

**Investigative approach in relation to the 2004 NSU bomb attack in Cologne**  
**Report**

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Raffaella Lanza Bugeño

Cologne, Germany

[rlanzabu@proton.me](mailto:rlanzabu@proton.me)

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The present report is presented as an explorative investigation around different fields intersecting to cultivate a poli-perspectival-view on the events occurred in the Keupstrasse in Cologne from 2004 until the present day.

Spatial research and evidence for numerous human rights investigations and prosecutions have been already provided by Institutions like Forensic Architecture(FA), a research agency, based at Goldsmiths, University of London. This work has served as theoretical background on hybrid research methods for this project.

Situated testimony has been used by researchers as a *method of gathering testimony that occurs in-situ*<sup>1</sup>. For the case, the so called, situated testimony has a very important role on understanding affected communities and specific socio-political contexts. Technology is as much part of the analysis as the statements regarding what happened in Keupsstrasse, allowing to serve as digital infrastructure to answer relevant questions implied in collective consciousness as well as subjectivities shaped by such violent attack.

The present project is not just gathering data since events of such psychological dimension could not be reduced to purely their instrumental capacity, I link it to collective analytical process (there is a range of phycological approaches to mention here but the focus relies on cognitive and clinical psychology).

<sup>1</sup> Common sensing, CRA press (2025)

## **Investigative framework**

The first breakthroughs in the investigation came from footage captured by a surveillance camera, located just around the corner and had filmed a man (confirmed identity of Uwe Mundlos) riding a bicycle past the headquarters shortly before the attack.

On the luggage rack was a hard-shell suitcase containing the nail bomb. That is the most well known picture we have so far. Mundlos parked this bicycle in front of the Özcan hair salon. Earlier, Böhnhardt can be seen pushing two mountain bikes down the street; these are the bicycles the two men used to flee the scene after the bomb exploded.

For years, the nationwide investigation into the attacks carried out by the National Socialist Underground focused almost exclusively on organized crime and on alleged personal

motives within the victims' social circles. Files that are crucial piece of evidence on this discriminative strategy and the attack itself, that is footage, official records (Akten), photographs, and other forms of institutional documentation have been rendered inaccessible.

The question I aim to answer becomes particularly urgent in contexts where a state bears responsibility for confronting and acknowledging structural racism. When the mentioned official records and other forms of institutional documentation has been deliberately destroyed due to rigid networks of individuals or institutions resisting the exposure of truth.

This investigation thus engages with the next question:

**How can a series of events be reconstructed when the remaining data has been deliberately destroyed or rendered inaccessible?**

The investigation thus set out to examine not only the violent act of the bomb attack, but also the subsequent institutional failure on investigate it and possible cover-up as violations of people's rights.

## **Premise**

As an independent and interested part in researching about the topic, I do not aim to provide legal evidence to the police nor the courts. I aim to call for open and impartial registration of the event, including the role of authorities and the police in the interrogations and investigation.

I quote the guidelines of the CRA: "The state did not invent research; research is a basic component of being alive. It is dedicating continuous attention to something to produce shareable knowledge. You find instances of research everywhere[...] We should expand the spectrum of what constitutes research vis-à-vis the multiplicity of lines the struggle that we're trying to grapple with"

I make use of testimonies and published media to produce a general picture of the narratives surrounding the bomb attack and from this collectiveness extract the psychological knowledge that could probably answer to my question, and to share this beyond spaces of academia.

## **Methodology**

## ***Discursive Mapping***

The remaining evidence does not vanish, but persists within human experience itself: in memory.

I propose that individual memories can be gathered and articulated into a form of collective memory, allowing for a multiperspectival reconstruction of events. Such a reconstruction does not seek a single, fixed narrative, but rather examines how events reside within the collective consciousness and what meanings emerge from their convergence.

Human memory, segmented and examined psychologically, offers an exposition of the truth of the events encoded in these testimonies. Not as abstract data, but as lived and situated evidence

From this emerges my central proposition: digital infrastructures can shape this collective memory by organizing the discursive field, exposing institutional silences as well.

I use a grid to visualize and map the collective discursiveness around the attack, the grid follows a categorization system in which I color coded specific data: gender, presence by the time of the attack, the anatomy of memory involved when retrieving specific information.

While memory is selective and its verbal expression may change over time, truth does not rely solely on factual precision. It is also embedded in the emotional and affective dimensions of experience. This approach is not speculative; it is grounded in established psychological analysis. Memory is defined as the faculty of the mind through which information is encoded, stored, and retrieved over time, influencing future actions.

Within this framework, declarative, or explicit memory, is the conscious storage and recollection of data. Under declarative memory resides semantic and episodic memory. Semantic memory refers to memory that is encoded with specific meaning. Non declarative or implicit memory is the unconscious storage and recollection of information, and shows that not all memory is consciously activated. Sensory memory holds information, derived from the senses, less than one second after an item is perceived. *“The ability to look at an item and remember what it looked like with just a split second of observation, or memorization, is an example of sensory memory. Memory is not a perfect processor for example pain affect memory, and that express itself in narrative”*. This research focuses on how memories interact at a collective narrative level, and how shared meanings are produced through their articulation.

By analyzing the semantic of the statements and metadata regarding the relationship of specific words and physical experiences to psychological procedures, I classify statements that are explicitly a memory into the different types of human memory.

For that I designed a system of 3 axis :

### **Axis 1 — Memory system**

Explicit memory / Declarative memory

- Episodic memory
- Semantic memory

Implicit memory / Non-declarative memory

- Procedural memory
- Classical conditioning (conditioned memory)
- Priming
- Emotional memory (also: affective memory)

### **Axis 2 — Encoding modality**

- Somatic perceptual (also: bodily, proprioceptive)
- Somatic motor
- Verbal-semantic

### **Axis 3 — Processing state**

- Raw sensory impression
- Non-consolidated
- Narratively consolidated
- Reconstructed

Ultimately, this project understands memory not as a record of the past, but as an active force shaping the future. Since the future is not an exact repetition of the past, simulation of future episodes requires a complex system that can draw on the past in a manner that flexibly extracts and recombines elements of previous experiences, that is a constructive rather than a reproductive system. By opening a window into collective memory, I seek to

influence how society understands responsibility, historical accountability, and the enduring impact of racialized violence, specifically within the context of German society.

The interface translation was achieved through iteration and feedback from my supervisors. I am open to receive any other feedback and any other contribution.

### **Possible evaluation**

The current state of the investigation is far from the final results. The work of gathering data is still on process according to the data that emerges and the infrastructure serves as a glimpse of how the investigation could evolve.

There are a few considerations at this point:

When analyzing witness testimony following a traumatic event, the core challenge is that trauma disrupts the normal architecture of memory meaning the standard assumptions about how memory works in legal or clinical contexts no longer hold cleanly.

Testimony is always a reconstruction, not a playback. Every time a memory is retrieved, it is slightly altered, this is called reconsolidation. In trauma, this effect is amplified because the original encoding was already incomplete or distorted by the stress response. There are some people that could even feel unable to give any declaration or want to remain in silence due to the emotional dysregulation.

A witness to a highly traumatic event may have:

- Vivid, intrusive sensory fragments (implicit, emotional)
- Non-linear narrative structure (explicit, episodic)
- Filling gaps with plausible but unverified information

The interview context matters enormously, meaning how testimony is collected shapes what is recovered. Leading questions, repeated interviews, suggestive framing, and time elapsed since the event all influence what the witness eventually reports.

### **Limitation to this analysis**

Testimony and declarations rarely map cleanly onto a single cell. A single classification per statement is way more a way to show the predominant type of memory rather than introduce artificial precision.

Working with published media, not with the people involved is another limitation. A full clinical assessment would include behavioral observation during retrieval although some audiovisuals offer it, body language, emotional dysregulation, pauses, voice changes play a big role. Text strips all of that out, leaving only the linguistic residue. The analysis has predominantly more witnesses statements since it is very rarely to find declarations from the police or authorities.

Consolidation state is partly a function of time. If the statements come from witnesses interviewed at different points after the event as it is the case, some days later, some years later, I am comparing memories at very different stages of consolidation, which the classification does not automatically correct for.

Witnesses who were present at the explosion but who experienced its aftermath and gave no declarations about discrimination, police suspicion, social rupture, show trauma encoding patterns that do not map onto the acute-event model this classification was built around.