesture as such is clearly demonstrated by Mitterrand's response to a reporter's question some five years later. Reviving a tradition of the Fourth Republic, Mitterrand gave a press conference in the Elysée palace in May 1989, where he was again asked about the issues and state of affairs in Franco-German relations. His answer to one of the questions is particularly telling:

Question: On the walls in Paris one sees these days a rather beautiful poster that shows you hand in hand with the Federal Chancellor Kohl. Does the Franco-German cooperation function as well as this poster makes one suspect?

Mitterrand: That is a photograph which was taken in Verdun at an important ceremony of which you surely have heard. It is a momentary snapshot, but this momentary snapshot indeed follows suit with the continuity of more than 35 years of French and German politics. One should draw no exaggerated conclusions, and yet, it is, after all, a symbolic picture, and symbols are not unimportant. We are constantly talking to each other, we constantly straighten things out; but that takes place in a climate of trust.¹¹⁸

Historian Horst Möller views the scene through a similar prism:

When the two leading statesmen of France and the Federal Republic of Germany, President François Mitterrand and Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl stand hand in hand in front of the grave fields near Verdun on 22 September 1984, they document the reconciliation at one of the most tragic locations of the common history, a location where as hardly anywhere else one becomes aware to what a degree Germans and French are not only separated, but also united by a common destiny. With this symbolic act, Kohl and Mitterrand turn a place of separation in animosity of the two nations into one of common mourning, common destiny: They declare that both nations have drawn their conclusions from history to put an end

tion's argument. This is the memory of Kohl's tears in the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris in January 1996 during the requiem mass in honor of former president François Mitterrand, who had died a few days before on 8 January. The mass was transmitted live on French and German television, and an extraordinarily large French audience watched as the cathedral in the heart of Paris was filled with the world's political leaders and dignitaries. One could see many sad faces during that broadcast, but the camera kept returning to Helmut Kohl with visible tears for his long-time companion shown again and again. Strikingly, the deep etching of the image has remained a powerful presence in the French collective memory. Compare, for example Audibert 1998, 58. Kohl's repeated statement that Europe not only had lost a great statesman, but that he himself had lost a close friend whom he had addressed and talked about as "François," may have cemented the engraving. The picture is known in Germany too, although less present than it is in France. In short, this is another picture or memory that produces, perpetuates, transports Franco-German meaning.

¹¹⁸ Mitterrand 1989, 351.

to the fratricidal fights, and to turn the view to the joint design of the future.¹¹⁹

It is important to grasp the epistemic quantum leap that Kohl and Mitterrand symbolically express: They symbolize *joint* Franco-German mourning of their *common* dead, of losses and wounds that they have both suffered and jointly inflicted upon each other. Having killed each other, first, may usher in a shared social meaning of revenge and resentment (as after 1871 and 1918). Second, in a state of reconciliation or rapprochement, it may lead to a mutual sense of forgiving. The third interpretation of past killing, however, is of yet another quality: it is the sense of having hurt oneself by having killed each other of a collective identity, however weak, which Kohl and Mitterrand symbolize.

In Verdun, history has drawn its own elliptic epilogue: At the location where on 11 August 843 Charlemagne's grandsons had sealed the loss of unity by splitting up the empire in an agreement named "Treaty of Verdun," and where more than a thousand years later the family members of the two lines had fought and killed each other the most fiercely and most thoroughly, the trenches and the battlefields no longer separate the two large Carolingian heirs. Now, the communal commemoration of their common dead binds them together.

Self-Referentialism: Commemorating de Gaulle and Adenauer (July and September 1987). Three years after the memorable Kohl-Mitterrand encounter in Verdun, just before the Elysée Treaty's twenty-fifth anniversary, it had been a quarter century since Adenauer and de Gaulle had undertaken their extended trips to each others' sides of the Rhine. Making reference to the meaning-generating and "identity-producing" trips of 1962, on 5 July 1987 Kohl and Prime Minister Chirac together visited de Gaulle's tomb in the village cemetery in Colombey-les-

¹¹⁹ Möller 1998, 59. For a rich and detailed essay on Verdun's history and symbolic significance fully in support of the argument here, see Krumeich 1995. Krumeich calls Verdun "the point of departure toward a new type of common Franco-German memory," and the act of 1984 of an "immense symbolic range." Krumeich 1995, 139. For an account of the symbolic handshake that in some ways diverges from the virtual unanimity of all accounts cited here, see Soeffner 1992, 180-185 and 190-193. Soeffner, however, agrees on the broad basics, namely that the handshake was a "ritually outstanding scene," that the soldiers' cemetery of Verdun is a "ritually occupied space," and that this space became associated with Franco-German "reconciliation and later also with friendship." Soeffner 1992, cf. 180-181. My thanks to Darius Zifonun for bringing this essay to my attention.

Deux-Églises.¹²⁰ On the same day chancellor and prime minister together participated in a mass in Reims in celebration of the Franco-German friendship.¹²¹ On the following day, 6 July 1987, the first common Franco-German military officers' seminar was held at the *Ecole Militaire* in Paris.¹²² And on 19 September 1987, in Kohl and Chirac's presence, young French and Germans jointly demonstrated in Ludwigsburg, commemorating de Gaulle's visit there and his speech to German youth on 9 September 1962.¹²³ Then, the old president spoke of the Franco-German "wholly natural solidarity that of course needs to be organized."¹²⁴ A quarter century later, there is a good dose of Franco-German self-referentialism at work. Such self-referentialism, too, reproduces and perpetuates a relationship's meaning and purpose.

V. Accumulation, Reproduction, Change

Symbolic practices are not designed to solve political problems or to directly formulate interests or positions. Instead, such practices engender meaning and purpose in the relations among states, providing social content in the international sphere. Constructing normality, providing references for the success of specific actions, and shaping rudiments of international collective identity, symbols generate meaning and social purpose that help to frame state interests and foster stability and order.

Without comprehending its symbolic practices, their nature, status, and effects, the Franco-German relationship of the 20th century's last four decades cannot be adequately understood, nor can its meaning and purpose be properly captured. Neglecting such symbols, and the social meaning that they contribute, means ignoring a major ingredient of a fundamental structural element of post-war European affairs.

Endurance of meaning does not preclude change, either of it or within it. Such change may be abrupt. More commonly, however, meaning-structures change when their perpetuation patterns transform gradually over time. The reproduction of meaning, while ongoing, is never entirely uniform, but usually implies piecemeal mutation.

At the same time, there seems to be the possibility of accumulation over time. Many European observers seem to think along such lines when they speak of France and Germany

¹²⁰ Ziebur 1997, 329.

¹²¹ Deutsch-Französisches Institut and Deutsche Frankreich-Bibliothek 1995 (and after), 92.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ See Chirac 1988; Deutsch-Französisches Institut and Deutsche Frankreich-Bibliothek 1995 (and after), 93.

as an “old marriage” or “old couple.” Perhaps there are a few occurrences, such as Kohl and Mitterrand’s holding hands in Verdun in 1984, that stand out. Afterwards things are not quite the same as they were before. But such events, too, need to be remembered in order to be part of a shared understanding and purpose. If collectively forgotten, they are no longer part of the relationship’s meaning-structure.

Shared meaning and collective memory need to be reproduced in order to continue to exist. If the processes that perpetuate them cease or undergo dramatic changes, or if shared understandings and purposes are forgotten or fundamentally reinterpreted, meaning-structures will decay, disappear, or transform. In this sense, the institutionalized meaning between France and Germany is a social structure like the Cold War: if it is no longer reproduced, it is over. After centuries of rivalry among French and German political entities, “hereditary enmity” from 1871 to 1945, and some fifteen years of *réconciliation* following World War II, the dominant Franco-German meaning from the late 1950s on, too, is not given by nature. Taking on some historical raw material, it is a social construction that is human-made. And as other social constructions it needs to be re-made in order to endure. Unless re-created, it is bound to disappear.

¹²⁴ de Gaulle 1970a, 16.

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Abstract

The relationship between France and Germany after World War II was transformed by the efforts of several influential leaders. These leaders – de Gaulle and Adenauer most prominent among them – engaged in symbolic acts that generated meaning and social purpose for the two states' relationship. Overcoming their countries' history of enmity and war, these leaders institutionalized the relationship as an end in itself. Later leaders, and then many representatives of the French and German governments, continually reproduced this social meaning so that France and Germany became known as the “tandem,” “couple,” and “pair.” Despite the importance of such symbolic practices, international relations scholarship lacks the conceptual tools to capture them and their meaning, and to grasp their effects. In this paper, I build upon existing constructivist thought to elaborate the concept of “pre-dominantly symbolic acts and practices among states,” and argue that symbols generate and perpetuate social meaning and purpose in the international sphere. With this concept, I explore the specific meaning of the bilateral Franco-German post-war relationship, scrutinize the symbolic acts with which it initially emerged, analyze the practices that have reproduced and perpetuated it, and examine

the effects that it has engendered. The conceptual addition that this paper offers provides the means to construct a coherent narrative out of the past half century's manifold symbolic Franco-German acts, to comprehend the connectedness of these varied episodes and pieces, and to appreciate the social meaning and characteristic effects of these symbolic practices in their entirety.