

GERMAN MUSINGS

- Notes on a sojourn, spring/summer 2013 and memories from the 50s., 60s and 80s

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Ronald G Young

2015

Introduction

My Relationship with Germany

Germany and I have form - it must have been 1955 or so that my father took me to the Detmold area for a few summer weeks as part of a reconciliation mission with the German Lutheran Church with which he shared links as a Scottish pastor. My memory as a 13-year old is of kindnessand generous houses surrounded by birch trees.....it clearly influenced my (unusual) choice of German as a third language at both school and university although I did switch from modern languages to politics and economics in my third and fourth years....

In 1961 I was in Berlin en route for Poland (for a student work camp) and then watched from my train the Russian tanks heading into the city as I made my return journey into East Berlin at the end of August. 1962 saw me in Gottingen University for a few summer weeks of language study; and I spent a couple of months in Berlin again in 1964 on a student exchange in the Robert Bosch Elektronik GmbH company which helped open up German culture further for me

I was to make several other visits to Berlin in the 80s (courtesy of various EC networks) - once staying with a German Professor of urban studies. I also had brief but one-to-one meetings with [two great German Presidents](#) - [Richard von Weizsacker](#) and [Johannes Rau](#).

Weizsacker was a Christian Democrat and President 1984-1994 and West Berlin Mayor 1981-84. Rau was a Social Democrat; President 1999-2004 and Head of the huge RheinWestphalen Land (Region) from 1978-98. I was lucky enough to meet both of these men informally and can therefore vouch personally for the humility they brought to their role. Weizsacker was holidaying in Scotland and popped in quietly to pay his respects to the leader of the Regional Council. As the (elected) Secretary to the majority party, I had private access to the Leader's office and stumbled in on their meeting.

Rau I also came across when in a Duisberg hotel on Council business. He was not then the President - but I recognised him when he came in with his wife and a couple of assistants, introduced myself (as a fellow social democrat); gave him a gift book on my Region which I happened to be carrying and was rewarded with a chat.

Then there was [Tisa von der Schulenburg](#) - Prussian aristocrat, nun and artist in 1920s Berlin who supported her brother in the plot to assassinate Hitler. I Tisa met a few years before her death (at 97!) at an exhibition (in Duisberg I think) of the sketches she had done in the 1939s of the Durham miners to which I had dropped in completely by accident during some European networking. I write later below about this experience....

I was incredibly fortunate in being offered in 1990 an amazing 6 month experience visiting most of the capitals of the newly independent countries of central and east Europe - after which I joined a small Berlin energy company which employed me to be the Director of its EC Energy Centre in Prague. This involved quite a



few drives from Prague via Dresden and Berlin (the HQ of the company) and to towns such as Leipzig (where I actually delivered a paper in German!) and Goerlitz and to the progressive Danish energy projects - with return visits to see the delights of places such as the Sans Souci Palace in Potsdam.

But I had imagined that I was part of a network of equals when it became increasingly clear to me that the (EU funded) network was pushing the interests of Western companies. It was the Head of that company who responded memorably to one of my many critiques by saying "we do not pay you to think - but to obey!!"

Despite that experience, I worked for 2 years (in Kyrgyzstan) for another small German company and, finally but much more briefly, in China in early 2010 for Germany's International Aid Agency - whose bureaucratic double-reporting system was one of several factors which persuaded me to make an early exit.....

Why Koln?

I have been out of the UK for 25 years - spending about 2 years apiece living and working in about a dozen countries on projects designed to improve the capacity of their state institutions. I was in Bulgaria in early 2013 when I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and had to decide where to go for appropriate treatment.

But first I had to learn more about the condition and its treatment - which helped me understand that the surgical treatments which had become routine were now being questioned - not just because of their invasive nature but because there was every probability that the symptoms would reappear after a few years....

As an expat Brit I quickly ruled out that country - partly for the delays trying to go as a citizen without medical records would entail but also because the French and German health systems were performing better (in general terms) in the various international league tables (not least WHO). I also wanted to go to a country whose language I spoke.

I narrowed the search to hospitals which seemed to have a good record for treating prostate cancer and sent off some queries....The French hospitals were quickly ruled out for two reasons -

- Their focus seemed to be on surgery and I was determined to avoid that
- They required bureaucratic paperwork which annoyed me

The West German Prostate Centre (Koln) simply asked me to send electronic copies of the diagnosis I had received and quickly gave a detailed commentary which persuaded me that this was the place to go. A few weeks later, on the first of May I touched down in Koln and remained there until mid-July - undergoing initially daily radiation treatment and then three minor operations.....

Time weighed - but Daniela and I were lucky in the choice of flat we had made - even although it involved a couple of moves....

We were in the outskirts - with great parks to walk in (the cemetery was our favourite); trams to ride; and bookshops to visit.....Unhappily, however, we found few people to talk with - apart from our last landlord.....

When I eventually was able to connect with the internet, I started to blog and surf again (the habit had started in 2009) and that is what forms the core of this little offering....

I hardly mention Koln in these posts - let alone the treatment I was undergoing. This was rather an opportunity to sink into another culture - using the immediate environment as a trigger for questions and casual insights..... One of my delights, for example, was the open-air charity stall near my treatment which offered free second-books.....

Getting Under the Skin

Tourism is one of the biggest global industries and yet gives us few real opportunities to fathom the soul of a country - although a retired generation is now beginning to experience some of the treasures which Europe offers.....and some publishing houses such as [The Collected Traveler](#), The Intercultural Press and [Cities of the Imagination](#) do offer books with great insights....

Those, however, committed to real cultural exchange have networks such as Quaker-based Servas or more functional ones which offer Home Exchanges.

It is in that spirit that this booklet is offered - the latest indeed in what is becoming a series of mine - which started in serious when my daughters started to visit me in Romania and Bulgaria from which came these cultural guides -

- [Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#) (2014)
- [Memory's Veil - lifting the shroud concealing Bulgarian Art](#) (2015) and
- [Memory's Veil - vol II](#) which built on my 2012 booklet [Introducing the Bulgarian Realists](#)

But my cultural explorations arguably started earlier - with such things as -

- [Administrative Reform with Chinese Characteristics](#) (2011)
- [The Independence Argument - home thoughts from abroad](#) (2014)

What follows are simply the initial notes of what I hope is an intelligent, curious traveler and reader who had the good luck to have a compassionate father; great Scottish state schooling in the immediate post-war period; opportunities to visit and revisit Germany; and is good at hyperlinks.....

The notes start in 2012.....

Understanding Germany



First - on the eve of the German-Greek football match - have a look at [this side-splitting Monty Python clip of a German-Greece football match](#) - whose members consist almost entirely ofphilosophers!!

Who do you read when you want to get under the skin of a country - and don't have the opportunity to go and live there?

In the 1960s we had Alistair Cooke for the USA; Luigi Barzini for the Italians; in the 1970s Richard Cobb and John Ardagh for France; in the 1980s Theodor Zeldin for France, John Ardagh for Germany - and Eric Newby and Norman Lewis for the rest of the globe!

France and Italy have become popular tourist destinations for the reading classes since then and created the market for a lot of books - [most of the slightly mocking sort about rural life](#) pioneered by Peter Mayle (Ginsborg's 1990 [History of Contemporary Italy: society and politics 1943-1980](#); The [Dark Heart of Italy](#) by Tobias Jones; and [The Pursuit of Italy](#) by David Gilmour are honourable exceptions).

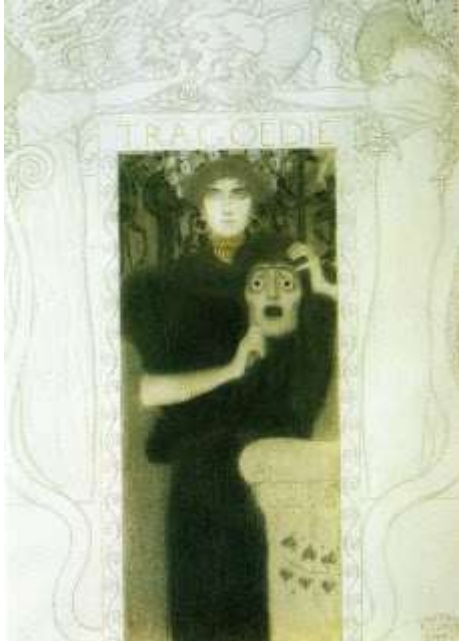
But HOW do you best get under the skin is perhaps an even more important question.

- Through historical recitations?
- Through [literary and cultural explorations](#)?
- Through textbooks on political systems?
- Or perhaps by a combination of these - eg the superb Peter Robb's "Midnight in Sicily" (which focussed on politics, the mafia and food); or "Molotov's Magic Lantern" on which I commented recently?

Despite the role and significance of Germany over the past century and in present times, any visitor to that country who wanted a good briefing had a stark choice - heavy academic histories or the Rough Guide. John Ardagh's voluminous and highly readable "Germany and the Germans" has been sadly out of the print for more than a decade. The situation has improved in recent years with Peter Watson's *German Genius* and Simon Winder's [Germania - a personal history of Germans Ancient and Modern](#). (for summary of latter see page 14 below)

22 June 2012

The Politics of Cultural Despair



A [very thoughtful blog](#) reminds us how anti-liberalism poisoned the politics of Weimar Germany and paved the way for Nazism. The post summarises something else written in the 1960s - *The Politics of Cultural Despair* - which looked closely at the ideas of three writers whose [critique of modernity](#) in the late 19th century, the author (Fritz Stern) argued, prepared the mental ground for the acceptance of Nazism.

The central focus of this cultural criticism was the fact of modernity - liberalism, secularism, Manchesterism, consumptionism, and individualism. These were conservative critics; they favored an earlier time that was more traditional, moral, hierarchical, and religious. They preferred villages and towns to cities; they preferred cultivated thinkers to merchants and professionals, and they feared the rise of the proletariat.

By liberalism they meant to encompass several ideas: individualism, self-interest, parliamentary government, and glorification of commerce and the market. And their criticisms were unswerving:

they hoped to turn back all of the liberal democratic and industrial transformations that modern Europe was undergoing.

The movement did embody a paradox: its followers sought to destroy the despised present in order to recapture an idealized past in an imaginary future. They were disinherited conservatives, who had nothing to conserve, because the spiritual values of the past had largely been buried and the material remnants of conservative power did not interest them. They sought a breakthrough to the past, and they longed for a new community in which old ideas and institutions would once again command universal allegiance.

The conservative revolutionaries denounced every aspect of the capitalistic society and its putative materialism. They railed against the spiritual emptiness of life in an urban, commercial civilization, and lamented the decline of intellect and virtue in a mass society. They attacked the press as corrupt, the political parties as the agents of national dissension, and the new rulers as ineffectual mediocrities. The bleaker their picture of the present, the more attractive seemed the past, and they indulged in nostalgic recollections of the uncorrupted life of earlier rural communities, when men were peasants and kings true rulers.

Fritz Stern, the author, is a marvellous historian born in Breslau/Wroclaw in 1926 who escaped to America in 1938 and wrote a powerful autobiography essay which I read a few years back with great pleasure and benefit - [Five Germanies I have known](#). He is a highly engaging character - as you can see both from his book and [this video of him introducing it](#)

Watching the video reminded me of the great interviews Clive James has on his website - and I liked his short piece attacking the rebranding which Britain's privatised railway companies carried out you can see half-way through (3 mins 50 secs to be precise) [this video interview about George Orwell](#).

Coming to terms with evil



We Scots have had a special relationship with Europe - the North Sea, for example, gave us special access to Russia and Poland in medieval times. Our architects left their marks in Tsarist Russia - and our traders established a quarter in Gdansk which was still active recently. And the Protestant faith was also a factor which created links with (North) Germany.

My father was one of a few Scottish pastors who developed a "Reconciliation" mission in the post-war period there - focussing on Detmold, Heiligenkirchen and Bad Meinberg areas in Nord-Rhein Westphalia. He took us with him on at least one trip there in the mid 1950s and it is to this I owe my (mainland) European orientation and (in all probability) the direction my life has taken - particularly in the past 20 years in central Europe and Central Asia.

One of my fond family memories is my father wading through the various parts of the weekend Die Zeit newspaper - printed on special thin but glossy paper - which was flown over to him. Not surprisingly I excelled at German and French at school - and started out on a language degree at University (which I changed half-way through to an Economics and Politics one)

In 1961 I ventured to a Polish student work-camp - via Berlin - and will never forget the sight from the train of a still-bombed out Breslau (Wroclaw).

The next year I spent some weeks at a summer school at Gottingen University - where I was introduced to the post-war stories of Heinrich Boell.

In 1964 I spent 2 months living and working in Berlin (thanks to AISEC) where I encountered for the first time the fervour of an old Nazi - the mother of my girlfriend of the time.

For these various reasons, I have had a particular fascination with the issue of how the Germans have tried to come to terms with the terrifying social transformation of the Nazi period. One of my treasured possessions during a 1980s visit was a collection of letters written by ordinary Germans trying to make sense of what was going on around them in the early and mid 1930s.

After an initial period of silence, it appeared that by the 1980s the schools were making a good job of helping the new generation face us to their past.



German historian Moritz Pfeiffer asked his granddad what he did in World War II, and then fact-checked the testimony. [His findings in a new book](#) shed light on a dying generation that remains outwardly unrepentant, but is increasingly willing to break decades of silence on how, and why, it followed Hitler -

Germany has won praise for collectively confronting its Nazi past, but the subject has remained a taboo in millions of family homes -- with children and grandchildren declining to press their elders on what they did in the war. At least 20 to 25 million Germans knew about the Holocaust while it was happening, according to conservative estimates, and some 10 million fought on the Eastern Front in a war of annihilation that targeted civilians from the start. That, says German historian Moritz Pfeiffer, makes the genocide and the crimes against humanity a part of family history.

Time is running out. The answer to how a cultured, civilized nation stooped so low lies in the minds of the dying Third Reich generation, many of whom are ready and willing to talk at the end of their lives, says Pfeiffer, 29, who has just completed an unprecedented research project based on his own family.

"The situation has changed radically compared with the decades immediately after the war," Pfeiffer, a historian at a museum on the SS at Wewelsburg Castle, told SPIEGEL ONLINE. "The generation of eyewitnesses evidently wants to talk now, at least that's my impression. Towards the end of one's life the distance to the events is so great that people are ready to give testimony."

"Immediately after the war, conversations about it between parents and children appear to have been impossible because it was all too fresh," Pfeiffer continued. "Now the problem is that no one is listening to that generation anymore. As a source of information, one's relatives are largely being ignored. But one day it will be too late."

New Approach to Questioning Relatives

Oral history has become increasingly popular, even though personal reminiscences are chronically unreliable as they are distorted by time. But Pfeiffer took a new approach by interviewing his two maternal grandparents about what they did in the war, and then systematically checking their statements using contemporary sources such as letters and army records.

No one has done this before.

He juxtaposed his findings with context from up-to-date historical research on the period and wrote a book that has shed new light on the generation that unquestioningly followed Hitler, failed to own up to its guilt in the immediate aftermath of the war and, more than six decades on, remains unable to express personal remorse for the civilian casualties of Hitler's war of aggression, let alone for the Holocaust.

His recently published book, "My Grandfather in the War 1939-1945," (published in German only) is based on the interviews he conducted in 2005 with his grandfather, named only as Hans Hermann K., who was a career officer in a Wehrmacht infantry regiment. His grandmother Edith was too ill to be interviewed at length but he analyzed many of her letters. Both died in 2006. Both of them supported the Nazi regime and Pfeiffer admits that they were morally "contaminated," like millions of ordinary Germans of that generation. He describes his grandmother Edith as a "committed, almost fanatical Nazi."

'No One Can Say What They Would Have Done'

But the project wasn't an attempt to pass judgment on his grandparents, says Pfeiffer. He only wanted to understand them. "No one today can say what they would have done or thought at the time," he said. "I believe that people will learn a lot if they understand how their respected and loved parents or grandparents behaved in the face of a totalitarian dictatorship and murderous racial ideology," Pfeiffer said. "Dealing with one's family history in the Nazi period in an open, factual and self-critical way is an important contribution to accepting democracy and avoiding a repeat of what happened between 1933 and 1945."

Hans Hermann K. was so good at goosestepping that he was briefly transferred to a parade unit in Berlin. Edith joined the Nazi Party and was so zealous that when she married Hans Hermann in 1943, she provided documentation tracing her Aryan roots all the way back to the early 18th century -- even SS members were "only" required to verify their racial purity back to January 1, 1800.

During the course of his research, Moritz Pfeiffer found large gaps, contradictions and evasive answers in Hans Hermann's testimony -- regarding his purported ignorance of mass executions of civilians, for example.

Grandfather Fought in France, Poland, Soviet Union

Hans Hermann was a lieutenant in the famous 6th Army and fought in the invasions of Poland, France and the Soviet

Union, where he lost an eye in September 1942 when a shell exploded near him. His wound probably saved his life. Shortly after he was evacuated back to Germany for treatment, his unit was sent to Stalingrad and virtually wiped out. Only 6,000 men survived out of the more than 100,000 that were taken prisoner by the Red Army at Stalingrad.

Few would disagree that Germany as a nation has worked hard to atone for its past, unlike Austria and Japan which have cloaked themselves in denial. Germany has paid an estimated €70 billion in compensation for the suffering it caused, conducts solemn ceremonies to commemorate the victims and, above all, has owned up to what was done in its name.

Companies and government ministries have opened up their archives to historians to illuminate their role in the Third Reich, and a late push in prosecutions of war criminals is underway to make up for the failure to bring them to justice in the decades after the war.

But millions never confronted their own personal role as cogs in the Nazi machinery.

Hans Hermann was no different, even though he readily agreed to talk to his grandson.

He was born in 1921 to an arch-conservative, nationalist family with military traditions in the western city of Wuppertal. His father, a furniture store owner, regaled him with stories about his time as a lieutenant in World War I, and it was instilled in him at an early age that the war reparations of the Versailles Treaty were exaggerated. The store boomed after Hitler took power because the new government provided cheap government loans for married couples to buy kitchen and bedroom furniture.

In the interview, Hans Hermann was frank about his attitude towards Jews in the mid-1930s, when he was in his early teens and a member of the Jungvolk youth organization, which was affiliated with the Hitler Youth. Asked by Moritz whether he thought at the time that the racial laws banning Jews from public life and systematically expropriating their property were unfair, he said: "No, we didn't regard that as injustice, we had to go with the times and the times were like that. The media didn't have the importance then that they do today."

Part 2: 'We Had to Keep Our Mouths Shut'

But Hans Hermann didn't join the Nazi party, and said in 2005 that he opposed the Reichskristallnacht, the Nov. 9, 1938 pogrom organized by the Nazi regime in which thousands of Jewish stores and synagogues were attacked and burned. "That wasn't right. We were angry about the violence and the fire in the synagogue, that wasn't our thing," he said. "That was the SA, that was the SS, we rejected that ... But we couldn't do anything, we had to keep our mouths shut."

Asked about the invasion of Poland and the executions of civilians, Hans Hermann was evasive, at first describing relations between the German army and Poles as "friendly" and saying he knew nothing about mass shootings of Polish civilians at the time.

When pressed by Moritz, however, he admitted he knew about killings being committed by the SS, but added that the Wehrmacht had nothing to do with it -- a typical attitude that reflected the long-held myth that regular German soldiers weren't involved in atrocities.

Pfeiffer said he found his grandfather's indifference to the suffering of the Polish population, 6 million of whom died in the war, "staggering" but, again, typical of the response of many Germans of his generation.

In 1941, Hans Hermann took part in Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union. He was in the Infantry Regiment 208 of the 79th Infantry Division, and he said he knew nothing about criminal orders such as the German army's infamous "Commissar Order" -- that all Soviet political commissars detected among the captured must be killed.

'Hardly Believable'

Asked about the Commissar Order, Hans Hermann said: "I didn't hear anything about that, don't know it. We were behind the combat troops who were the ones taking prisoners."

Pfeiffer refuted the claim that his grandfather's unit took no prisoners. He found the war diary of the 79th Infantry Division which records that 5,088 Russian soldiers were captured between August 5 and August 31 alone. Between September 20 and 25, a further 24,000 were taken prisoner.

Even the ones who weren't shot dead on the spot had a slim chance of survival. More than 3 million of the 5.7 million Red Army soldiers captured by German forces in World War II died, a proportion of almost 60 percent.

Pfeiffer said his grandfather as a front line officer and company commander would have been subject to the order to weed out the political commissars from among captured Red Army soldiers and have them shot. The historian said he couldn't ascertain whether his grandfather ever had to take such a decision. But historical evidence exists that the 79th Infantry division carried out the order.

Also, historians have proven that the 6th Army, which Hans Hermann's division was part of, carried out war crimes and massacres, and assisted in the murder of 33,771 Jews in the ravine of Babi Yar in Ukraine at the end of September 1941.

Pfeiffer said it was "hardly believable" that his grandfather didn't know anything about the mass killings. Hans Hermann also said: "The Bolsheviks were our enemies, that was clear and we had to be guided by that. But those who greeted us with salt and bread on their doorstep, they couldn't be enemies, we treated them well." He didn't say what happened to civilians who didn't greet the troops with salt and bread.

'Spellbound by the Words of the Führer'

Pfeiffer's book also presents letters written by his grandmother Edith that showed her ardent support for Hitler. On Nov. 8, 1943, she wrote to her husband after hearing Hitler speak: "I am still totally spellbound by the words of the Führer that were stirring and inspiring as ever! I glow with enthusiasm ... One feels strong enough to tear out trees."

In his interview, Hans Hermann expressed criticism of the Allied bombings of German cities. "How could that be possible, against the civilian population!" He made no mention of German bombing attacks on Rotterdam and Coventry in 1940.

He was taken prisoner by American forces in Metz, France, in October 1944 and didn't see his wife again until March 1946.

Pfeiffer concluded that his grandfather wasn't lying outright in his interviews, but merely doing what millions of Germans had done after the war -- engaging in denial, playing down their role to lessen their responsibility. It led to the convenient myth in the immediate aftermath of the war that the entire nation had been duped by a small clique of criminals who bore sole responsibility for the Holocaust -- and that ordinary Germans had themselves been victims.

Germany has long since jettisoned that fallacy. But Pfeiffer admits that his book didn't answer a key question about his loving, kind grandparents who were pillars of his family for decades.

"Why did the humanity of my grandparents not rebel against the mass murders and why didn't my grandfather, even in his interview in 2005, concede guilt or shame or express any sympathy for the victims?"

'Moral Insanity'

When asked whether he felt that he shared any of the collective guilt for the Holocaust, Hans Hermann said: "No. That is no guilt collectively. No group is levelling this collective guilt, it's differentiated today, in historical research as well. The individual guilt of people and groups is being researched."

Pfeiffer writes that his grandparents were infected by the same "moral insanity" that afflicted many Germans during and after World War I: "A state of emotional coldness, a lack of self-criticism and absolute egotism combined with a strong deficit of moral judgment as well as the support, acceptance and justification of cruelty when the enemy was affected by it."

Those are damning words. Pfeiffer said his grandparents' generation probably had no choice but to suppress their guilt in order to keep on functioning in the hard post-war years when all their energy was focused on rebuilding their livelihoods. "It was a necessary human reaction," said Pfeiffer.

The *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* -- the confrontation with the past -- got a much-needed push with the 1968 student protests. For many, the atonement didn't come fast enough. German author Ralph Giordano referred to the "Second Guilt" in a book he wrote in 1987 -- the reluctance to own up to the crimes, and the ability of Nazi perpetrators to prosper in postwar West Germany.

Pfeiffer hopes his book will encourage other children and grandchildren of eyewitnesses to follow suit. "I think conversations like the ones I carried out will bring relatives together rather than drive a wedge between them," he said.

Pfeiffer's original intention had been just to write a family history for personal use. After he interviewed his grandfather, he edited the transcript and presented it to the family at Christmas in 2005.

'Non-Verbal Admissions of Guilt'

But he had noticed omissions in his grandfather's testimony and had asked him to submit to a second, more rigorous interview in summer 2006. Hans Hermann agreed. Unfortunately, Moritz never got the chance to conduct it. Edith died in June that year after a long illness. Overcome by grief, Hans Hermann died six weeks later.

Asked how he thinks his grandfather would have reacted to his book, Pfeiffer said: "I think he would have initially been shocked about the unsparing presentation of his life story and wouldn't exactly have been delighted at my critical comments and conclusions. "But I think he would have spent a long time examining it and would acknowledge the factual analysis and the fact that I wasn't trying to discredit him or settle any scores."

Pfeiffer sees a big difference between what the dying generation is able to articulate and what it is actually feeling. He detected what he called "non-verbal admissions of guilt" in his grandfather's behavior. After the war, Hans Hermann encouraged his daughter to learn French and hosted French pupils on exchange programs. He also supported the European integration policy of Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle, and avoided going to veterans' reunions.

In 2005, he was outraged at first by a research report Pfeiffer co-wrote at the University of Freiburg about the involvement of the Wehrmacht in war crimes. A few weeks later, however, he told his grandson: "I have thought a lot about it -- and there's some truth to it."

Moritz Pfeiffer: "Mein Großvater im Krieg 1939-1945. Erinnerung und Fakten im Vergleich". Donat-Verlag, Bremen 2012, 216 Seiten

13 April 2012

The torture of choice

For the past decade I haven't been able to decide where to live - a condition the Germans call "Die Qual der Wahl", the torture of choice.

I've lived in more than ten countries since I left Scotland in 1990. Since leaving Kyrgyzstan in 2007 I seem to have settled down - dividing my time between Bulgaria (where I had a couple of projects); Transylvania (where I have a mountain house); and Bucharest where I have access to a very small flat. But I need a flat in a city I enjoy - with proper space for my paintings and artefacts. And time is running out!



Scotland is ruled out for its weather; I tried the French (or rather Brittany) rural market briefly (in 2010) but realised that, much as I love the French language and culture, I did not need another rural place. I then considered, for their cultural treasures, Brussels and Vienna - but they are too pricey. At the moment I find Sofia the best location (I currently rent a place there); but have, for the past month, been in Koln - receiving medical treatment which is scheduled to finish in mid-July. Occasionally I have wondered about Germany as a place to retire to...

Much as I appreciate German culture and society, my experience so far would not suggest this as an option. It is simply too expensive (although I notice that property in many parts of Germany can still be bought at reasonable prices); the shopping experiences are too bland; and the Rheinland anyway far too cold and damp. I miss my Balkan vegetables and warmth! Little wonder that so many sunbed and physiotherapy services are on offer here!

Of course I am impressed with the neatness of residential areas (so much "touching up" going on); the profusion of greenery; the politeness; the cycling; the regularity and cleanliness of public transport; and the sheer number of old people who use it. But I resent the charges the museums and galleries make - 10 euros, for example, to access Koln's permanent exhibition of the Expressionists. So my only taste of culture so far has been the great **Kathe Kollwitz museum** at Neumarkt. It was 1964 when I first came across **Kollwitz** (1867-1945) - and **Georg Grosz** - when I lived for a short time in Berlin. Both were a great inspiration for the Bulgarian graphic artists of the first half of the century - the piece which fronts this post is one of the series she did on the Peasants' Revolt.

The Wine festival which has been occupying Neumarkt for the past 2 weeks is, quite frankly, pathetic - with 2.50 euros being charged for 0.15 millilitre glasses. What a contrast with the 10 euros 2-day ticket I bought for the Sofia wine-tasting in October when I could fill my face! The German property market is supposed to be more sensible than (say) the British - but I was still disappointed to find that the cheapest flats I could rent here are 60 euros a night (although that does reflect reasonably the higher cost of living compared, for example, with Sofia where I pay one seventh of the rent; such proportionality is not the case for food!). And internet connections seem to be very slow - one of several reasons why I have not been posting recently.

25 May 2013

Stunde Null



When you're in the centre of Koln, you don't need much of an imagination to sense what life was like here in the dying days of the war. The place has been completely rebuilt - such was the scale of the bombing. In the first week of my occupancy of the flat I have taken in a pleasant Koln suburb, television had black-grained images of American troops edging in March 1945 into the rubble of the the outskirts and centres of Bonn and Koln. And these continue to be shown - although May 9 is well past. Postcards with scenes of this rubble and destruction are also prominently on display in the city centre's kiosks.

In 1961 I spent a few summer weeks on a German course at Gottingen University - where my core text was Heinrich Böll's **Der Zug Kam Punktlich** which described powerfully but laconically the journey to the eastern front of a German soldier in 1943 or so who knew he would meet his death and simply wondered which of the station names which flashed by would be his resting place.

Böll's bleak post-1945 novels made a big impact on me and it was therefore with a sense of serendipity that I picked up for free at some bookcases near my Clinic his **The Silent Angel**.

Heinrich Böll's The Silent Angel was one of only a handful of postwar novels that depicted the aftermath of intensive carpet bombing of Germany in the second world war. Though written early in

Böll's career, the novel was not published in his lifetime due to the subject matter that was perceived by his publisher as unpalatable to the German public. Isn't it inappropriate to dwell on a topic that brings home the very episodes one wanted to forget? After so much destruction and suffering, is it not perhaps best to move on to cheery stories? Böll described the wasteland of war-torn Germany right after the end of the bombings. Amid this tortured landscape the characters moved like zombies, traumatized by their experiences and haunted by relentless hunger. The lack of food and shelter consigned the majority of the citizens to the status of refugees. They lived only to survive hunger, scrounging for the rare bread and provisions that came at high prices.

At the start of the novel, Hans, a German soldier who lacked proper identification, stumbled into a hospital and was offered a bread loaf by a nun working there. The reader was given a first taste of the novel's subject.

Quickly he broke off a large piece of the bread. His chin trembled and he felt the muscles of his mouth and jaws twitch. Then he buried his teeth in the soft, uneven place where the bread had been broken, and bit in. The loaf was old, at least four or five days old, perhaps even older, plain brown bread bearing some bakery's red paper label; but it tasted so sweet. He bit in even more deeply, taking the leathery, brown crust into his mouth as well; then he seized the loaf in his hands and tore off a new piece. While he ate with his right hand he held the loaf fast in his left, as if someone might come and try to take it from him, and he saw his hand lying on the bread, thin and dirty, with a deep scratch that was soiled and scabbed

Physical hunger and destroyed landscapes of the city inhabit the tissues of the novel. Hunger (and destruction) was so pervasive as to go beyond the realm of the physical. It crossed the threshold of the characters' physical state, to become the hunger of their souls, the debilitating poverty of spirit. It became the very fires in their belly that drove them to resist that very same hunger. Böll was able to illuminate a time that was barely recorded, even consciously avoided, according to Sebald—erased from memory, sanitized and repressed by German writers. It was not a popular subject but it was necessary to keep a record of destruction of cities and its effects on men and women. Sebald found in *The Silent Angel* not only an important subject but a quality of writing that he felt approached the gravity of the subject.

Sebald's essay ["Air War and Literature"] takes to task the postwar German writers for failing to record the destruction wrought by wars. For Sebald, the books of Ledig, as well as that of Heinrich Böll and Peter Weiss, among others, are a rare exception to this apparent defect in the German letters. Sebald champions the kind of novels that speak plainly and precisely, and with unpretentious objectivity, as opposed to novels full of "aesthetic or pseudo-aesthetic effects." He favors the concrete and documentary style of writing over the abstract and imaginary. For Sebald, accounts of suffering must be commensurate to the magnitude of the human loss; these are the kind of novels worth writing about in the face of total destruction.

In *The Silent Angel*, the imaginary was given up in favor of the imaginative.

The curtains had been pulled open, and in the large, black window frames stood the fantasylike image of the ruins: smoke-blackened flanks of buildings, cracked gables that seemed about to fall—overgrown mounds that had been ripped apart a second time, leaving only a few spots where the green was mossy and peaceful. . . . (91-92)

The above passage described the image of the ruins as "fantasylike" but the real view of destruction made the image un-fantasylike. The qualification of the smoke-blackened, cracked, overgrown, and dripped objects could not deny the direct harms inflicted to the people on the ground.

Likewise, Böll's similes and imagery were purposefully constructed. *An open piano in a corner "stood like a monster with a thousand false teeth" (39). In a particular ruin could be seen "only naked destruction, desolate and terribly empty, as if the breath of the bomb still hung in the air" (86). That lingering "breath of the bomb" was sufficient to convey the utter "nakedness" of the damage.* A most powerful description of destruction was that of the silent statues in a church.

His gaze remained below: the altar was buried in debris, the choir stalls had been toppled by the blast. He saw their broad brown backs inclined in what seemed sarcastic prayer. The lower rank of saints on the columns showed gaps as well: abraded torsos and flayed stone, hideous in its mutilation and painfully deformed, as if it once had been alive. He was struck by the demonic grotesqueness. A few faces grimaced like furious cripples because they lacked an ear or a chin, or because strange cracks deformed them; others were headless, and the stone stumps of their necks thrust up horribly from their bodies. Equally disturbing were those who lacked hands. They almost seemed to bleed, silently imploring, and a baroque plaster statue was oddly split, almost cracked like an egg: the pale plaster face of the saint was undamaged, the narrow, melancholy face of a Jesuit, but its chest and belly were ripped open. The plaster had trickled down—it lay in whitish flakes at the base of the figure—and from the dark hollow of the belly straw spilled forth, saturated with hardened plaster. (119-120)

This posthumous horror was probably one of the most indirect and one of the most graphic descriptions of the aftermath of a night of "successful" bombing run a reader will encounter in fiction.

Despite the depressing, vivid images in the novel, the reader could not fail to detect the deep sense of the novelist's humanity. He did not reduce his characters to virtual zombies. Instead, the novelist kept intact their human strengths and failings. Amid the piles of debris in the city, the white powder chalk and plaster, signs of renewal of vegetation started to shoot up from the ground. From these bleak surroundings, Böll's beautiful prose was able to yield a comforting quality of tenderness. The words had lightness and softness, like sweet bread. It was not really all black smoke and white dust:

He stood up, walked quietly over to the door, and opened it cautiously. Light was coming from the kitchen. The old, blue coat that she had draped over the windowpane let large, yellow beams of light in through its tattered holes, and the rays fell onto the debris in the hall: the axe blade gleamed somewhere and he saw the dark logs, their split surfaces glowing yellowly. He approached slowly and now he could see her. He realized he'd never seen her like this before. She was lying on the couch with her legs drawn up, wrapped in a large, red blanket, reading. He saw her from behind. Her long, damply shining hair seemed darker, tinged with red; it fell across the arm of the couch. A lamp stood beside her, and the stove was lit. A pack of cigarettes lay on the table, together with a jar of marmalade, a loaf of bread that had been cut into, and beside it the knife with its loose, black handle. . . . (130-131)

The colours and sheen (blue, yellow, gleamed, dark, glowing yellow, red, damply shining, darker, tinged with red, black) were so lovingly spread over this description of domestic setting and minutiae (coat, windowpane, axe blade, logs, couch, blanket, "book", hair, lamp, stove, cigarettes, marmalade, bread, knife handle) as to drum up the characters' expectations of a return to peaceful, normal circumstances. There was a flicker of love in that passage, a sense that all was not lost. The sense that hunger (physical, spiritual) does not go unfulfilled. The intermittent pangs of hunger only served as their amulet

26 May 2013

The neglect of Germany



Despite the role and significance of Germany over the past century and in present times, any visitor to that country who wanted a good book on the country had, until recently, a stark choice - heavy academic histories or the Rough Guide. The 600 page *Germany and the Germans* which John Ardagh produced in the mid 1980s sadly went out of print after its final edition of 1995. In 2010, however, two large and serious books appeared - Peter Watson's blockbuster - *German Genius* which is reviewed [here](#) and [here](#)

Watson has not simply written a survey of the German intellect from Goethe to Botho Strauss - nothing so dilettantist. In the course of nearly 1,000 pages, he covers German idealism, porcelain, the symphony, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, telegraphy, homeopathy, strategy, Sanskrit, colour theory, the Nazarenes, universities, Hegel, jurisprudence, the conservation of energy, the Biedermeier, entropy, fractals, dyestuffs, the PhD, heroin, automobiles, the

unconscious, the cannon, the Altar of Pergamon, sociology, militarism, the waltz, anti-semitism, continental drift, quantum theory and serial music.

The second book was Simon Winder's *Germania- a personal history of Germans Ancient and Modern* which I referred to at the end of a blog last year but did not find an easy book to persevere with - by virtue of its idiosyncratic approach. I've drawn on some of the Amazon reviews to give a sense of its key features.

It's the history of Germany in the broadest sense of that name - starting with the residue of the Roman Empire and ending with the founding of the Third Empire in 1933 when the author can't bear to continue. It encompasses cities from Brussels to Gdansk to Milan and all the way down the Danube, allowing the author to potter around old castles and cathedrals to his heart's content. A higgledy-piggledy mixture of more or less independent duchies, principalities and bishoprics coalesced slowly into modern states (plural - Winder uses Germania for Austria and Germany, and doesn't hesitate to visit other countries nearby). History as folly, incompetence and grudge; the author dismisses his own work as anecdotal facetiousness but it's far better than that. A flavour - "a slice through any given month in Germany's history turns up a staggering array of rulers: a discredited soldier, a pious archbishop, a sickly boy and his throne-grabbing regent, and a half-demented miser obsessed with alchemy".

This book is a travelogue (in the Bill Bryson style) fused with a cultural and political history of Germany. If you're looking for only one or the other, you will be disappointed. But if you just want to find out about Germany, and are ready to accept a few idiosyncrasies of style along the way, you'll love this book.

Neither book, however, deals with contemporary Germany - that's why the 1995 John Ardagh book is sorely missed, with its explanation of such important aspects of German life as federalism and the social market. The only bit of writing which I can unreservedly recommend about contemporary Germany is [the long article on Germany written a few years ago by Perry Andersen](#).

Winder's focus on history gives some good insights:

- The role the earliest centuries and the Middle Ages play in the imagination of the Germans in all sorts of ways; and how much medieval -architecture remains in Germany
- Why the Holy Roman Emperors, with no proper capital before 1533 when Vienna was declared the capital city of the Habsburgs, never managed to overcome the extraordinary fragmentation of Germany in the way in which the English and the French managed it many centuries earlier. There are delightful vignettes of the courts of tiny principalities, often presided over by dotty or self-indulgent rulers. Due to the frequent absence of primogeniture, many of them had hyphenated names, like Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg which provided the wife for Edward VII: the more hyphenated, the tinier they were.
- How weak Prussia was between the end of the reign of Frederick the Great in 1786 and Bismarck's Danish War of 1864. Winder asserts that "Frederick's actions DID NOT LEAD (his italics) to Bismarck's empire." Winder doesn't think much of Frederick's achievements, but admires Maria Theresa and her "adorable", "fun" husband, the Holy Roman Emperor Francis I.
- And after all the tomes that have been written about the Prussian - later German - armies, it is interesting to see Winder rather debunking their achievements "outside the delusive little seven year period [covering the Danish, Austrian and French wars between 1864 and 1871]". He also debunks the German navy. He lays into some conventional views about the run-up to and course of the First World War with a zest reminiscent of A.J.P. Taylor. He makes a case for saying that Germany between 1871 and 1914 was militarily less aggressive than Russia Britain, France or Italy during the same period. He sees the French as the main trouble-makers in Europe from Louis XIV onwards. But then he had decided from the start that his book would "bale out" in 1933. (He does not completely manage that: reference to the Nazi period are dotted throughout the book.) He told us at the beginning that he wanted us to look at pre-1933 Germany free from the hostile mind-set which has been created by the two World Wars, and which had been quite absent from Britain for almost the whole of the 19th century. For him there was no German "Sonderweg": for him "Germany in 1914 had been a normal country, espousing much of the same racism, military posturing, and taste for ugly public buildings that bedevilled the rest of the Continent."
- This is more of an impressionist account, though, like an impressionist painting, consisting of many brilliant and highly coloured individual brush strokes. It is basically, but not always chronological; and it is interspersed with digressions and bits of autobiography which increase in length as the book proceeds. Winder is having fun: "fun" used as an adjective occurs frequently in the book, which is light-hearted, often hilarious, discursive, never short of an opinion and indeed sometimes opinionated and over-the-top: he calls Weber's book on the Protestant Ethic "famously idiotic"; Napoleon III is rebuked for his "sheer childishness"; the word "mad" occurs with a somewhat maddening frequency; he describes the successor states of the Habsburg Empire as "a mass of poisonous micro-states". It is also quite serious, in many ways insightful, cultured, affectionate but also critical, and fantastically knowledgeable.

The book certainly has made me (and others- it has 100 reviews on the Amazon site) think. It has more than 100 bibliographical references and, significantly, half are literary or cultural.

As it's a public holiday in this part of Germany (the fourth this month - it's Corpus Christi for Catholics and several hundred parishioners have just passed by with a brass band under my balcony) my internet is working very well even mid-morning and I've been able to surf the internet for articles about Germany. I was quickly rewarded with a book about the country written by an American whose German family background in Pennsylvania led him to a European trip in the 1970s which led to a 14-year stay in Germany and the research which led to the production in 2000 of the book *Germany - Unravelling an Enigma* which seems to focus on aspects of social behaviour and explanations of the social market.

30 May 2013

Interest in the German model

This blog has referred several times to 'the Scandinavian model' of society and government (or "governance" in modern parlance) but it had failed to pick up the growing interest of the British "chattering classes" in 'the German model'. More than a year ago, one of the British Think Tanks was drawn to observe that -

*at some point in every generation, British policymakers look in envy and awe at the German economy. It last happened in the early 1990s, when the UK was recovering from the post-Lawson bust and the ignominy of forced exit from the exchange rate mechanism. Will Hutton's *The State We're In* captured the zeitgeist of this era brilliantly: a time when the Rhineland social market economy appeared to offer a stronger and fairer variety of capitalism than its rapacious, unequal and structurally weak Anglo-Saxon competitor.*



The tables turned as the 1990s wore on. Anglo-Saxon economies boomed and created jobs while the German economy got stuck in low growth and high unemployment. Gerhard Schroeder talked about the 'Neue Mitte', in conscious emulation of the Clinton-Blair 'third way'. Germany embarked on difficult structural reform of its labour market and held down real wages as it entered the euro. The pendulum has swung back and the German model is now in vogue again. The TUC produced in early 2012 a detailed report on the lessons of Germany's manufacturing strength, attributing its export prowess to deep institutional foundations in its social partnerships, apprenticeships and industrial strategies. Maurice Glasman regularly sings hymns of praise to Germany's regional banks, vocational traditions (implanted, he argues, by Ernie Bevin after the second world war), and the fact that workers share fully in company decision-making. Meanwhile, shadow business secretary Chuka Ummuna has recently been on a study tour of Germany to mug up on how it achieves a more patient, responsible and resilient capitalism.

Germany's appeal is not difficult to understand. Its famous Mittelstand of medium-sized family companies that export all over the world has long been admired. It has a superb apprenticeship system and huge investments in both physical and human capital. Its industrial social partnerships have proved a source of durability and strength in the era of globalised markets, not a weakness. Recently it has coupled an

expanding service sector to its historic industrial pre-eminence.

What has attracted most attention recently, however, is its employment performance. Germany's unemployment rate is now lower than it was before the financial crisis struck, while in most of the rest of the OECD it remains high or rising. This is a huge turnaround from the position Germany was in barely half a dozen years ago.

I have always felt at home in Germany - my father was one of a few Scottish pastors who developed a "Reconciliation" mission in the post-war period there - focussing on Detmold, Heiligenkirchen and Bad Meinberg areas in Nord-Rhein Westphalia. He took us with him on at least one trip there in the mid 1950s and it is to this I owe my (mainland) European orientation and (in all probability) the direction my life has taken in the past 20 years in central Europe and Central Asia.

One of my fond family memories is of my father is his wading through the various parts of the weekend Die Zeit newspaper - printed on special thin but glossy paper - which was flown over to him. Not surprisingly I excelled at German and French at school - and started out on a language degree at University (which I changed half-way through to an Economics and Politics one) In 1961 I ventured to a Polish student work-camp - via Berlin - and will never forget the sight from the train of a still-bombed out Wroclaw.

The next year I spent some weeks at a summer school at Gottingen University - where I was introduced to **the post-war stories of Heinrich Boll**.

In 1964 I spent 2 months living and working in Berlin (thanks to the student economic association AISEC) where I encountered for the first time the fervour of an old Nazi - the mother of my girlfriend of the time.

And, as a regional politician, I visited the country several times in the 1980s becoming very aware of how civilised the coverage of German politics seemed to be compared with Britain and envious of the role and status of German regional politicians in national policy-making.

Such a federal system was, of course, the post-war creation of the Anglo-Americans - building on the older system of Laender. And the worker representation embodied in the cooperative system of Mitbestimmung was very much a British element. But the wider aspects of the "social market" (as clearly **set out in chapter five of this book**) and to be seen in the industrial role played by the state-owned regional banks; in the strength of the training system; in the constant emphasis given to savings were very German; and embodied in their neglected concept of "**ordoliberalism**" is specifically German. The role of social insurance in the funding of the health system (and of the churches in the management of schooling) are yet more examples of how pluralistic the German system is.

31 May 2013

German perceptions

Germany is in election mode - although [Neal Ascherson makes the point](#) in the current LRB that

Europe and the euro crisis scarcely figure in this election campaign. Listening to the speeches or reading the manifestos, you would never guess that boys and girls in other countries are charging water cannon and raving about German neo-imperialism, or burning pictures of Merkel as the destroyer of Europe. There is some heavy cliché about wanting 'a European Germany, not a German Europe'. But where are the positive ideas about how German economic strength might relieve nations swamped by debt? The turmoil seems a long way off.

Those who are aware of how hated Germany has become in parts of Southern Europe feel merely pained, misunderstood. The self-image of Germany as a bewildered, kindly nation, helpless to defend itself against greedy neighbours, dies hard. It was lent credibility a few weeks ago by an eccentric European Central Bank report which asserted that - in terms of 'per household property' - the Germans were among the poorest in the Eurozone, with an average wealth of €51,000 - less than the Slovaks and far less than a Greek or Cypriot household. This morally comforting estimate was soon rubbished: it ignored family income, which puts the Germans near the top of the league, and crudely set bank wealth against population (billions in septic bank holdings divided by the total number of Cypriot households equals €267,000, equals meaningless).

And yet, beyond the nonsense, the report implied some interesting things about German political psychology. People still prefer to rent rather than to own their homes, a contrast to post-Communist nations in the Eurozone where public housing was sold off to its tenants. The Germans tend to put their money into local savings banks (Sparkassen) at low but secure interest, rather than buy real estate or invest in the stock market. Thrift and caution are still hard-wired into society.

1 June 2013

The curious behaviour of German banks

I mentioned the state-owned regional banks as one of the lynchpins of the post-war German success story - their support of the essentially family-owned industrial companies endowing its society with a long-term perspective difficult for Anglo-Americans to understand.

In any other society, such a combination of finance and politics would make for collusive corruption of the highest degree - as is shown in the [behaviour of the Spanish Cajas](#).

The consensual nature of corporate decision-making - as embodied in the Mitbestimmung system of worker representation and involvement has also been a key feature of the post-war German model.

But, as Perry Anderson showed in his 2009 article on [The New Germany](#)

the landscape of the Berlin Republic has become steadily more polarized in the past decade or so. At the top, traditional restraints on the accumulation and display of wealth were cast to the winds, as capital markets were prised loose and Anglo-American norms of executive pay increasingly accepted by German business.

Gerhard Schröder gave his own enrichissez-vous blessing to the process in the first half of the 2000s, slashing corporation and upper-bracket income tax, and rejecting any wealth tax,. Structurally still more important, by abolishing capital gains tax on the sale of cross-holdings, his government encouraged the dissolution of the long-term investments by banks in companies, and reciprocal stakes in firms, traditionally central to German corporatism—or in the consecrated phrase, the 'Rhenish' model of capitalism. In its place,

shareholder value was increasingly set free. By 2006, foreigners had acquired an average of over 50 per cent of the free float of German blue-chip companies

I haven't so far picked up any analysis on the internet about exactly how this has changed the German "social market". On the face of it a lot of the basic features are still there - although the scale of the German banks' exposure to the sub-prime market disaster did take us all by surprise. Michael Lewis got himself into some trouble a couple of years ago with his [Vanity Fair article on Germany](#) which focused a bit too much on anal vocabulary - but his [article did contain some important vignettes](#) -

He is a type familiar in Germany but absolutely freakish in Greece—or for that matter the United States: a keenly intelligent, highly ambitious civil servant who has no other desire but to serve his country. His sparkling curriculum vitae is missing a line that would be found on the résumés of men in his position most anywhere else in the world—the line where he leaves government service for Goldman Sachs to cash out. When I asked another prominent German civil servant why he hadn't taken time out of public service to make his fortune working for some bank, the way every American civil servant who is anywhere near finance seems to want to do, his expression changed to alarm. "But I could never do this," he said. "It would be disloyal!"

The curious thing about the eruption of cheap and indiscriminate lending of money during the past decade was the different effects it had from country to country. Every developed country was subjected to more or less the same temptation, but no two countries responded in precisely the same way. The rest of Europe, in effect, used Germany's credit rating to indulge its material desires. They borrowed as cheaply as Germans could to buy stuff they couldn't afford. Given the chance to take something for nothing, the German people alone simply ignored the offer. "There was no credit boom in Germany. Real-estate prices were completely flat.

There was no borrowing for consumption. Because this behaviour is rather alien to Germans. Germans save whenever possible. This is deeply in German genes. Perhaps a leftover of the collective memory of the Great Depression and the hyperinflation of the 1920s." The German government was equally prudent because, he went on, "there is a consensus among the different parties about this: if you're not adhering to fiscal responsibility, you have no chance in elections, because the people are that way."

In that moment of temptation, Germany became something like a mirror image of Iceland and Ireland and Greece and, for that matter, the United States. Other countries used foreign money to fuel various forms of insanity.

The Germans, through their bankers, used their own money to enable foreigners to behave insanely. This is what makes the German case so peculiar. If they had been merely the only big, developed nation with decent financial morals, they would present one sort of picture, of simple rectitude. But they had done something far more peculiar: during the boom German bankers had gone out of their way to get dirty. They lent money to American subprime borrowers, to Irish real-estate barons, to Icelandic banking tycoons to do things that no German would ever do. The German losses are still being toted up, but at last count they stand at \$21 billion in the Icelandic banks, \$100 billion in Irish banks, \$60 billion in various U.S. subprime-backed bonds, and some yet-to-be-determined amount in Greek bonds. The only financial disaster in the last decade German bankers appear to have missed was investing with Bernie Madoff.

A German economist named Henrik Enderlein, who teaches at the Hertie School of Governance, in Berlin, has described the radical change that occurred in German banks beginning about 2003. In a paper in progress, Enderlein points out that "many observers initially believed German banks would be relatively less exposed to the crisis. The contrary turned out to be the case. German banks ended up being among the

most severely affected in continental Europe and this despite relatively favorable economic conditions. "Everyone thought that German bankers were more conservative, and more isolated from the outside world, than, say, the French. And it wasn't true. "There had never been any innovation in German banking," says Enderlein. "You gave money to some company, and the company paid you back. They went [virtually overnight] from this to being American. And they weren't any good at it."

What Germans did with money between 2003 and 2008 would never have been possible within Germany, as there was no one to take the other side of the many deals they did which made no sense. They lost massive sums, in everything they touched. Indeed, one view of the European debt crisis—the Greek street view—is that it is an elaborate attempt by the German government on behalf of its banks to get their money back without calling attention to what they are up to. The German government gives money to the European Union rescue fund so that it can give money to the Irish government so that the Irish government can give money to Irish banks so the Irish banks can repay their loans to the German banks. "They are playing billiards," says Enderlein. "The easier way to do it would be to give German money to the German banks and let the Irish banks fail." Why they don't simply do this is a question worth trying to answer.

....On the surface IKB's German bond traders resembled the reckless traders who made similarly stupid bets for Citigroup and Morgan Stanley. Beneath it they were playing an entirely different game. The American bond traders may have sunk their firms by turning a blind eye to the risks in the subprime-bond market, but they made a fortune for themselves in the bargain and have for the most part never been called to account. They were paid to put their firms in jeopardy, and so it is hard to know whether they did it intentionally or not. The German bond traders, on the other hand, had been paid roughly \$100,000 a year, with, at most, another \$50,000 bonus. **In general, German bankers were paid peanuts to run the risk that sank their banks—which suggests they really didn't know what they were doing. But—and here is the strange thing—unlike their American counterparts, they are being treated by the German public as crooks.** The former C.E.O. of IKB, Stefan Ortseifen, received a 10-month suspended sentence and has been asked by the bank to return his salary: eight hundred and five thousand euros.

2 June 2013

German Europe??

Ulrich Beck is a German sociologist whose name I encounter from time to time - from his work on risk society (which I don't pretend to understand). He has now jumped to almost best-selling status in the UK by virtue of his small book with the fairly self-explanatory title of "German Europe"

It appeared in English in April and has got the English chattering classes drooling covering, as it does, two of the hate subjects of the English - Europe and the Germans.

The book itself seems a bit incoherent - a bit of knock-about fun at Angela Merkel's expense; an emphasis on her (and Germany's) Protestant/Lutheran discipline (rather missing the point about the Catholic contribution to the concept of the social market); some obvious assertions about the new divisions in Europe; and then some wishy-washy points about the future.....

You can make up your own mind from this interview, podcast; and summary

I would say that the first thing we have to think about is what the purpose of the European Union actually is. Is there any purpose? Why Europe and not the whole world? Why not do it alone in Germany, or the UK, or France?

I think there are four answers in this respect. First, the European Union is about enemies becoming neighbours. In the context of European history this actually constitutes something of a miracle. The second

purpose of the European Union is that it can prevent countries from being lost in world politics. A post-European Britain, or a post-European Germany, is a lost Britain, and a lost Germany. Europe is part of what makes these countries important from a global perspective.

The third point is that we should not only think about a new Europe, we also have to think about how the European nations have to change. They are part of the process and I would say that Europe is about redefining the national interest in a European way. Europe is not an obstacle to national sovereignty; it is the necessary means to improve national sovereignty. Nationalism is now the enemy of the nation because only through the European Union can these countries have genuine sovereignty.

The fourth point is that European modernity, which has been distributed all over the world, is a suicidal project. It's producing all kinds of basic problems, such as climate change and the financial crisis. It's a bit like if a car company created a car without any brakes and it started to cause accidents: the company would take these cars back to redesign them and that's exactly what Europe should do with modernity.

Reinventing modernity could be a specific purpose for Europe.

Taken together these four points form what you could say is a grand narrative of Europe, but one basic issue is missing in the whole design. So far we've thought about things like institutions, law, and economics, but we haven't asked what the European Union means for individuals.

What do individuals gain from the European project?

First of all I would say that, particularly in terms of the younger generation, more Europe is producing more freedom. It's not only about the free movement of people across Europe; it's also about opening up your own perspective and living in a space which is essentially grounded on law.

Second, European workers, but also students as well, are now confronted with the kind of existential uncertainty which needs an answer. Half of the best educated generation in Spanish and Greek history lack any future prospects. So what we need is a vision for a social Europe in the sense that the individual can see that there is not necessarily social security, but that there is less uncertainty. Finally we need to redefine democracy from the bottom up. We need to ask how an individual can become engaged with the European project. In that respect I have made a manifesto, along with Daniel Cohn-Bendit, called "[We Are Europe](#)", arguing that we need a free year for everyone to do a project in another country with other Europeans in order to start a European civil society.

The Council of Europe published recently a series of lectures by various intellectuals on the crisis and Beck's [Europe at risk - a cosmopolitan perspective](#) gives a good sense of his book - and his other contributions. Self-indulgent academic sloganising which comes from too much time in incestuous discussions.

3 June 2013

Saturday in Junkersdorf

The world could not have been more beautiful yesterday at the Rhein Energie Stadion and the Junkersdorf woods. The area is huge and intensively used by Koln people at weekends whether for ball games, cycling, festivals - or simply walking around its picturesque small lakes.

A Sporting High school is also located in a superb wooded area.

Yesterday an ecumenical group was singing its heart out in the stadium; a family athletics fair was in full swing in a nearby racing track; and a large number of young men and women were taking part in the finals of the German Touch Rugby competition in the complex of football fields.

First time I've seen this game - the friendly spirit evident was very impressive - as was the sheer mix of shapes and sizes of those taking part.

Germany at its most civilised!



German reading



by Theo Sommer.

German newspaper stands offer a profusion of titles - with the various regional titles reflecting perspectives not available in centralised England and France. The (weekly) Die Zeit is the country's most weighty publication - in more senses than one (!). I had enjoyed last month the glimpse one of its articles had given us of ex-Chancellor Helmut Schmidt's long love affair with painting - not least those of the German Expressionists. Schmidt is now a still active 94 year-old whose trademark cigarette was on display in a recent television interview here. He was not only German Chancellor 1974-82 but also publisher of the Hamburg-based paper for a couple of decades after he left the Chancellory. And I am now reading with interest the account of this rich life of his - *Unser Schmidt* written

He will doubtless be reading with his usual critical eye the latest fat issue of Die Zeit whose special magazine today focuses on questions such as *What is the good life?*

From the profusion of titles, I've developed a taste for the much thinner and leftist daily -Die Tageszeitung whose sentence construction is less convoluted than the heavies such as Der Spiegel which I have now deserted for the easier Stern. Although Bavaria is a stronghold of the right, Die Suddeutsche Zeitung is an attractively packaged left-leaning daily with interesting content. Franfurte Allgemeine Zeitung is a rather boring conservative paper - and the Cologne titles are very superficial.

Der Spiegel's English edition continues to be part of my daily reading - its latest offers first [a take on some of the construction scandals which are filling the columns of German papers](#); then [a rare insight into war-time Berlin](#) -

The diary of Brigitte Eicke, a Berlin teenager in World War II, is an account of cinema visits, first kisses, hairdos and dressmaking, along with a brief, untroubled reference to disappearing Jews. Recently published, it highlights the public indifference that paved the road to Auschwitz. Hers is a perspective seldom glimpsed in Germany's World War II literature, a field in which the female voice took a while to be heard.

"In the 1950s and '60s, the focus was more on memories of battle and the male experience," says Arnulf Scriba, who coordinates a project at the German Historical Museum called "Collective Memory," an archive of personal testimonies. *"The school had been bombed when we arrived this morning. Waltraud, Melitta and I went back to Gisela's and danced to gramophone records."* (1 Feb 1944)

Young girls are made of stern stuff. In December 1942, while Allied bombs rained on Berlin and Nazi troops fought for control of Stalingrad, 15-year-old Brigitte Eicke began keeping a diary. For the next three years, the young office apprentice wrote in it every single day. Now published in German as "Backfisch im Bombenkrieg" -- backfisch being an old-fashioned term for a girl on the cusp of womanhood -- it adds a new perspective to Germany's World War II experience and shows not only how mundane war can become but also how the majority of Germans were able to turn a blind eye to Nazi brutality. Until relatively recently, accounts of Germans' own wartime suffering were considered something of a taboo, their own trauma eclipsed by the horror of [the Holocaust](#). But now that the wartime generation is dying, every slice of first-hand social history has inherent value.

Another story focuses on the German Constitutional Court's current consideration of the legality of the ECB bond buying program known as Outright Monetary Transactions (OMT).

The program, announced last autumn, envisions the ECB buying unlimited quantities of sovereign bonds from ailing euro-zone member states to hold down their borrowing costs. To date, the ECB has not made any bond purchases, but the mere announcement that it might has proven enough to calm the markets and provide European leaders with some to seek agreement on longer-term measures to solve [the crisis](#). Even [opponents of the program](#) have acknowledged its success. The OMT "has been the most successful measure taken in saving the euro thus far," says Dietrich Murswiek, who represents co-claimant Peter Gauweiler, a member of parliament with Bavaria's Christian Social Union.

But despite its success, the OMT program is illegal, say the plaintiffs. "State financing, whether direct or indirect, is not allowed for the ECB," says one of their attorneys, Karl Albrecht Schachtschneider. And his complaint is far from fanciful -- it is difficult not to see the OMT program as state financing. In essence, the court is being asked to decide whether economic pragmatism trumps a strict interpretation of the law.

Open Europe has a [blog on the issue](#)

The painting is one of [Hans Purrmann's](#) - a glorious colourist I have just come across who was strongly influenced by Matisse - and whose paintings were banned by the Nazis.

It seems appropriate to end with [this link to a marvellous table listing about 150 novels in the German language](#) which Guardian readers recommended for a World Literature Tour, The [equivalent French list is here](#).

13 June 2013

June 17 1953 - Electing another people!

Sixty years ago today, [East German workers rose against their government](#) - an event which is being marked extensively in the German media.

The uprising (quickly put down) is nowadays best known for [a short poem written by Bert Brecht](#) at the time - which was not however published until 1959 after his death in 1956.



Die Lösung

Nach dem Aufstand des 17. Juni
Ließ der Sekretär des Schriftstellerverbands
In der Stalinallee Flugblätter verteilen
Auf denen zu lesen war, daß das Volk
Das Vertrauen der Regierung verscherzt habe
Und es nur durch verdoppelte Arbeit
zurückerobern könne. Wäre es da
Nicht doch einfacher, die Regierung
Löste das Volk auf und
Wählte ein anderes?

The Solution

After the uprising of the 17th of June
The Secretary of the Writers' Union
Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee
Stating that the people
Had forfeited the confidence of the government
And could win it back only
By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier
In that case for the government
To dissolve the people
And elect another?

Although I am a great admirer of Brecht's poetry, I readily admit he was not the most admirable of human beings...

German rulers out of touch?



As I was wading through last Thursday's copy of Die Zeit, I was hit with a full-page ad from [a group which is trying to bring a radical perspective to autumn's national election here in Germany](#) (which is currently looking a foregone conclusion, so great is Merkel's lead over the SPD in the polls).

"Das Generationen-Manifesto" gives first ten short but blunt warnings -

WE CAUTION - In the interest of future generations and the social and ecological balance

1 Climate change is the biggest threat we have ever experienced. The federal government and all parties are not treating the issue with the highest priority. The life and well-being of future generations is being put at risk.

2 The energy revolution, the most important project of our generation is being dealt with in a half-hearted and inconsistent way by policy makers. We will make them liable if they negligently endanger the chances of this future project because of party political power games.

3 The rulers govern past us citizens. They hide in their ivory towers, without explaining what consequences will result from far-reaching political

decisions (eg energy policy and euro crisis) for our lives and the lives of our children.

4 The present policy places massive debts on the shoulders of our children and grandchildren. The government deficit is further increased rather than reduced, and thus the scope of the next generations curtailed dramatically.

5 Profits are privatized, losses socialized. Our rulers have been seduced by the financial industry and disregards the interests of the citizens.

6 Politicians are splitting society with their inaction. Recent years have seen the divergence between rich and poor increase to an unacceptable degree.

7 We are increasing our prosperity at the expense of people in the emerging and developing countries, who often work under inhumane conditions for us. It is a shame that we struggle with obesity and excess, while the rest of the world millions of people don't even have the basic necessities of life.

8 Our education system is failing miserably in the face of challenges posed by the future. Policy-makers from politics, economy and society know that our education system is unfair and opaque and not prepare our children for future learning content requirements. But there is a lack of courage for radical change.

9 The sustainable modernization of the economy is demanded in speeches, but not taken seriously. Unless subsidies overtook place in trendsetting industries and technologies are directed, we forego the opportunities that present themselves to Germany as an international pioneer of a green or blue economic change.

10. The generational contract has been terminated unilaterally. The present generation of parents and grandparents are protecting their own vested rights at the expense of their children and grandchildren.

The signatories include one particularly famous name - that of *Professor Ernest von Weizsacker*, one of the country's most prominent intellectuals; writer on ecological and sustainable issues (and brother of Richard, from 1984-94, the country's most respected President). Otherwise, the list of 28 signatories seems to consist mainly of actors, writers and Foundation people - with one bank President. The [manifesto goes on to set out 10 demands](#) which, for me, are curiously light on detail -

WE DEMAND - courage, honesty and generational just action

1 The fight against climate change must be taken as a national objective in the Constitution. A law passed at the beginning of the new term climate protection law needs to provide the basis for it. If Europe and Germany lead the way on climate change and the introduction of mitigation techniques, others - already competitive

reasons - follow.

2 The energy transition must be actively pursued, both as a "green" energy production, as well as energy saving turnaround. Through innovations in energy efficiency and a focus on energy savings in companies and households can manage the transformation of energy at reasonable costs for all involved. With the great energy transition opportunities are economically connected, not only for our country but also for Europe and for the world. Today's generation has a duty to provide a safe power base for future generations.

3 We demand our right to a participation and voice. Citizens want to actively participate in decision-making in politics, economy and society. If politicians do not want to jeopardize democracy, they must justify and convey what they are doing and why. We call on our leaders to leave their ivory towers to seek sincere discourse with citizens and make decisions on this basis. The voters need to know what they can choose and rely on politicians.

4 We urge the government to reform government finances so that the debt reduced and new priorities for a future just and sustainable output design can be set. The interest burden on the state budget must be reduced and sustainable future investments encouraged. Only a financially stable state can ensure security, education, culture, research and development, social security and other public goods to all citizens.

5 We call for a reform and strict regulation of private finance. Banks are servants of the economy and the citizens, not their rulers. "Systemically important" banks take an entire society hostage. Therefore, the limitation of bank power is indispensable. The polluter pays principle must also enter in the financial sector to bear: the consequential costs of financial crises must bear those who earn high profits with incalculable risks. As a bank customer, we call for full transparency in the use of entrusted funds and crisis-proof variety of banks.

6 We demand social justice in Germany . Poverty and lack of opportunities must be overcome. A crash programme is needed to stop the growing rift between rich and poor. Participation in private prosperity and public goods must be secured and strengthened social cohesion. An effective minimum wage would be an essential bulwark against the social crash. High earners and the wealthy must contribute more to the financing of public tasks.

7 We demand a serious effort to fight hunger, poverty and underdevelopment in the world. need for this is an emergency package of measures to implement the Millennium Development Goals. Multinational companies must be required by law to protect the social and human rights of workers in their factories and suppliers, and to contribute to a survivable level to raise their living standards.

8 We call for a sustainable development of our economy, fair competition rules and the reduction of environmentally harmful subsidies. With the sustainable transformation of our economic system, great opportunities for Germany are possible because environmentally friendly technologies and products will be a competitive advantage and export in the future.

9 We call for a comprehensive nationwide reform of the education and training system, because education is the most effective, most social and economical way of securing the future of our society and the fuel . It is a prerequisite for participation in society and creates the potential for innovation in our country. All young people need regardless of their parents' income equal access and opportunities for advancement in the education system. Curricula, teaching methods and grading systems of the past must be checked and designed so that the desire to learn, commitment and talents of young people are supported in their diversity and their self-confidence is strengthened. School must be a place of enthusiasm, the strengthening of self-awareness, the development of individual potentials and prepare them for the challenges of the future.

10. We demand a new fair contract between generations. If our children are to have at least the chance of a life as it was our generation, we must stop the destruction of natural resources and the exclusion of talents

and cultural diversity of people . We need new visions and debates about the future of the good life. We want to give our children a society that allows them and enables them to realize their dreams. Because our children especially in times of demographic change are entitled to a promising life.

We call a strategy of change for Germany, Europe and the world . Sustainability requires more than a few cosmetic changes. And she needs to close ranks with the emerging and developing countries that have a special meaning for all sustainability issues due to their dynamic development. We must with a long breath and consistently work towards an ecologically and socially just society. We call on all politicians to make decisions in their choice not dependent on short-term forecasts, power shifts or lobby interests.

Although there seem to have been a generally favourable reaction, I sense a lack of excitement - something very cerebral..... contrasting with the intensity which has been characteristic of German discussion of social issues in recent times.

And it would be interesting to compare and contrast it with the [UK Power Inquiry](#) of 2004 which was [a powerful diagnosis of the ills of British democracy](#).....but which sank like a stone after the 2010 elections.....My [own take on its analysis](#) is here....Interesting that Europe simply doesn't figure in the German manifesto!

18 June 2013

German introspection

I've spent 7 weeks so far in Koln - Germany's fourth largest urban district. The same time I spent in Berlin in 1964. It is my first real venture into the country since all of 50 years ago. The bubble in which I existed then and there was, of course, a very different one from the one in which I am presently enveloped.

I was 22 then, just finished University, living in a room in a small Berlin flat and encountering a new civilisation for the first time - as student pressures were building prior to the 1968 explosion. And it was a mere 3 years after I had seen with my own eyes (and from a train crossing East Germany parallel with Russian tanks) the first bricks of the Berlin wall being laid.

Now I'm in an affluent Koln suburb making a daily crossing of the Rhein to receive medical treatment and trying to understand the Germans through bookshops rather than friendships. Helmut Schmidt remains big here - about 8 of his books spread on a table in the huge 3 storey bookshop on Neumarkt (plus 2 of his late wife's; and 2 of his daughter Susanne's. The latter [is a financial journalist](#)).

From a great remaindered bookshop nearby I had last week picked up for 5 euros [Deutschland for Beginners](#) which was published in English in 2007 by Ben Donald as *Springtime for Germany*. It's a light-hearted romp through the country which seems to have annoyed most of its British readers none of whom seem to have spotted the basic logic of the book's chapter structure - words which go to the core of German identity such as

- weltschmerz;
- angst
- gemutlichkeit
- gesundheit
- kindergarten

- schadenfreude
- zeitgeist
- lebensraum
- wanderlust
- weltmeister

I'm enjoying the book - which I'm able to read (slowly) in German making my usual pencilled annotations for later checking.

I spotted several "zeitgeist" titles about the country aimed more at a German audience on the Koln bookshelves - such as Stefan Gaertner's [Deutschlandreise - forays into a crazy country](#) (2012) which seems a rather hurriedly-written set of notes for a satire on German tourist resorts. [Mein Deutschland, dein Deutschland](#) by Stamer and Buhrow (2011) records the first impressions of Germany of a journalist couple after being absent in France and the USA for more than a decade; and a [highly controversial tour of Germany - Allein unter Deutschen](#) by New York based Israeli Tuvia Tenenbom (2012) was initially refused publication for [its scurrilous accusations about German racism](#).

The most interesting, however, looked [Die Rupelrepublik - The Bully Republic - why we are so unsociable](#) by Jorg Schindler (2012).

19 June 2013

A sado-masochistic canter through some German reading

Everything is going to the dogs, if we are to believe the books to be found on the shelves of average mainstreet German bookshops today. [Thomas Wieczorek](#) is a prolific (and angry) German journalist who has been charting the excesses of the power elite over the past decade, for example in [The Dumb Republic - how the media, business and the politicians are selling us](#) which first appeared in 2009. His latest title can be translated variously as "Ruined" or [Fucked up - why our country is going downhill and who's profiting from this](#) which gives a pretty good sense of its drift.

Juergen Toth's [Webs of power - how the political and business elite is destroying our country](#) (2013) seems to be a powerful critique of neo-liberalism and its effects on Germany. It plots the tight links between business, politics, media, think tanks etc and therefore covers the same ground as Wieczorek (who is strangely not acknowledged in the notes) Sasha Adamek's [The Power machine](#) (2013) tries to shine a light into this murky area by focusing first on the two astounding recent resignations of German Presidents and then on the work of lobbyists. [Horst Koehler had apparently to go because he was too independent](#); Christian Wulff for



the opposite reason - he was too dependent on and pally with dubious business friends. Adamek suggests that crony capitalism is alive and well in Germany -

In total, about 18 000 German officers work in Berlin and Bonn ministries. In addition, 620 members of parliament with their average of two employees. Thus nearly 20 000 representatives of government and parliament are facing about 5,000 lobbyists. Statistically, a lobbyist take care of four representatives from politics and government. More than 400 lobbyists paid by corporations or associations also contribute a desk in the federal ministries. But why we are already living in a corrupt republic?

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development was published recently in the 2010 comparative study "Life in Transition Survey II" to the question of how common are experiences of greasing or favors in different countries. Who has made in the past twelve months, an unofficial payment or presents a gift to the other person "like a"? At least ten per cent of the respondents affirmed this specific question. So that more people in this country gave to real acts of corruption as for example the inhabitants of Georgia, Italy or Croatia. The advantage is an integral part of everyday life and thus also the power structure in Germany.

Klaus Norbert is apparently [another critical German journalist with several critiques to his name](#). The title of his latest book is certainly one which I would not normally apply to Germans - [Idioten- made in Germany](#) (2011) and shows that restless educational reform is not merely a feature of modern Britain but is [also wreaking havoc here in Germany](#).

Two other books completed my sado-masochistic canter through current German publishers' lists - [Our prosperity and its enemies](#) by [Gabor Steingart](#); and [German soil - a participant observation](#) by Moritz von Ustar

25 June

The painting is an Otto Dix

Footloose and fancy free

Several times on this blog, I have highlighted the nomadic life I have lived for the past 22 years - with least 20 addresses during that period. Although my project life has been quiet for the past 3 years, I still commute between 3-4 locations and have been [on the lookout for an urban base which I could really call home](#). In 2010 I explored the idea of a house in Brittany but realised that I did not need another rural retreat but rather an urban base for winter. Living in Koln these past 2 months has made the idea of a German base one worth further study. Notwithstanding [the sourness of a lot of German journalistic comment at the moment](#), their transport systems; greenery; civilised behaviour and general costs make this a very attractive place to live.

I've been looking (casually) at the housing market during my present 2 month stay in Koln - the internet and also the VOX television programme called "Mieten, kaufen, wohnen" allow me to get a good sense of what the market is like. Furnished rented accommodation is not easy to find - I'm paying 8 times here what I pay in Sofia for my central flat - which, unlike food, petrol and communal services, is about the right relationship given incomes in Bulgaria. And there are signs of stress - the free copy of Der Spiegel which I was given this week as part of a special offer has [a story about the extent of decay in the country's infrastructure](#) which I had not expected to read in a German paper.

And another story tells of an apparent shortage of housing accommodation which, on closer examination, is not quite what it seems -

Long lines stretch out in front of apartments in Munich, Stuttgart, Düsseldorf, Cologne and Frankfurt during house showings. Desperate apartment hunters are even starting Facebook campaigns, writing chain emails or posting ads on streetlights: "A small family is looking for a home in this area! Please give us a chance!" Politicians are starting to react. Hamburg has proposed housing students and trainees on ships. In Berlin, Federal Minister of Transport, Building and Urban Development Peter Ramsauer of the conservative Christian Democrats plans to convert vacant military barracks into dorms and is urging the city to be imaginative. Meanwhile, Peer Steinbrück, the centre-left Social Democrats' candidate for the Chancellery, is promoting subsidized housing during his campaign. Even the ever-hesitant chancellor, Angela Merkel, suddenly seems to feel inclined to put an end to rising rents.

Merkel even surprised many in her own party with her campaign pledge a few weeks back to cap price increases on properties coming up for re-rental to 10 per cent of average rents in the area. But when the Green Party, which has been touting the issue for two years, tried to push a similar initiative through parliament on Friday, Merkel's coalition parties rejected it. The chancellor appears keen to chalk up a victory on the popular issue in her next term in office.

Run on Fashionable Areas

The overall impression is that Germany's big cities are facing a housing shortage as bad as the one caused by World War II. But experts, real estate associations, German renter groups and municipal building companies convey a different message: There is no general housing shortage in Germany. Instead, there is a massive run on certain fashionable areas in popular cities, which inflates prices. Too many people want to live in the same neighborhoods and yet they are surprised that prices for apartments are increasing.

Comparisons to Hong Kong

"A much greater number of people today exclusively focus on the hip districts in spite of prices. So rents continue to rise and the search for apartments is growing increasingly harder," says Axel Gedaschko, president of the Federal Association of Housing and Real Estate Associations (GdW). That's the reason why many people get the impression that the housing shortage in large German cities has grown to dimensions comparable to Hong Kong.

Often it's only two or three subway stops that make all the difference. According to an analysis by Internet portal Immobilienscout24.de, which runs classified ads for rentals and property for sale, five times more inquiries are made for apartments in Cologne's city center compared to the district of Bilderstöckchen -- which isn't much further out.

"It makes my blood boil," says the manager of one property management company is responsible for around 4,000 apartments. "Those who claim that there are no affordable living spaces in all of Cologne and in other big cities are lying," he insists.

The average rent excluding heat and utilities in Cologne has risen by 9 percent. But dramatic increases in price have only occurred in re-rentals in some popular neighbourhoods. He says the hikes in price are also a result of the government encouraging homeowners to conduct renovations to make homes more energy efficient -- costs that are in part then passed on to the renter.

He also places some blame on today's generation of renters, who he says make it easier for property owners to raise rents on a regular basis. "Today's renter tends to be unsettled," Pass says. He points to singles as an example. At first they're satisfied with 50 square meters (538 square feet), but after they receive their first pay raise, they move into a 70-square-meter apartment. That gives apartment owners the perfect opportunity to turn the screws: They have no problems whatsoever increasing the rent when the re-rent the old apartment to a new tenant.

Already today, around 50 percent of the people residing in large cities are living alone, in some cases occupying living space that would be suitable for up to three people. Something urgently needs to be done for families with low incomes.

If true, that's an amazing statistic - 50% of people living alone in large German cities. I feel we need more flexibility. Take my case - I want to buy somewhere - but only for use during the winter. The place I'm currently renting (upper floor of an old house) would be ideal - but the market doesn't cater for such eccentricities.....

Coincidentally, The Guardian has today a story about [developments in the English market for rented accommodation](#)

29 June 2013

Burning and ...Celebration of Books

My local branch of the Thalia bookstore chain was offering remaindered books yesterday in the huge Rhein Centre Mall just minutes from the house I'm renting in the delightful Bahnstrasse [whose quiet street goes back 100 years](#). I emerged clutching 4 books for 10 euros - all of them real finds. First [Umberto Eco's stunning 450 page On Ugliness](#) (although my version was in German, [Scribd gives me the full version here in English!!](#)) which immediately goes into the short list I have of "beautiful books" (others include [The History of Reading](#); [The Embarrassment of Riches](#); and [Bean Eaters and Bread Soup](#)).

It was 80 years ago (10 May 1933) that the infamous "[burning of the books](#)" took place in Nazi Germany - an [event which is still marked today](#). Volker Weidermann is a German literary critic who has published [The Book of Burned Books](#) which was my second purchase. The website [I love German books](#) noted 3 years ago that it -



provides portraits of every writer on a list compiled by the librarian Wolfgang Herrmann who drew up his list of books by 131 writers of "un-German spirit" for removal from public libraries. It was the student organisation Deutsche Studentenschaft that organised the book burnings around Germany, using the list to select the titles. The writers in question were communists, Jews, anti-militarists and feminists - in a few cases all of the above. The book burning had different consequences for many of them. There were those who went into exile, many of them dying far from home, those who resorted to "inner emigration" of varying degrees of hypocrisy - and some who adapted to the regime, openly writing propaganda for the Nazis. Many of them are still household names in a certain kind of household today, while others died in poverty and obscurity. Plenty of names would be familiar to English readers: Klaus Mann, Heinrich Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Stefan Zweig and Joseph Roth. And Weidermann gives us some quirky details on these writers, such as the letters exchanged between Zweig and Roth and Heinrich Mann's fading optimism in the USA.



And one man - Georg Salzmann - started in the 1970s to collect specimens of these books from flea markets and antiquarian bookshops, [amassing a collection of 12,000](#) which he donated in 2009 to the University of Augsburg. I admire such obsessions!

My third book is actually a comic - the first I have ever bought (in any language). [Der Bewegte man](#) (I thought it meant the "aroused man") appeared in 1987 was probably one of Germany's first gay comic strips. The author - [Ralf König](#) - reminds me of [Claire Bretecher](#) and is now the country's most famous "bande desseinist". I won't make the obvious comment about the meaning of "bander" in French!

My final bargain was a collection of short essays [What do we want?](#) by one Ingo Schulze who turns out to have [interesting views](#) about contemporary events, for example [in this issue of Der Freitag](#) which is a worthy German weekly.

30 June 2013

Model Germany?

Germany has, at the moment, the reputation of an invincible powerhouse - although it was some 15 years ago seen to be somewhat sluggish. I have referred in recent posts to the various critiques which have surfaced in the past few years. Last week's Der Spiegel had a large feature on the [decline of public investment - and the deterioration in public infrastructure](#).

This theme is picked up again in a publication by the European Council for Foreign Relations, entitled - a [German Model for Europe?](#) which

examines the reasons for the success of the German economy during the last decade. In particular, it describes the elements of the Agenda 2010 - essentially a set of labour market reforms implemented by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder from 2003 onwards - and explores their contribution to Germany's macroeconomic performance. It points out some problematic elements of Germany's economic performance during the last decade and concludes that Germany's economic success is a product of a combination of nominal wage restraint, supported by labour market reforms which have brought down the reservation wage and put downward pressure on wages, and severe spending restraints on public investment as well as on research and development and education. On the whole, this cannot serve as a blueprint for Europe.

3 July

getting to know the Germans

Last year I dared to recommend "getting to know the Bulgarians through their painters" (of the last 100 years) and to produce a small book about it. Now I've had the idea of trying to understand the Germans through their literature of the past 50 years.

I've been gripped by a book I picked up a couple of days ago (for 1.5 euros) called Light Years - a short history of German literature from 1945 to the present, available, sadly, only in German. It's very far from being your normal, dry listing of worthy books - but rather a series of short and very human vignettes by Volker Weidermann (of the FAZ) of German writers as they struggled to make a living in post-war Germany. I'm almost half way through - and already feel I have made a lot of new friends.



As I've mentioned already in this series of postings I've been doing in the past 2 months from Koln (20 so far), anglo-saxons wanting to read about European countries are well served with countries such as France, Italy and Spain but starved when it comes to Germany. There is no contemporary John Ardagh writing - despite the best efforts of Simon Winder and Peter Watson. Of course there's no apparent market for such books - apart, perhaps, from those taking short-trips to Berlin for stag parties! But Germany is so vast, diverse and culturally rich that it definitely deserves far more books devoted to it than the dreadful choice currently available eg Spring Time for Germany - a little better, admittedly, than the stuff which Roger Boyes has been inflicting on the British public. Watson's "German Genius" or Winder's "Germania" are not the easiest of reads.

I see that there is a "very short introduction" to German Literature available on the Amazon site - it will be interesting to read it - and compare with the Weidermann text.

In a small way, Weidermann's book reminds me of the magnum opus of Clive James - "Cultural Amnesia" - which gave us a few pages apiece on European writers of the last century (most neglected) and was indeed tempted to alert him to Weidermann's book - not least because of this profile.

I've been one of James' camp followers for some 40 years and cannot imagine a world without him (see his website!!). I find him one of the world's best wordsmiths and renaissance men! One of the very few people I would like to spend some hours with. I was, first, captivated by his songs with Pete Atkin (the 1970s?); amused with his TV commentaries (written and TV); seduced by his autobiographies; and then stunned with his massive "Cultural Amnesia"

7 July 2013

The German connection



Almost a month ago I had been so impressed by the opening story of a book devoted to stories of Anglo-German friendships and loves that I used it [in a post I called "remembering"](#). With all the work I've been doing on the little guide to Romania, it's only now that I've finished what turned out to be a fascinating book with the intriguing title - [Noble Endeavours - the Life of Two Countries, England and Germany, in Many Stories](#) by [Miranda Seymour](#) whose blog also gives background on some of their characters as well as explaining [what brought her to write the book](#).

I've reached the stage of my life when stories about individuals have become more important to me than narratives about historical events. Perhaps the book's author focuses a tad much for contemporary tastes on the higher social echelons, but the stories she tells of

Germans in England and Angles in Germany are nonetheless important - particularly with the appearance of German emigres after the abortive 1848 revolutions. But the most shocking stories appear at the end of the book when it reaches the 1930s and recounts how various Germans and Angles reacted to Hitler. For once the former are the goodies and the latter the baddies - with the [various warnings being actively sidelined by the Foreign Office](#) - including those of [British spies with excellent connections](#)

And I was delighted to see [Tisa Schulenburg](#) appear in the story. Somewhere in Germany, in 1990, I happened to wander in from the street to an exhibition of wonderful sketches of coalminers. They turned out to be Durham miners in the 1930s and executed by "Tisa" Schulenburg - a very graceful lady in her 80s who was kind enough to chat with me and (a few weeks later) send me reproductions of her work and a couple of her books. I knew nothing about her and discovered her full story only later - as [I recounted in a blogpost](#)

"Tisa" Schulenburg's life was by any standard remarkable. Having grown up among the Prussian nobility and witnessed the trauma of Germany's defeat in the Great War, she frequented the salons of Weimar Berlin, shocked her family by marrying a Jewish divorcee in the 1930s, fled Nazi Germany for England, worked as [an artist with the Durham coal miners](#), and spent her later years in a convent in the Ruhr. Her experience of the darker moments of the 20th century was reflected in her sculpture and drawing, in which the subject of human suffering and hardship was a constant theme - whether in the form of Nazi terror or the back-breaking grind of manual labour at the coal face.





When she heard that I was a politician from Strathclyde Region - with its mining traditions in Lanarkshire and Ayrshire - she presented me with a signed portfolio of her 1930s drawings of the NE English miners and their families (some embedded in text) for onward donation to the Scottish miners. She died more than a decade later at the age of 97 - having lived the most amazing life.....

I have copies of them - from which these are selections
The two books she sent are the small "Meine Dunklen Brueder" - which recounts her stay in the North-East villages and contains many of the sketches; and the more substantial "Ich Hab's Gewagt - Bildhauerin und Ordensfrau - ein unkonventionelles Leben" - her autobiography which she has signed in large, clear script, with an address sticker for the St Ursula Convent in Dorsten where she was then living.

I prize the books - and will now work my way through her autobiography.....I notice that the second book had run into 8 editions by the time she sent it to me - with the last imprint being in 1990.

Thursday, May 15, 2014

[Remembering](#)

It was remiss of me not to have mentioned the exhibition of [Otto Dix](#) graphics now in its last few weeks at the Bucharest National Gallery (the side entrance near the English bookshop).

Dix is not a favourite painter of mine - but his graphics about the First World War are quite stunning.

I've also included - by way of comparison - one of the many sketches of Ilya Petrov I bought earlier this year in Sofia....



I was reminded because of opening a new book about Anglo-German Relations called [Noble Endeavours, the Life of Two Countries, England and Germany, in Many Stories](#)' which starts with a profile of one, [Herbert Sulzbach](#) whose life is described by the author in the following terms -

Herbert Sulzbach fought for Germany in the First World War and for Britain in the Second. His most challenging war began later. On November 11 1945, this quietly charming and slightly-built man succeeded in persuading the 4,000 Nazi PoWs with whom he had spent the past 11 months to stand alongside him, on Armistice Day, and pledge themselves to return home as good Europeans, "to take part in the reconciliation of all people and the maintenance of peace."

Subsequently, working among the high-ranking SS officers imprisoned at Featherstone Park in Northumbria, Sulzbach ensured that these more hardened candidates also returned home with a clear understanding of how a liberal democracy should work. Sulzbach's persuasive method — he made a point of imposing no form of censorship — proved remarkably effective. The 3,000 ex-prisoners who later wrote to thank him for his

endeavours had little to gain at that point from their gratitude. One reformed PoW, Willi Brundert, went on to become a celebrated mayor of Frankfurt. Twenty-five of Sulzbach's Nazi pupils would freely form a European branch of Featherstone. It was still going strong when Sulzbach died in 1985..... In 1948, Herbert Sulzbach publicly described the PoWs returning home as the best of envoys for future peace and understanding between Germany and England. Nearly 40 years later, he warned that "first, the old distrust must disappear". The time has surely come to pay heed to Sulzbach's words. Writing my book, Noble Endeavours, I was greatly struck by the spirit of forgiveness I encountered among people who had come to England as Kindertransport children. Born in Germany and now profoundly attached to England, all of them echoed Sulzbach's wish for an end to the old distrust.

On the eve of a year of remembering the horrors that began in 1914, I hope that recalling the past won't allow us to undo, or to neglect, the task of reconciliation for which so much was done by two heroic Jews.

I'm glad to do my little bit in remembering not so much the two World Wars - but the few good people who have tried to do something positive with their lives.....

10 June 2014

A New Germany? Perry Anderson

Excerpt from April 2009 NLR 57 <http://newleftreview.org/II/57/perry-anderson-a-new-germany>

Perry Anderson must be unique amongst Brits for the depth of his (first-hand) reading of works and events which have shaped recent generations in not only European countries such as the UK, Italy, France and Germany but also America and India - and then producing long essays (in some cases book-length). They have all appeared in the New Left Review journal.

This is the last section of his study of contemporary Germany - focusing on cultural aspects.....

Culture (p24)

..... The leitmotif (of the Federal Republic) has always been, and remains, consensus—the unity of all sensible citizens around a prosperous economy and a pacified state, without social conflicts or structural contradictions. No other political system in post-war Europe is so ideologically gun-shy, averse to any expression of sharp words or irreconcilable opinions; so devoted to banality and blandness. The quest for respectability after 1945, federal checks and balances, the etiquette of coalitions, all have contributed to making a distinctively German style of politics, an unmistakable code of high-minded, sententious conformism.

This was not, of course, a mere ideological mannerism. It reflected the reality of a bipartisan—Christian and Social Democratic—convergence on a corporatist model of development, designed to square all interests: naturally, each according to their station, or *Mitbestimmung* writ large, as a charter for social harmony.

This consensus is now, for the first time since the late sixties, under serious pressure. From one direction, demands for social justice risk splitting the fictive unity it has cultivated. The received name for this danger, abhorrent to every self-respecting pundit and politician, is populism—incarnate in the demagogue Lafontaine. It threatens the legacy of Bonn from the left. But the same consensus was also under pressure from an opposite direction. This came from opinion attacking it in the name of liberalism, and calling for a new paradigm of politics worthy of the move to Berlin.

For these critics of the status quo, the vital spirit that post-war Germany always lacked is what Anglo-American societies have long possessed: a sense of individual liberty, suspicion of the state, faith in the market, willingness to take risks—the tradition of Locke, Smith, Jefferson, Ricardo, Mill and their successors.²¹ Politically, the marginality of the FDP reflected the weakness of any such outlook in the Federal Republic. Even the nearest German equivalent after 1945, the Freiburg School of *Ordo-Liberals*—Eucken, Müller-Armack, Röpke—still had, for all their positive influence on Ludwig Erhard, too limited a vision of what a free society requires, as the capture of their originally anti-statist slogan of a 'social market economy' by the clammy corporatism of later years had shown.

A more radical break with inveterate national reflexes, closer to the intransigent temper of a Hayek or Popper, was required. This line of argument, hitting the post-war settlement at an unfamiliar angle, has been a development of intellectual opinion, distant from any obvious popular

mood, but resonating across a wide band of the media. How significant is it politically? German tradition, famously, tended to separate the world of culture from that of power, as a compensation or sphere superior to it.

In his recent study of *The Seduction of Culture in German History*, Wolfgang Ienaghi convicts this inclination of a significant share of blame for the country's surrender to authoritarianism, from the Second to the Third Reich, pointing in particular to the failure of so many German thinkers and writers to defend Weimar democracy; indeed, their often outright hostility or contempt towards it. In the postwar period, so this case goes, such attitudes gradually waned: 'Germany's special path eventually flowed into the mainstream of parliamentary democracy, the market and the rule of the law. Playing off culture against civilization no longer made much sense. It also no longer made much sense to think of culture as a substitute for politics.' By 1949 Leo Strauss was complaining that German thinking had become indistinguishable from Western thought in general. Actually, Ienaghi comments, in such assimilation lay 'one of the great political success stories of the twentieth century'.²² The temptations and delusions of Germany as *Kulturnation* were eventually set aside for a sturdy adjustment to the everyday world of contemporary politics in Bonn.

From this perspective, there was a troublesome interlude around 1968, when students rejected the new normalcy under the influence of traditions now out of time—not necessarily of the same stamp as those uppermost between the wars, but in their way no less disdainful of markets and parliaments. However, such revolutionary fevers were soon over, leaving behind only a mild counter-cultural *Schwärmerei*, eventually issuing into an inoffensive *Greenery*. Thereafter, the intellectual climate in the Federal Republic by and large reflected the stability of the political system. No culture is ever made of one piece, and cross-currents persisted.

But if Kohl's long rule, as distinct from the system over which he presided, found few admirers, the cultural 'dominant' of the period could be described as a theoretical version of the practices of government, in more left-liberal register. The two emblematic thinkers of these years might indeed be said to illustrate, each in his own way, the validity of Ienaghi's diagnosis, exhibiting the reconciliation of culture and power in a pacified German democracy. They shared, appropriately enough, a common American point of departure in Talcott Parsons's *Social System*—a work which nowhere else in Europe enjoyed such a reception.

Habermas's huge *Theory of Communicative Action*, which appeared in 1981, supplied an affirmative variation on Parsons, developing his idealist emphasis on value-integration as the basis of any modern social order into a still loftier conception of consensus, as not only the hallmark of a political democracy, but touchstone of philosophical truth. Niklas Luhmann offered a saturnine variant, radicalizing Parsons's account of differentiated sub-systems within society—economy, polity, family etc.—into a theory of their complete autonomization as self-reproducing, self-adjusting orders, without subjective agency or structural interpenetration, functioning simply to reduce the complexity of the environments outside them. Though less palatable to polite opinion, Luhmann's tacit construction of the Bonn Republic as a matter-of-fact complex of so many mechanisms of technocratic routine disavowed any critical intent. If Habermas told his readers that things could be as they should be—and, under the protection of the *Grundgesetz*, mostly were—Luhmann's message was dryer, but no less reassuring: things were as they had to be.

On the heights of social theory, these bodies of thought commanded the terrain. In history, the other discipline of greatest public projection, the scene was much more varied, with significant

conservative figures and schools continuously active. But here too, the cutting edge of research and intervention—the 'societal' history associated with Bielefeld—was a left-liberal loyalism, critical of the Second Reich as an antechamber of the Third, and tracing the path of a reactionary Sonderweg that, in separating Germany from the West, had led to disaster. Here political emphasis fell on the contrast between a calamitous past and a transfigured present: the Bonn Republic as everything that Weimar had not been—stable, consensual, faithful to the international community. As prolific as Habermas, a close friend from schooldays, Hans-Ulrich Wehler was no less active a presence in the public sphere, sustaining the values of the post-war settlement with a distinctive tranchant of his own. Still more pointed as instruction for the present was the work of Heinrich Winkler on the German labour movement between the wars, dwelling on the blindness of the spd's failure to understand that compromise with parties of the bourgeois centre could alone save German democracy, as had thankfully been upheld since the war.

Rightist dissidents

The hegemony of a left-liberal culture in essential syntony with the character of the political system—while always keeping a critical distance from its particular incumbents—was never exclusive. Powerful earlier bodies of writing, dating back to the interwar period, continued to circulate and exercise influence to other effects, less hospitable to the status quo. The Frankfurt School had been one of these, central in detonating the rebellion of the late sixties. Consensus was not a value dear to it. But once the hyper-activist turn of the revolt had passed, or was crushed, and the legacy of Adorno and Horkheimer had been put through the blender of Habermas's philosophy of communication, little memory was left of the critical theory for which they had stood. Dissonance now increasingly came from the right. There could be found the still active figures of Heidegger, Schmitt, Jünger, Gehlen, all compromised during the Third Reich, each an intellectual legend in his own right. Of these, Heidegger, the best known abroad, was probably of least importance, his post-war reception greater in France than in Germany itself, where under American influence analytical philosophy gained entry early on; his runic ontology had only a narrow purchase on the political or social issues of the period, as one generically desolate vision of technological modernity among others.

The other three, all—unlike Heidegger—masters of a terse, vivid German prose, were of greater moment: Schmitt, the most ruthlessly brilliant, unstable mind of his generation, for his kaleidoscopic ability to shake sovereignty, law, war, politics into sharply new and unsettling patterns; Gehlen, for his uncanny sense of the closure of ideological and artistic forms in the 'crystallizations' of a post-histoire, and the probability of student and guerrilla rebellions against it; Jünger, for the arresting arc of a trajectory from lyricist of a machine civilization to seer of ecological disaster. The calendars and areas of their influence were not the same, in part depending on their personal situations. Schmitt, institutionally the most ostracized, was intellectually the most consulted, constitutional lawyers flocking to his ideas early on.²³ Gehlen, who died much younger, was stylized as a counter-weight to Adorno. Jünger, who lived longest, regained the most complete *droit de cité*, ending up with every kind of honour, indeed decorated by Mitterrand. But, though never 'residual', in Raymond Williams's sense, the intellectual world such thinkers embodied could not compete with the post-war consensus as any kind of public doctrine. It was an alternative to the dominant discourse, inescapable yet peripheral, incapable of displacing it. Hegemony remained left-liberal.

Around the mid-eighties, there were the first premonitions of a change. Habermas's last great book, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, appeared in 1985. Intellectually, it was already on the defensive—a noble rescue operation to save the idea of modernity from the descendants of Nietzsche, from Bataille to Foucault to Derrida, who were darkening it once more into an ecstatic antinomianism. If the dangers Habermas discerned were principally French, it was not long before German subvariants materialized. Peter Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason*, greeted respectfully by Habermas himself, had set the ball rolling two years earlier: a bestseller born of a sojourn with the guru Bhagwan Rajneesh in Poona. Over the next twenty years, a torrent of sequels poured out, zig-zagging across every possible terrain of frisson or fashion, from psychotherapy to the ozone layer, religion to genetic engineering, and catapulting Sloterdijk to the status of talk-show host and popular celebrity—a Teutonic version, more whimsical and bear-like, of Bernard-Henri Lévy. The sway of communicative reason could hardly survive this triumph of public relations. Habermas's pupils, Albrecht Wellmer and Axel Honneth, have continued to produce honourable work, on occasion more radical in tenor than that of their mentor, of late increasingly preoccupied with religion. But the philosophical props of the peace of Bonn have gone.

In the historical field, the story was different. There the mid-eighties saw a more direct assault on left-liberal heights, which was successfully repulsed, but marked a shift of acceptable opinion all the same. The *Historikerstreit* of 1986 was set off by Ernst Nolte's argument that Nazi atrocities were a reaction to prior Bolshevik crimes, and should not be treated as either unique, or as absolute definitions of the German past.

This soon involved a wider group of conservative historians, making less extreme claims, but in the eyes of their critics—Wehler and Habermas among them—nonetheless not only palliating the criminality of the Third Reich, but undermining the necessary centrality of the Judeocide to the identity of post-war Germany, as memory and responsibility.²⁴ National rehabilitation was not to be had in this fashion. There could be no question who won this dispute. Soon afterwards, however, the tables were turned, when in their zeal to preclude any revival of national sentiment the leading lights of left-liberalism—Winkler, Wehler, Habermas—expressed their reserve or opposition to reunification of the country, even as it was plainly about to become a reality. However justified were their objections to the form it took, there was no concealing the fact that this was a transformation of Germany they had never conceived or wished for, as their antagonists had. Here too the dominant had dissolved.

Trouble-makers?

In the gradual change of intellectual atmosphere, one catalyst stands out. Since the war, Germany's leading journal of ideas has been *Merkur*, which can claim a record of continuous distinction arguably without equal in Europe. Its remarkable founding editor Hans Paeschke gave it an interdisciplinary span—from the arts through philosophy and sociology to the hard sciences—of exceptional breadth, canvassed with consistent elegance and concision. But what made it unique was the creed of its editor. Inspired by Wieland's encyclopaedism, Paeschke gave the ecumenical range of his Enlightenment model a more agonistic twist, combining the capacity for *Gegenwirkung* that Goethe had praised in Wieland—who had published Burke and Wollstonecraft alike—with a *Polarisierung* of his own, as twin mottos for the journal.

These remained the constants in Merkur's changeable liberalism—first conservative, then national, then left, as Paeschke later described its phases: an editorial practice welcoming opposites, and setting them in play against each other. 'The more liberal, the richer in tensions.'²⁶ At one time or another Broch, Arendt, Curtius, Adorno, Heidegger, Brecht, Gehlen, Löwith, Weizsäcker, Voegelin, Borkenau, Bloch, Schmitt, Habermas, Weinrich, Bann all appeared in its pages. Uninterested in the Wirtschaftswunder, hostile to the Cold War, regarding Adenauer's Germany as a 'pseudomorphosis', Paeschke maintained good relations with writers in the East, and when the political scene changed in the sixties, was sympathetic to both the student revolt and the turn to an Ostpolitik.

Averse to any kind of Syntheselei, he conceived the journal socratically, as a dialectical enterprise, in keeping with the dictum *Der Geist ist ein Wühler*.²⁷ Spirit is not a reconciler, but a trouble-maker. Paeschke retired in the late seventies, and in 1984 the succession passed to Karl Heinz Bohrer, pre-eminently equipped for the role of *Wühler*. A student of German Romanticism, and theorist of Jünger's early work, Bohrer made his *début* in Merkur in 1968, with a defence of the student revolt against liberal attacks in the mainstream press, praising it as the expression, at its best, of an eclectic anarchism.²⁸ Not the Frankfurt School, he argued, but the French Surrealism that Benjamin had admired and Adorno dismissed, was the appropriate inspiration for rebellion against the detestable *juste milieu* of the Bonn system.²⁹ These were the sentiments of a writer who was soon making a name for himself as editor of the *feuilleton* section of the country's leading conservative newspaper, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, before falling out with his superiors and being packed off as correspondent to London.

A decade later, he returned to the charge in Merkur with a bravura survey of the fate of the movements of 1968—compared to those of 1848 and 1870-71—as uprising and counter-culture, covering politics, theatre, film, art, theory and music, and marking 1974 as the end of a revolutionary epoch in which Blake's tiger had stalked the streets. A mere restoration of 'oldbourgeois cultural piety' was no longer possible, but the new culture had by now lost its magnetism: only an artist like Beuys retained an anarchic force of subversion.³⁰ Bohrer's own deepest allegiances were to 'suddenness' as the dangerous moment, without past or future, in which true aesthetic experience ruptures the continuity of existence and so, potentially, the social fabric. Captured by Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Hofmannsthal and Jünger—in their own way Woolf or Joyce, too—the sudden found its political expression in the decisionism of Schmitt.³¹

The central figure in this pantheon, combining more than any other its aesthetic and political moments—epiphany and act—remained Jünger, the subject of Bohrer's *Ästhetik des Schreckens* (1978), the work that won him a chair in Modern German Literary History at Bielefeld. On taking charge of Merkur soon afterwards, Bohrer opened his editorship in spectacular fashion, with a merciless satire on the petty-bourgeois philistinism, provincialism and consumerism of Bonn politics and culture, complete with a ruinous portrait of Kohl as the personification of a mindless gluttony.³² This was a state, wanting all aesthetic form, that could only be described in the spirit of the early Brecht, or Baudelaire on Belgium.

A three-part pasquinade on the German political class followed, depicting both the new-found *cdu-fdp* coalition and the *spd* opposition to it with blistering derision.³³ Time did not soften these judgements. At the turn of the nineties, Bohrer unleashed another ferocious fusillade against German provincialism, in a six-part series covering government, literature, television, advertising,

press, songs, stars, movies, cityscapes, and culminating in special scorn for delusions that the enthusiasm of his compatriots for Europe was anything other than a tourist form of the same parochialism. From the 'pastoral boredom' of *Die Zeit* and the *faz*, to the 'fussy sentimentalism' of Grass or Walser, to the grotesqueries of Kohl as 'Giant of the Caucasus' and Genscher as his Sancho Panza, little escaped Bohrer's scathing report. At best, the Frankfurt of the sixties had not been quite so dreary as Düsseldorf or Munich, and Fassbinder was a bright spot.³⁴

The polemical élan of such broadsides was never just destructive. From the beginning, Bohrer had a normative ideal in mind. Germany was in need of a creative aesthetics of the state. It was the absence of one that produced the dismal landscape scanned in his first editorial, and its many sequels. To those who taxed him with that 'aestheticization of politics' which Benjamin had identified as peculiar to fascism, he replied that in fact every democratic state that respected itself had its own aesthetic, expressed in its capital city, public buildings, ceremonies, spaces, forms of rule and rhetoric—contemporary America, England, France or Italy supplied the evidence, to which a special issue of *Merkur* was devoted.³⁵ It was in these that the identity of the nation acquired tangible legitimacy and shape: a state without its own distinctive symbolic forms, in which politics was reduced to mere social assistance, was hardly worth the name. It was time for Germany to put the stunted half-life of the Bonn Republic behind it.

When the Berlin Wall came down five years later, but reunification was still quite uncertain, and resisted by the liberal left in the West, Bohrer was thus well positioned to publish, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, perhaps the most powerful single essay of the time in favour of German unity: '*Why We Are Not a Nation—and Why We Should Become One*'.³⁶ His leading adversary was Habermas, treated with the respect Bohrer had always shown him. The contribution to *Merkur* immediately following his famous 'Aesthetics of the State' had, indeed, been an article by Habermas on the peace demonstrations against the stationing of Pershing missiles, and when the *Historikerstreit* came two years later, Bohrer had not hesitated to side with him. But Habermas's resistance to unification, worthy though his notion of a disembodied constitutional patriotism might be as an abstract ideal, was a delusion. Behind it lay a 'negative chiasm', in which the Judeocide stood as the unconditional event of the German past, barring the country from any recovery of a traditional national identity, with its own psychic and cultural forms. 'Did our specifically "irrational" tradition of Romanticism have to be so thoroughly destroyed by the bulldozers

Deficiencies of form

With reunification and the transfer of the capital to Berlin came possibilities of another kind of Germany, for which Bohrer had polemicized. For with them faded the intellectual nimbus of the old order. But if the arrival of the Berlin Republic marked the passage to a new situation, it was not one which Bohrer viewed in any spirit of complacent vindication. When *Merkur* took stock of the country in late 2006 with a book-length special issue '*On the Physiognomy of the Berlin Republic*', under the rubric, *Ein neues Deutschland?*—a virtuoso composition, containing essays on everything from ideology to politics, journalism to architecture, slums to managers, patriots to professors, legitimacy to diplomacy—Bohrer's editorial, 'The Aesthetics of the State Revisited', made clear how little he had relented.³⁷

Germany was now a sovereign nation once more; it had a proper capital; and globalization ruled out any retreat into the self-abasing niche of the past. These were welcome changes. But in many respects the lowering heritage of the Bonn era lived on. In Berlin itself, the new government quarter was for the most part a vacuous desolation, inviting mass tourism, redeemed only by the restoration of the Reichstag—even that banalized by fashionable bric-à-brac and political correctness, not to speak of the droning addresses delivered within it.³⁸ Alone had dignity the ensemble of Prussian classicism, at length recovered, extending east from the Brandenburg Gate to the Gendarmenmarkt. Nor had Berlin's return to the position of a national capital had any transformative effect on other German cities, or even aroused their interest: if anything, each had become more regional, the country more centrifugal, than ever. The feel-good patriotism of the World Cup of 2006, with its sea of bon enfant flag-waving youth, as vapid as it was vulgar, was the obverse of the lack of any serious statecraft at the helm of the republic, of which Merkel was only the latest dispiriting, institutionally determined, incarnation.

Missing in this order was any will to style. The expressive deficit of the Bonn Republic had not been overcome.

True independence of mind, Bohrer would subsequently remark, was to be found in those thinkers—Montaigne, Schlegel, Nietzsche—who replaced Sinnfragen with Formfragen,³⁹ a substitution that could be taken as the motto of his own work. But Sinn and Form are not so easily separated. Bohrer's critique of the deficiencies of the German state, both before and after the move to Berlin, could by its own logic never remain a purely formal matter, of aesthetics alone. From the beginning, his editorial interventions in Merkur had a substantive edge. A state that respected itself enough to develop a symbolic form was one that knew how to assert itself, where required, in the field of relations between states.

From his post in London, Bohrer had admired British resolve in the Falklands War, and he thereafter consistently backed Western military interventions, in the Balkans or the Middle East. The deficit of the German state was thus not just a matter of buildings or speeches, it was also one of arms. Bohrer was a scathing critic of Kohl's failure to join in Operation Desert Storm; advocated the dispatch of German ground troops to Yugoslavia; and handed Schröder a white feather over Iraq. With such belligerence has gone a shift of cultural reference. Paeschke subtitled Merkur 'A German Journal of European Thought', and kept his word—Gide, Eliot, Montale, Ortega, Russell appearing alongside his native eminences.

Few German intellectuals of his generation were as well equipped to maintain this tradition as Bohrer, whose contempt for the provincialism of Bonn and all it stood for was rooted in personal experience. Steeped in Anglo-French culture, after working in London he later lived much of the time in Paris, editing Merkur from afar. But by the turn of the century, a change had come over the journal under him.

The presence of Europe faded. Contributors, topics and arguments were now more insistently American. Bohrer had never been an enthusiast for the eu, his view of it close to a British scepticism—he liked to invoke the Spectator—he had long admired. Intellectual sources in the United States, however, were something new. The combination of a hawkish Aussenpolitik and multiplying signatures from the Heritage Foundation or Cato Institute can give the impression that a German version of us-style neo-conservatism has of late taken shape in Merkur.

Bohrer rejects any such classification.

If he is to be labelled at all, it should be as a 'neo-liberal' in the spirit, not of the IMF, but of Richard Rorty, at once patriot and ironist. That he cannot, in fact, be aligned with either kind of transatlantic import is clear not only from his more accurate self-description elsewhere as an 'anti-authoritarian, subjectivist liberal', but also the occasion that produced it, an essay on the fortieth anniversary of the student revolt in Germany. 'Eight Scenes from Sixty-Eight'—clipped reminiscences of that year: so many strobe-lit flashes of Dutschke and Krahl, Enzensberger and Adorno, Habermas and Ulrike Meinhof—is sometimes acerbic, but for the most part unabashedly lyrical in its memories of the intellectual and sensual awakening of that year: 'Who has not known those days and nights of psychological, and literal, masquerade and identity-switching, does not know what makes life exciting, to vary Talleyrand's phrase'.⁴⁰ Reitz's *Zweite Heimat* offered an unforgettable recreation of them.

The worst that could be said of 68ers was that they destroyed what was left of symbolic form in Germany. The best, that they were never Spiessers. If they left a residue of fanaticism, today that had perhaps become most conspicuous in root-and-branch denunciations of 68 by former participants in it. Bohrer had little time for such renegades.

He was not Daniel Bell: the antinomian held no fears for him.

vi. world power

Looking back on Paeschke's command at *Merkur*, Bohrer once remarked of it that though Schlegel's *Athenaeum* was a much more original journal than Wieland's *Teutsche Merkur*, it was the latter—which lasted so much longer—that marked its epoch; regularity and consistency requiring that eccentricity be curbed, if authority was to be gained. This was a lesson Paeschke had learnt. He himself, however, came out of the Romantic, not the Enlightenment tradition, and took some time to see it, before attempting to conjugate the two.⁴¹

As Bohrer's tenure moved towards its appointed end, the results of that effort were visible. In intention, at any rate, authority has increasingly materialized, in the shape of contributors from just those organs of opinion Bohrer had once castigated as the voices of a pious ennui: editors and columnists from *Die Zeit*, *Die Welt*, the *faz*, coming thick and fast in the pages of the journal. Here a genuinely neo-liberal front, excoriating the lame compromises of the Schröder-Merkel years, is on the attack, aggressively seeking to replace one 'paradigm' with another.

Flanking it, if at a slight angle, is the journal's theorist of geopolitics, Herfried Münkler, author of an ambitious body of writing on war and empire,⁴² whose recent essays in *Merkur* offer the most systematic prospectus for returning Germany, in the new century, to the theatre of *Weltpolitik*. The logic of the inter-state system of today, Münkler suggests, may best be illustrated by an Athenian fable to be found in Aristotle. In an assembly of beasts, the hares demanded equal rights for all animals; the lions replied, 'But where are your claws and teeth?', whereupon the proposal was rejected, and the hares withdrew to the back rows again.

Moral: for equal rights to obtain, there must be a reasonable equality of powers. In their reaction to the American lion's attack on Iraq, countries like France and Germany protested like so many hares, earning only leonine contempt. Even united, Europe could not itself become a lion overnight,

and should realize this. But what it could, and should, become is a continental fox in alliance with the lion, complementing—in Machiavelli's formula—the force of the one with the cunning of the other; in contemporary jargon, American hard power with European soft power. The loyalty of the fox to the lion must be beyond question, and each must overcome current resentment against the other—the lion feeling betrayed, the foxes humiliated, by what has happened in the Middle East.

But once good relations are restored, the fox has a special role to play in the cooperation between them, as a beast more alert than the lion to another, increasingly prominent species in the animal kingdom—rats, now multiplying, and spreading the plague of terror. Such rodents do not belong to the diet of lions; but foxes, which have their own—lesser, but still sharp—teeth and claws, devour them, and can halt their proliferation. That zoological duty will require of Europe, however, that it develop a will to fashion a world politics of its own—*ein eigener weltpolitischer Gestaltungswille*. The necessary self-assertion of Europe demands nothing less.⁴³

What of Germany? In contrast to the Second Reich and the Weimar Republic, both deeply insecure, and the rabid attempt to over-compensate such insecurity in the Third Reich, the Berlin Republic exhibits a new and warranted self-confidence. Post-war Germany for long sought to buy its way back into international respectability, simply with its cheque-book.

Kohl, helping to defray the costs of the Gulf War without participating in it, was the last episode in that inglorious process. Since his departure, Münkler argues, the Federal Republic has finally assumed its responsibilities as an outward-looking member of the European Union: dispatching its armed forces to the Balkans, Afghanistan and Congo, not in any selfish pursuit of its own interests, but for the common good, to protect others. Such is the appropriate role for a medium power, which must rely more on prestige and reputation than repression for its position in the world, and has naturally sought a permanent seat in the Security Council commensurate with its contribution to the operations of the un.⁴⁴ Yet Germany, politically integrated into the eu and militarily into nato, still relies too much on its economic weight for its role as a sovereign state in the world. It needs to diversify its portfolio of power, above all by recovering the ideological and cultural attraction it formerly possessed, becoming once again the *Kulturnation und Wissenschaftslandschaft* of old.

The attraction of the new Berlin as an international city, comparable to its radiance in Weimar days, will help. But soft power alone will not be enough. All Europe, and Germany with it, confronts resistances to the existing world order of capitalism, not from a China or India that are now sub-centres of it, but from the periphery of the system. There, terrorism remains the principal challenge to the post-heroic societies of the West, of which Germany is the deepest example. It would be naïve to think it could be defeated by mere economic aid or moral exhortation.⁴⁵ Propositions such as these, adjusting Prussian modes of thought to contemporary conditions, aim at making policy.

Münkler, no figure of the right but a frequenter of the spd, is listened to within today's Wilhelmstrasse, which has organized ambassadorial conclaves to discuss his ideas. German diplomats, he writes with satisfaction, are readier to play on the different keyboards of power he recommends than are, so far, politicians. Here is probably the closest interface between the

review and the state to be found in *Merkur*. The influence of a journal of ideas is never easy to measure. Bohrer's enterprise has certainly played a critical role in dethroning the comfortable left-liberalism of the postwar intellectual establishment. But its destructive capacity has not—or not yet—been equalled by an ability to construct a comparable new consensus. The kind of hegemony that a journal like *Le Débat* for a period achieved in France has been beyond it. In part, this has been a question of form: the essays in *Merkur*, closer to a still vigorous German tradition of *belles lettres*, remain less 'modern' than the more empirical, better documented, contributions to the French review. But it has also been a function of Bohrer's own distinctive handling of his office. In the tension between Schlegel and Wieland, although he would respect the goal of authority, his own higher value has always been idiosyncrasy—that is, originality, of which the strange cocktail of themes and positions he developed out of Romantic and Surrealist materials in his own texts, effervescent and potent enough by any measure, was the presiding example. Editorially, even in its late neo-liberal moods, *Merkur* always comprised contrary opinions, in the spirit of Paeschke's *Gegenwirkung*. But the underlying impulse was polarizing, not in his but in the avant-garde sense inaugurated by the *Athenaeum*. To Bohrer's credit, conventional authority was forfeited with it.

21 For a pungent version of this complaint from the chief editor of *Die Zeit*, see Josef Joffe, 'Was fehlt?', *Merkur* 689-690, September-October 2006.

22 Wolfgang Iser, *The Seduction of Culture in German History*, Princeton 2006, p. 128.26 nlr 57

23 Schmitt's juridical influence is documented in Dirk van Laak, *Gespräche in der Sicherheit des Schweigens: Carl Schmitt in der politischen Geistesgeschichte der frühen Bundesrepublik*, Berlin 1993; and his wider intellectual impact in Jan-Werner Müller, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought*, New Haven 2003, pp. 76ff, which, as its title indicates, extends beyond the German field itself.

24 Habermas: *Eine Art Schadensabwicklung*, Munich 1987; Wehler: *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit?*, Munich 1988.

25 Within a year of the Historikerstreit, there had appeared sociologist Claus Leggewie's knockabout tour through what he took to be the emergent forms of a new conservatism, *Der Geist steht rechts. Ausflüge in die Denkfabriken der Wende*, Berlin 1987. In this constellation, the most significant figure was Armin Mohler, secretary to Jünger and friend of Schmitt, famous as the author of *Die conservative Revolution in Deutschland, 1918-1932: Grundriss ihrer Weltanschauungen*, which had appeared in 1950, on whom see pp. 187-211.

26 'Kann keine Trauer sein', *Merkur* 367, December 1978, p. 1180; Paeschke took the title of this beautiful farewell to the journal he had edited from Gottfried Benn's last poem, written a few weeks before his death, published in *Merkur*.

27 'Vorbemerkung', in *Merkur. Gesamtregister für die Jahrgänge I-XXXII, 1947-1978*, Stuttgart 1986, p. x. The phrase comes from Burckhardt.

28 'Die Missverständene Rebellion', *Merkur* 238, January 1968.

29 'Surrealismus und Terror', *Merkur* 258, October 1969.

30 'Die ausverkauften Ideen', *Merkur* 365, October 1978.

31 'Der gefährliche Augenblick', *Merkur* 358, March 1978; themes developed in *Plötzlichkeit: zum Augenblick des ästhetischen Scheins*, Frankfurt 1981, of which there is an English translation, *Suddenness: on the Moment of Aesthetic Appearance*, New York 1994.

32 'Die Ästhetik des Staates', *Merkur* 423, January 1984.

33 'Die Unschuld an die Macht', *Merkur* 425, March 1984; *Merkur* 427, May 1984; *Merkur* 431, January 1985.

34 'Provinzialismus', *Merkur* 501, December 1990; *Merkur* 504, March 1991; *Merkur* 505, April 1991; *Merkur* 507, June 1991; *Merkur* 509, August 1991; *Merkur* 512, November 1991.

35 'Ästhetik und Politik sowie einige damit zusammenhängende Fragen', *Merkur* 451-452, September-October 1986.

36 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 January 1990; for an English version of this text, see *New German Critique*, no. 52, Winter 1991. Its translator, Stephen Brockmann, would later describe Bohrer's arguments as 'a foundational discourse for the triumphal conservatism that emerged on the German right in the wake of reunification'. For this judgement, see his *Literature and German Reunification*, Cambridge 1999, p. 57.

37 'Die Ästhetik des Staates revisited', *Merkur* 689-690, September-October 2006. The title of the special number alludes, of course, ironically to the official daily of the former ddr.

38 For a mocking tour of the fixtures and fittings of the new Bundestag, and of the government district at large, see Gustav Seibt's deadly squib, 'Post aus Ozeanien', *Merkur* 689-690.

39 'Was heisst unabhängig denken?', Merkur 699, July 2007, p. 574.

40 'Acht Szenen Achtundsechzig', Merkur 708, May 2008, p. 419.

41 'Hans Paeschke und der Merkur. Erinnerung und Gegenwart', Merkur 510-511, September-October 1991.

42 For a penetrating critique of his major recent work, *Imperien*, which came out in 2005, see Benno Teschke, 'Empires by Analogy', nlr 40, July-August 2006.

43 Münkler, 'Die Selbstbehauptung Europas. Fabelhafte Überlegungen', Merkur 649, May 2003.

44 Münkler, 'Die selbstbewusste Mittelmacht. Aussenpolitik im souveränen Staat', Merkur 689-690, September-October 2006.

45 Münkler, 'Heroische und postheroische Gesellschaften', Merkur 700, August-September 2007.

FURTHER READING – initial draft

I suggested in the Introduction that the intelligent traveler who wants well written and thorough insights into a country's culture, history and society is badly served.

[Germany - Unravelling an Enigma](#); Greg Nees (Intercultural Press; interaction series 2000)

Very readable analysis of the key elements which make Germany what it is

[A New Germany?](#) Perry Anderson (New Left Review 57 - April 2009)

If you want a well-written piece based on a lifetime's reading of original source material, this is it

[German Genius](#); Peter Watson (2010)

a massive and well-produced book by Peter Watson which attempts to rectify what he (rightly) considers to be a serious ignorance by the English-speaking world of what Germany has contributed to the world in the past 200 years. The long introduction of *German Genius* summarises various recent debates about the distinctiveness of German development (eg the "Historikerstreit" of the 1980s and the later "Sonderweg" thesis) is intellectual history at its best and demonstrate the depth of Watson's reading and understanding.

[Germania - a personal history of Germans ancient and modern](#) ; Simon Winder (2010)

Rather idiosyncratic treatment which uses historical monuments and artefacts to gives us slabs of German history up to 1933. The bits which grabbed my attention are [summarized here](#)

[Deutschland for Beginners](#) (English title - "Springtime for Germany"); Ben Donald (2007)

Quirky but useful

[Germany - memories of a Nation](#); Neil MacGregor (2014)

Focuses on cultural objects - in the spirit of Watson's and Winder's books

[Death of a Nation - a new History of Germany](#); Stephen A'Barrow (2015)

A very interesting-looking book by a non-academic Germanophile

[Five Germanies I have known](#); Fritz Stern - a marvellous historian born in Breslau/Wroclaw in 1926 who escaped to America in 1938 and wrote this powerful autobiography essay which I read a few years back with great pleasure and benefit. He is a highly engaging character - as you can see both from his book and [this video of him introducing it](#)

[Noble Endeavours - the Life of Two Countries, England and Germany, in Many Stories](#) by [Miranda Seymour](#) whose blog also gives background on some of their characters as well as explaining [what brought her to write the book](#).

Sebastian Haffner was a German émigré and journalist who has written some of best stuff on modern Germany....

[German Literature - a very short introduction](#); Nicholas Boyle (2007)

Very good on the social context

[Berlin in the 20th Century - a cultural topography](#); Andrew J Webber (2008)

Rather academic treatment - but looks worth persevering with

[Roads to Berlin](#); Cees Nooteboom (2009)

A poetic set of diary notes from a famous Netherlands journalist who has known the city since the 1960s and lived in it off and on.

[Berlin; imagine a city](#) Rory McLean (2014)

A look at the historical figures who still prowl the landscape - in the genre of Watson, Winder and MacGregor

I seem to remember also a voluminous book on the history of the city by Alexandra Ritchie

<https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/culture/communication-media/the-german-blogging-scene>

German Stereotypes in British magazines prior to WW!

http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-06092004-150805/unrestricted/Bertolette_thesis.pdf

About the author

Ronald Young lived the first 48 years of his life in the West of Scotland - 22 of them as an aspiring academic and innovative politician in local, then Regional, Government.

The last 24 years have been spent as a consultant in central Europe and central Asia - generally leading small teams in institutional development or training projects.

He first came to live in Bulgaria in the summer of 2007 - and has since then divided his time between a flat in Sofia, a flat in Bucharest and a house in the Carpathian mountains.

In 2008 he started a website which contains the major papers he has written over the years about his attempts to reform various public organisations in the various roles he has had - politician; academic/trainer; consultant.

"Most of the writing in my field is done by academics - and gives little help to individuals who are struggling to survive in or change public bureaucracies. Or else it is propoganda drafted by consultants and officials trying to talk up their reforms. And most of it covers work at a national level - whereas most of the worthwhile effort is at a more local level.

The restless search for the new dishonours the work we have done in the past. As Zeldin once said - "To have a new vision of the future it is first necessary to have new vision of the past"

In 2009 he started a blog - called [Balkan and Carpathian Musings](#) - to try to make sense of the organisational endeavours he has been involved in - to see if there are any lessons which can be passed on. To restore a bit of institutional memory and social history - particularly in the endeavour of what used to be known as "social justice".

"My generation believed that political activity could improve things - that belief is now dead and that cynicism threatens civilisation. I also read a lot and wanted to pass on the results of this to those who have neither the time nor inclination - as well as my love of painting, particularly the realist 20th century schools of Bulgaria and Belgium" .

He now has a new website - [Mapping the Common Ground](#) - which is a library for articles and books he considers useful for those who - like Brecht - feel that "*So ist die Welt - und muss nicht so sein!*"

I've always had great difficulty answering the simple question "What do you do?" "Student" was easy but, after graduation, I had a quick succession of jobs in what could be called generally the "planning" field - and "planner" is as vague a term as "manager" and enjoyed a rather limited vogue. In 1968 I joined a polytechnic and was also elected to a town council - so "lecturer" was as good a description as what I did as any. Using my voice was what I was paid for - whether to transmit information or opinions. I read widely - so "reader" was also a pertinent word. I became heavily involved in community development - managing to straddle the worlds of community action and political bureaucracy (for 20 years I was the Secretary of ruling Labour groups in municipal and regional Councils and also a sponsor of community action) and figured in a book about "reticulists" (networkers) - but imagine putting that word in a passport application!

For a few years I was Director of a so-called "Research Unit" which was more like a Think Tank in its proselytising workshops and publications celebrating the new rationalism of corporate management and community development.

At age 43 my default activity became full-time (regional) politics - with a leader role but of a rather maverick nature who never aspired to the top job but was content to be at the interstices of bureaucracy, politics and academia. I remember my reception at an OECD function in central Sweden as someone with a proclivity to challenge.

All this paved the way for the "consultancy" which I have apparently practised for the past 20 years in Central Europe and Central Asia. But "consultant" is not only a vague but a (rightly) increasingly insulting term - so I was tempted for a period to enter the word "writer" on my Visa application forms since this was as good a description of what I actually did as any. At one stage indeed, my despairing Secretary in the Region had actually given me the nickname "Paperback writer". Except that this was seen by many border guards in central Asia as a threatening activity! Robert Reich's "symbolic analyst" briefly tempted - but was perhaps too close to the term "spy"!

When I did the [Belbin test on team roles](#) to which I was subjecting my teams, I had expected to come out as a leader - but was not altogether surprised to discover that my stronger role was a "resource person" - someone who surfed information and knowledge widely and shared it. What some people saw as the utopian streak in my writing gave me the idea of using the term "poet" at the airport guiches - but I have a poor memory for verse.

This morning, as I looked around at the various artefacts in the house, a new label came to me - "collector"! I collect beautiful objects - not only books and paintings but pottery, pens, pencils, laquered cases, miniatures, carpets, Uzbek wall-hangings, Kyrgyz and Iranian table coverings, glassware, terrace cotta figurines, plates, Chinese screens, wooden carvings et al. Of very little - except sentimental - value I hasten to add! But, of course, I have these things simply because I have been an "explorer" - first of ideas (desperately searching for the holy grail) and then of countries - in the 1980s Western Europe, the 1990s central Europe - finally central Asia and beyond.

Some 25 years ago, when I was going through some difficult times, my sister-in-law tried to help me by encouraging me to explore the various roles I had - father, son, husband, politician, writer, activist etc. I didn't understand what she was driving at. Now I do! Lecturer, reticulist, politician, maverick, leader, writer, explorer, consultant, resource person, collector - I have indeed played all these roles (and more too intimate for this blog!). Makes me wonder what tombstone I should have carved for myself in the marvellous [Sapanta cemetery in Maramures](#) where people are remembered humourously in verse and pictures for their work or way they died!!

And it was TS Eliot who wrote that
old men ought to be explorers

Hopefully [this flickr account](#) will be built up more in the months to come with more examples of art.....

LIST OF Author's PUBLICATIONS

[Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey \(2014\)](#)

[Introducing the Bulgarian Realists - how to get to know the Bulgarians through their paintings \(2012\)](#)

[The Search for the Holy Grail - some reflections on 40 years of trying to make government and its systems work for people 2012](#)

[Just Words - a glossary and bibliography for the fight against the pretensions and perversities of power \(2012\)](#)

[A Draft Guide for the Perplexed \(2011\)](#)

[The Long Game - not the log-frame; \(2011\)](#)

[Administrative Reform with Chinese Characteristics \(2010\)](#)

[Training that works! How do we build training systems which actually improve the performance of state bodies? \(2010\)](#) Even altho I say it myself - it is one of the best papers on the subject

[Learning from Experience - a Bulgarian project \(2009\)](#)

[Building Municipal Capacity \(2007\)](#) an interesting account of an intellectual journey

[Roadmap for Local Government in Kyrgyzstan \(2007\)](#) this is a long doc (117 pages. I enjoyed pulling out this metaphor - and developing using (in workshops) the diagram at pages 76-77

[Building Local Government in a Hostile Climate \(2006\)](#)

[Overview of PAR in transition countries \(2006\)](#) This is the paper I drafted for the European Agency for Reconstruction after the staff retreat the EAR Director invited me to speak at in June 2006 in Skopje, Macedonia. The best papers are always written after the event!

[Transfer of Functions - European experiences 1970-2000](#) I learned a lot as I drafted this paper for my Uzbek colleagues. I haven't seen this sort of typology before.

[Case Study in Organisational Development and Political Amnesia \(1999\)](#)

[In Transit - Part One \(1999\)](#) The first section of the book I wrote for young Central European reformers. I find it stands up pretty well to the test of time

[Annotated Bibliography for change agents](#) - For quite a few years I had the habit of keeping notes the books I was reading. Perhaps they will be useful to others?