

Lutz Niethammer

# Memory and History

## GESCHICHTE ERINNERUNG POLITIK

Posener Studien zur Geschichts-,  
Kultur- und Politikwissenschaft

Herausgegeben von Anna Wolff-Powęska  
und Piotr Forecki

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Fakultät der politischen Wissenschaften  
und des Journalismus  
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Lutz Niethammer

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# Table of Contents

## EGO-HISTOIRE?

Living Memory and Historical Practise. A Personal Tale (2001) .....	7
1.1 Mastered History? Irritations about the suggested format and authorship of 'ego histoire' .....	9
1.2 About the Involuntary in my Historical Practise. Personal Reflections .....	13
Diversity and eclecticism / Beyond oeuvre / Hidden agenda?	
1.3 Memory and History Conceptual intervention .....	36
1.4 In Search of Textures lost From the historian's laboratory for recollections.....	41
Construction and legendary / The composition of narratives / Images and contexts	

## THE COMMUNICATIVE MEMORY..... 55

2.1 Intervening into Memory (2004).....	57
2.2 Oral History as a Channel of Communication between Workers and Historians (1982).....	63
2.3 Traces of Memory Leading Back into the 1950s (1987) .....	77
2.4 Zeroing in on Change. In Search of Popular Experience in Industrial Milieus of the GDR (1988) .....	110
2.5 Where Were <i>You</i> on 17 June? A Niche in Memory (1990).....	169

## VARIETIES OF IDENTITY AND MEMORY..... 191

3.1 The Infancy of Tarzan. Is Collective Identity indifferent? (2001) .....	193
3.2 A European Identity? (2002).....	
3.3 Maurice Halbwachs: Memory and the Feeling of Identity (2000) .....	226

A CASE OF COMPENSATION .....	243
4.1 From Nazi Forced Labor to „Remembrance, Responsibility, and Furture“ (2007).....	245
4.2 How to Address the Injustices of the Nazi Era from an Historical Perspective (1999).....	323
4.3 From Wrongs to Rights? (2001) .....	335
COMPARATIVE REFLEXIONS .....	351
5.1 Reconstruction and Disintegration: The German Labor Movement between War and Cold War (1979) .....	353
5.2 The Mythological Potential of the Soviet Special Camps (1945-1950) in Germany in the Cold War and since (2009) .....	370
Divided Legacy / Transnational Research Cooperative / The Historians' Intervention and it's Limits	
5.3 The German “Sonderweg” after Unification (1992).....	384
POSTHISTOIRE? .....	405
6.1 Afterthoughts on Posthistoire (1989).....	407
6.2 On Katja Strunz's Object Visionary Fragment (for Antoine Augustin Cournot), 2003 .....	429
POST SCRIPTUM .....	433

# **EGO-HISTOIRE?**

**Living Memory and Historical Practice. A personal tale**





## **1.1 Mastered History? Irritations about the suggested format and authorship of ‘ego histoire’**

To be invited to present a public reflection on the interrelationships of one's life and work is to be seduced and frustrated at the same time. Seduced because it is flattering that there should be such a personal interest in my historical practise and in my person with colleagues from all over Europe, being gathered at its most prominent graduate faculty here in Florence. Frustrating because an one hour exposé in ‘Ego Histoire’ seems to me to be an impossible task.

Obviously, the challenge is not an autobiography because that genre of narratives can hardly be put on the agenda from the outside. If its results were to be any good, it needed a special motive and time in the author's life to be triggered off and then most probably it may run into complexities that would afford far more space. Basically this holds still true when the task would be cut down to a work account after more than thirty years as an academic historian. The right time in life for autobiographical labors usually is a crisis, when things can no longer be taken as selfunderstood and the person is forced to come to grips with his or her own tale, authoring it anew. Less generally, but still as a standard rule the best type of crisis for an autobiography is a liberating one, when the restraints of institutions, ambition and discretion tend to fade away, measured against the need to compose or correct one's own image or to tell some of the important stories that were silenced before. Significantly most male autobiographers set to work after loosing their institutional power. Most authors of this series of essays, including my-self, may approach that sort of crisis, but the restraints are still at work.

What, then, is an ‘ego histoire’? When I look into the french models of that type of narrative I find constructions of the specificities of various historians' approaches to their work, more or less placed into the contexts of their time and professional surroundings, but only little glimpses of their private or even intimate lives. This is even so with historians who tell that they were influenced by psychoanalysis, by anthropology, gender-, cultural and micro-studies and reflect periods and contexts of their formation, when and where the personal was regarded to be the political. I am astonished, but of course I appreciate the decency of their discretion.

But it raises questions about the construction of the ‘Egos’ at work. The influences of Allied re-education on my youth were strong enough that, from my student days, I construed my intellectual practise to be at least as much on the tracks of the Enlightenment as it was then schooled by the romantic assumptions

of German historicism, then already in decline. But for one thing: the enlightened construct of a gigantic Ego, later to be ruined by Freud, and in a diminished way resurrected for the encouragement of the masses in contemporary middle-class-societies by Erikson and other Ego-psychologists, drawing on Jung's theories about individuation and fascinated by his cult of the genius. Is the Ego the sole source of creativity, in reading and writing, in the impulse to select a problem and to get started in what direction, in deciding where to go for what sort of information and where and how to present results or reflections? And in the exchanges when you advise students or younger colleagues or seek advice with others yourself? Or are there other relationships at work, short-cuts between deeper layers of the self and challenges, models, powers, complex attractions and frustrations from the outside world, both of which Ego may or may not be able to perceive to some extent, but for sure is not in control of? Of course I know that there are colleagues producing a lot and sometimes very useful stuff, sitting down at their desk at eight a clock in the morning and are furthering professional knowledge step by step.

But my own experience is different. Take for instance writing: since almost half a century time and again I have tried, for all sorts of good reasons, to tear my writing and interpretative work into day-light, but always in vain. Either it just didn't happen or the results were dull and uninspiring, piecing together available information within professional frameworks and using burocratic or fashionable languages and, hopefully more often, Ego then censored again what it had produced. Writing with me only happens at night, and I mean it in every sense of the word (with lots of pipes and hopefully less wine). Next morning, the Ego then mediates, edits, or cuts out the results of my intellectual night-life and during the rest of the day (or month or year), it takes a lot of reading or whatever intake of information has to be done, to allow for further intuitions and make the composition possible again next night. With me, the Ego is construed to be a mediating and controlling institute, dominated by rationality, but if there were nothing else generating, there would be hardly anything worthwhile for it to edit. Or take the advising of research students (or similar visitors in search of advice), for me the central job of a professor and, being a poor teacher in collective situations, the only one that I think I can be really good at, at least now and then, when 'it' happens. In such situations I carve out all other considerations and try to be completely at the attention of my visitor. The exchange then is always very friendly, but may reach to the extremes of professional critique and into the depth of our motives as well. We may sit for the rest of the day, or take a long walk, getting very personal indeed and very much to the point of the subject matter under review, hopefully generating strategies of inquiry that are apt to both, the author and the problem. On such an occasion it is not only Egos that

relate somehow and stimulate one another, but all sorts of textures between our selves including the presence of various dimensions of the outside world, some of them under rational control, others well beyond its reach.

On second thought, the reservations of other 'ego-historians' may have had more professional reasons, too, including the impossibility to relate to the complexities of one's own life in the format of a lecture or a scholarly article. Even if they had chosen nothing more than just a few examples from the more complex, i.e. true and riddling pieces of their recollections they would have been drawn into the autobiographical genre where you have to weave a whole texture of relationships to make even a little scene from your memory meaningful to others.

Another astonishment was even more bewildering to me: most colleagues who did 'ego histoires', relating the development of their approach and oeuvre, seemed to be able to make sense of it. Which is the precondition of a short version. In most cases there seemed to be a continuity in their view of their development and sort of a subjective and meaningful programmatic, that they had meanwhile acquired, sounding to me as if they were the masters of their histories. Were they? Did they think, they were? Or was it the format und context of their narratives that had suggested a continuous flow and a happy ending?

May-be my impression was wrong, but my irritation was there and it had – beyond my inability to cut long stories short – at least two reasons. The first had to do with my own feelings about my life and work, suggesting, that they were far more fragmented and open ended and that I certainly was not the master of my histories, let alone of my life. But if an elderly historian was asked to tell his 'ego histoire', was he or she not regarded to be able to tell a story with a meaningful ending that could tell others about a field mastered, and how to do it. My problem was neither one of overdone modesty nor the frustration of someone who, in old age, looked back on his life and work and felt, that he had achieved nothing. The question was more one of authorship and how to reduce a useful message.

The second reason of my irritation rooted in my experience as an oral historian with life-cycle-interviews and more generally with some two decades of ever and again coming back to the problem of memory, individual and collective (and gratefully I want to acknowledge here that I was first initiated to these problems by Luisa Passerini long ago). Taking the 'communicative memory' of those still around, I knew that most people by now in central Europe could present a version of their curriculum vitae, grouped around basic data of their descent, formation, carrier, and family, and that most of them also presented a hidden or outspoken pattern of how to explain the specificity of their life in general and socially acceptable terms, sometimes even a statement about the meaning of

their life and accomplishment. In Germany many elderly interviewees usually had put their personal experience into and against the discontinuities of German history of the 20th century and its major events, that structured for many their experience of time, often had changed their lives in unforeseeable and dramatic ways and sometimes even put questions as to their survival and personal identity. Against this background a sense for success in life in the long run resembled with many more some sort of individual luck and muddling through (“Durchkommen”) rather than accomplishment, pride or the advance of a tradition. When the interview went on, however, this sort of lifestory for social uses, with well established references and acceptable patterns of meaning, unfolded into something much more complex and fragmented, full of relationships and little scenes from their memories, that sometimes fitted into their overall pattern and sometimes did not. Those, that didn’t, usually proved to be keys for interpretation, because they were uncensored from later explanations and social acceptability. The overall patterns thus got a history of their own, when perceived from the unintegrated slips of reminiscences which the interaction with an unknown interviewer, a screen for all sorts of transferences, had liberated in memory. The more we got away from a mastered history, the more we touched real ground, if only in fragments, to be puzzled together anew, and the more we learned about the making of hegemonic sense and the limits of its powers of integration.

In short, I feel the format and the construction of authorship of ‘ego histoire’ not to be feasible for me. So what can I do between temptation and frustration? I can only offer a much more questionable and fragmented substitute. First I try to reflect on my practise as a specialist in contemporary history, or what Germans call “Zeitgeschichte” (history within living memory), looking at it from an unachieved end. Second I shall sketch very shortly some ideas on the relationship of memory and history. Finally offering a small extract from my own recollections, if I were asked to present them in a semi-public context for historical purposes. And in the end I will leave it to you to let history and memory comment on one another.

## 1.2 About the Involuntary in my Historical Practise. Personal Reflections

Since most of us historians think of their writing as the center of their practise, I will start with looking back on my publications, especially what they look like as a whole, in terms of methodological and thematic coherence. Then I will point to other fields of the practise of an academic historian and the social contexts, that co-authored my work. And third I suggest sort of a hidden agenda behind the inconsistencies of the present author.

### 1.2.1 Diversity and eclecticism

The first problem I find with my published work is that it lacks thematic and methodological coherence, an evident evolution and a sense for time and planning. Since time is the basic dimension of history, I find my lack of ability to handle it in my own work rhythm quite troubling. A dear friend and respected historian, who has published readable books of some two- or threehundred pages in an continuous flow of perceptable stages, once told me how he is planning his oeuvre, putting one step before the other. Nothing could be less characteristic of my own publications.

#### *Publications:*

Some of them, including various of the papers and articles that have been put together and reissued under the title "Germany thereafter" [1999] by my friends and former assistants, answered public challenges and two such books (on Post- and Neofascism [1969]; on Communist Capos in the concentration camp of Buchenwald and after [1994]) were produced within months, to intervene at the right time in public debate, ruining all other plans. On the other side it took me seven years to write my dissertation on American Denazification in Bavaria [1972, reissued 1982] (amid was 1968) and I conceptualize a postwar German history since almost two decades (amid was 1989) without having achieved more than a blueprint and first fragments of text. I had not even finished my dissertation, when I began to edit private papers of Walter Dorn, General Clay's advisor on denazification [1973], by the way, an American specialist of early modern European history, and in some ways a kindred soul. My planned 'habilitation' on the European discourse about working class housing and spacial social control was never written, because in 1973 I got a chair when I was in the middle of research for this project in England.

When in 1978 after two years of being dean of my department I sought time off to complete this research in France, I did get the time, but never settled down to write the book, becoming vice-president of my university instead, but scattered some of the results in articles and in advising others. The substitutes became a comparative article, largely a blueprint, shelved in an American reader on urban history and never published in German, a collection of essays (all about German housing, including one of my own) 'Dwelling in Change', edited by me [1979] and my own favourite little booklet on (to quote just the first of some of my awkward titles on the Ruhr) "Circumstantial explanation of the psychic troubles of a local planner in Prussia's biggest industrial village or The inability of urban development" [1979], in fact a programmatic article on the urban- and 'Alltags'-historical approach to industrial agglomerations, disguised in a biographical sketch of some thirty pages, considerably enlarged by archival documents and 19<sup>th</sup> century maps and photographs, some of which an artist and colleague, my friend Hermann Sturm, had collaged into, and deciphered by, ingenious drawings. But in my own work, that programmatic was almost the last piece of urban history. Two of my more recent studies (on *Posthistoire* [1989] and on *Collective Identity* [2000]) were planned as critical comments on fashionable 'theories' of the 80s and 90s, each to be written in a summer as a short and readable pocket book, but they drew me into major excursions into intellectual history and years went by till they were finally published, one having accumulated some 670 pages of small print and thereby completely lost its purpose as a public intervention. Various publications were the result of team-work (such as on antifascist liberation committees in Germany 1945 [1976], the impact of the Marshall-Plan on the European left [1986], the experience of working class people West and East 1930-1960 [4 vol. 1983, 1985, 1991], an invitation to people's history in my region then (1985), a textbook on civil society in Germany since around 1800 [1990]) or the documentation "Between Liberation and Occupation" from the archives of the American secret service [1977, reissued 1995], an edition of Russian documents on Soviet camps in Germany 1945-1950 [1998] and including the *Capo*-book, mentioned earlier on. Most of this team-work has been quite close – and the bigger the team was, the more it proved to be time consuming – with me usually being the team leader or one of them but much of the best insight for the overall projects and some of its most rewarding texts coming from fellow authors.

### *Themes:*

When I try to group my own writing and the animation of more or less collective projects by themes and subject matters, some centres of gravity emerge: (1) the impact of the Allies and the Cold War on the perception of postfascist problems

(including the transformation of the extreme right) and antifascist (and more generally leftist and trade union) perspectives in Germany and Europe; (2) spatial aspects of social control, popular experience and cultural symbols in industrial regions and more particularly the Ruhr district; (3) the perceptive structures of popular experiences as a mediator of continuity through the discontinuities of German history in mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, including rising individualization and fading infrastructures of collectivity among the working classes in different varieties in West and East; (4) the roots of widespread concepts of the later 20<sup>th</sup> century in the intellectual history of the aftermaths of World War I and of totalitarian ideology; (5) the history and heritages of camps (and of forced labor) as most infamous sites of the breakdown of German and some other European civilizations. Such a list is intriguing enough, but in my view it would have to be topped with the themes of projects abandoned (the spacial discourse of social control in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, a history of the future in the 20<sup>th</sup> century) or still not achieved like the puzzle of a political, social and cultural history of Germany, including its international ramifications and the workings of public and private memories in both West and East since 1945 and beyond 1990, that is on top of my agenda. But this agenda also includes the animation of two more collective projects on the cultural history of infrastructures and the impact and challenge of intergenerational transfers of experiences from the GDR within youth cultures in Eastern Germany, yet to be observed.

For me such themes and subject matters are not really unconnected, but I am stuck when I have to explain the diversity to others. Could I only explain it in autobiographical or generational terms? Who co-authored the variety of these interests? Am I an opportunist in opposition? One thing seems to me to be quite evident from such a survey: in contrast to many a painstakingly specialized scholar, who keeps to his chosen line and problematic and hopefully will, on top of the piles of his or her specialized knowledge, end up with a big break through, I was much more tied to questions of my time and surroundings, taking them up to give them a different turn. I worked on the assumption, that after a couple of years one should change the field of specialization and also the methodological approach. Looking back I am still not sure, whether this was prompted by changing outward influences and challenges, or by my curiosity, or by a conviction that if one spent five or ten years on a problem and did not come up with results or at least a debatable intervention into the set of questions, one's own contribution probably was false or not really worthwhile, or by whatever mix of the three. I do not want to overdo this point, since my work was restricted to a relatively limited field in the time span of European history and within this, it was nationally biased and sometimes quite parochial. But there remains an insecurity about the authorship of one's own writings.

*Methods and Sources:*

Even though a decade ago I was regarded among German colleagues as ‘Mr. Oral History’, after I had edited, and contributed to, five or six volumes in this field to probe and prove the usefulness and academic acceptability of this method within German history, I myself, again, do not see a dominating methodological approach in my work. My lectures at the university largely deal with a somewhat widened political history as was my dissertation. Quantitative and comparative operations have always been central to my way of linkages between social and political aspects of history. And in my studies about concentration-, labor- and similar camps – provoked during the last decade by advisory jobs in the remodelling of the commemorative site of Buchenwald and in the very late compensation of Nazi forced labor by German industry and government – I could not only invest a certain amount of expertise with life histories and the experience of victims, but I had also to learn unwillingly the horrible lesson that in any comparison and history of such camps the death toll is an indispensable indicator and instrument of research.

The same picture of an eclectic (and in some fields amateurish) methodological experimentation holds true when I look to the sources I used. Certainly, I can recognize periods in which I concentrated largely on one type of evidence: the texture of American and Bavarian archives early on, in a middle phase the coproduction and interpretation of oral recollections, in a later period published material on and of intellectuals, be it to uncover the origins and interplay of their ideas, be it to synthesize research done by others. But in the first phase of archival pleasures I have also evaluated current parliamentary debates, tried to make sense of public opinion polls, and compared the images and maps of cities, industrial agglomerations and varieties of housing. Even including the collection, interpretation and instigation of documentary photography of the Ruhr Region – well into the second phase of my oral history adventures. These were on the other side combined with the interpretation of Nazi films and of archival ‘ego documents’, types of sources I taught about considerably and wrote little, or more recently of the oppositional leaflets during the fall of the GDR. This did not preclude that I also continued earlier comparative work, based on the research of others, on fascist movements, the postwar European labor movement, or later on camps (or, as in my current teaching, within the process of European integration) or that I fell in love with intellectual history.



*Schools:*

Again, when I look to the theoretical references of my work, I find the same eclecticism. Even though I gratefully enjoyed the compaigny and inspiration (and sometimes even a sort of conspirational fighting spirit) of various teams and networks, I never had the feeling that I belonged to a school. And the courageous individualistic resistance of my assistants and research students wiped out all of my own temporary temptations, to do more than to advise them and direct them instead into my favourite interests: happily, this almost always was an utter failure. To be sure I am proud that all assistants to my chairs in the Ruhr later became professors themselves, and that we stayed friends, but most of them worked in or developed into different fields, finding approaches of their own: Ulrich Borsdorf in museology, Othmar Haberl in East-European studies, Alexander Schölch in Middle-Eastern studies, Detlef Peuckert in the interwar period (both unfortunately already deceased), Franz Brüggemeier in ecological history, Ulrich Herbert in Nazi-History, and Dorothee Wierling in the fields of gender and education. With almost everyone of them I did team-work at times and advising these brilliant people meant learning and pleasure for me. But certainly we do not constitute a school.

On the other hand this should not sound as if I were not grateful for the chances and stimulations that I got when I myself was near more schoolbuilding masters like my 'Doktorvater' Werner Conze, a conservative innovator in grounding political in social history, (who was very tolerant with my selection of a sensitive subject and during the rather long span of time I worked on it, but in the end didn't like the result particularly). Or Hans Mommsen (who picked me as his first assistant even before I had a doctorate or, for that matter, any exam at all), a social-democratic fighter against nationalism und conservatism and, together with Martin Broszat (who advised my first editorial work on Dorn), the protagonist of the structuralist approach to Nazi history. Later from 1972 onwards I profitted in England from my contacts with the innovator of urban history, Jim Dyos, and from friendships within the 'history workshop' movement, among whom I should at least mention the late Tim Mason and Raphael Samuel, who introduced me to the radiation of E. P. Thompson and the romanticism and empiricism of British marxists, or among the editors of 'Social History', especially Keith Nield. Later 1978 in France, I had a chance to participate in one of the last series of seminars by Fernand Braudel and to get some insight into the transformation of the 'école des annales', but was even more fascinated by occational meetings with Pierre Bourdieu and got into a working relationship with younger Foucaultiens like Lion Murard and Patrick Zylberman. To such impressive influences, of course, I should add Masters long de-

ceased, whose writings had a strong impact on my views like Droysen's "Historik", various sociological works by Halbwachs, or later Benjamin's "On the concept of history". Even though I could go on and on, I stop this name dropping here, because I only wanted to illustrate three things at a time. During my professional formation (1) I had chances to see some of the most productive schools of historical research and practise from the inside and I profitted greatly thereby. But (2) I did not stay in one, was impressed with rather conflicting influences and took it more as my travels. And (3) these influences quickly transformed in the 70s from schools into a variety of loose cooperative networks, that were tied together by common interests rather than the same point of departure, by joining different references and styles and by friendly curiosity – and in some cases left long lasting friendships. I will come back to the impact of institutions and networks on my work.

### *Theory:*

Let me here just add that theory – and this seems to me to be a strong indication of retardation against my age cohort in Germany – came only late into my formation and I had to learn still a lot, when I was already long into academic teaching. But increasingly I liked to learn about theories to the present day. Many of my age among German academics were strongly and abruptly influenced if not converted, from the mid sixties onwards, by the Frankfurt School, by some variety of Marxism or Psychoanalysis. In my case, this was different. Although I then read a lot of theories of fascism, it was more a topic of my research on denazification and Neo-Nazism and only a few (like Bloch, Thalheimer, and Franz Neumann) left long lasting suggestions. About Marx I did not know much more than standard school stuff and it was only in 1972 and in Oxford of all places, that I felt that this was a grave deficiency and joined a couple from Brazil, a Japanese, and some others from the international student community there for an in depth and critical reading of "Das Kapital" – in English. I distasted people whose only practise was theory, and even more the then fashionable gesture of theoretical deductions among newly converted marxists. I may have started late and certainly never became a marxist, but even nowadays when Marxism is mega-out, I cherish some of his writings like the 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire or on the Paris Commune.

The reason behind my circumvention of philosophical studies as a student, that put long reading lists on my agenda in mid age, probably was that I had started out as a theologian, getting my basic instruction in historical criticism in the reading of holy texts (mainly from the Hebrew Bible). I am grateful to the

present day for this careful and serene schooling, because nobody is more knowledgeable about their few sources and less dogmatic than protestant scholars of the Old Testament, or at least those who instructed us in the early 60s at Heidelberg and Bonn like the superb Gerhard vom Rath or Martin Noth (including a dear old Rabbi from Poland). But when we arrived, after four years of language training, exegesis and historical studies about religious institutions and thought, at dogmatics (theological philosophy), I broke off altogether because I discovered that my agnosticism was unsurmountable. I just could no longer follow these dons and, looking back, I am not so sure whether it was more their message or rather their style of authoritative deductive thinking that finally let me drop out and concentrate on history and social sciences. I stayed grateful for my basic education in reading and historical research with the theologians and I kept my respect for people who believed and acted as christians; but for my part I became immune against dogmatism in whatever covering.

This background of my eclecticism restricted my theoretical interest for a long time to the critic of ideologies and to the use of middle range theories as debatable instruments to gain and organize knowledge. My economical defense was “I think, when I have to”, i.e. when I am stuck with a problem and when I have been able to transform it into a set of questions then I turn for advice to theoretical literature. It took almost two decades till my interests in ‘Alltagsgeschichte’ (socio-cultural history), Oral History and the discourses around memory had manoeuvred me enough outside established historical assumptions, that I realized that instrumental eclecticism was not enough. But even then I did not select some giant to climb on his shoulders and translate his wisdom into nowadays’ problems, but became more and more interested in what ways and for what reasons these giants had mapped the ground and why ordinary people like us should still uphold such superhuman perspectives. Even though I hate the fashionable rhetoric of deconstructivism and would be more attracted by Benjamin’s term of “rettende Kritik” (rescuing or redeeming critique), much of my historical practise since seems to work in this direction.

### 1.2.2 Beyond oeuvre

German professors are state officials expected to divide their time into three equal parts: teaching, research, and administration. By international comparison, the first point varies and may be somewhere in a middle field, the second is uncontrollable in the Arts, at least in terms of quality, and the third is rather peculiar, since some university systems abroad are not self governed, others are but in a more efficient way. The peculiarity of the German system is a threefold ad-

ministration: (1) collegueal and co-determined self government by all sorts of more or less influential boards and comitees, (2) under an often exceedingly bureaucratic state control, and (3) deriving all extra finances for research students and projects from a very complex system of public, private and semipublic foundations (the latter being by far the largest part) that divide their riches through comitees operating on an extremely time consuming system of elaborated and competing evaluations of the again very elaborated projects proposed ("Gutachten"). Of course it can be instructive and often networking for the participants, and a means of patronage and it's checks at the same time, but by the charms of power it eats up more and more of their time, energy and writing. I often thought that the major part of my oeuvre, written at day-time, was silenced in piles of confidential Gutachten.

If you are working in a field like contemporary history that is oriented towards the public you have more than average chances to spend additional time and energy on book reviews (this one I skipped almost completely), public comment, further education (especially of teachers) and in all sorts of initiatives and advisory bodies in the realm of public history, museology, preservation of cultural heritage, historical publishing, didactical competitions and the like. Many German historians devote a large part of their creativity to such extramural public or secret activities, that have grown since the mid 70s considerably and I must confess, that almost from the first months, after I had become an assistant in early 1968 at the first new founded university of the Ruhr district at Bochum, I was quite active in both, institutional administration and reform, and in networking and professional and public initiatives. And I stayed so during my work in three other newly established academic institutions there (the Comprehensive University at Essen since 1973, the German version of the Open University at Hagen since 1982, the Institute for Advanced Cultural Studies again in Essen since 1989) till I finally left the Ruhr after 25 years to go east and teach at the new old University of Jena, where I tried to restrain such activities, without much success.

I cannot but tell a bit more about these institutional and public activities because (1) they were obviously triggered off by the opening of academic life since 1968, (2) my version is just one among many characteristic for the outgoing spirit of the time, but also it's illusions, and (3) because these activities were a continious school of further education for myself and deeply influenced my thinking about history and memory. Before I do so, it may be noteworthy, that I never belonged to a political faction of the type of the '68ers or to a political party, but have in my rather stable leftish liberal flexibility, at certain times and issues networked with almost any of the established parties, but mainly cooperated with Social Democrats and trade unionists. These I only got to know more

intimately during my years in the Ruhr where their political hegemony was grounded in regional socio-cultural roots. Probably I should also add that from early on I became familiar with the public domain and the media, founding and editing together with others for some years a printed pupils' journal at my secondary boys' (and the neighbouring girls'!) school at Stuttgart. As title I had chosen "filia + filius", and if you ever will get to the end of this essay, you will find this name to be astonishing enough and not only, because I had failed school in the previous year because of my bad marks in Latin, among others. Later I chaired the regional federation of the youth owned press ('jugendeigene Presse') and earned much of my living when I was a student in Heidelberg by writing longish scripts for educational and cultural programs of various broadcasting stations in the perspective of becoming a journalist. After I had changed subject, I won a nice scholarship (Studienstiftung), that took the need out of my publizising and finally I got stuck as a historian by academic opportunity.

#### *Self-government:*

My carrier as an academic administrator, so to speak, began a couple of weeks, after I got my first job as assistant, at a general meeting of the Bochum history department where the revolting students powered for institutional reform in a rather wild and dogmatic fashion, which the professors declined. Largely because I could not bare the tensions in this crowded assembly I advanced the core of the students program for equal representation of professors, assistants and students to be, in consideration of the differentiated needs within the department, a guideline for a more pragmatic procedure. Within an hour, I found myself elected to the chair of a reform body that over some weeks drew up a new statute for the department, with "Drittelparität" and with the consent of most professors. It was put to work as the second in Germany after one of the hot places, the political scientists in West-Berlin, and worked for something like a decade. After this promising start we formed a second reform group to restructure the syllabus, but the participation of students and professors alike faded away and nothing came out of it, but a longlasting one-year introductory course, where specialists from ancient to contemporary history coordinated their teaching, most introductory courses being in the hands of us assistants, anyhow.

After I had, to my greatest surprise at the age of 33, become a full professor myself, I served – taken together – for some nine years as chairperson of the historians in different places, even longer as member of various central committees or the senate of my universities, two years as dean of humanities, two years as vice-president for education and four years as ministerial commissioner to get an

institute for advanced cultural studies started in the Ruhr. Not to speak of more temporary assignments to advisory boards and project committees of a number of foundations and other institutions. Obviously I was a man of institutions and one of the typical reformers and builders of academic institutions of the 70s and 80s and I can neither deny that I invested a lot into these activities nor that most of my major reform initiatives failed. For instance the reform of teacher's education in Essen or the opening of the German open university at Hagen, which in fact is called 'University for distance education', for a system of further education in the humanities. Changes in atmosphere and approach worked as long as we could practice them within a single institute in the loopholes of the overall machinery. But when it came to tackling the structures of the wider machinery and when we had won academic consent to make them more intellectually creative and less self enclosed, we usually did not get political approval. We met with the lack of time, courage or knowledge among politicians and, more decisively, the power of high ranking bureaucrats who thought in administrative regimes rather than in terms of culture and education and were all but prepared to loosen their technocratic grip on academia, wasteful and frustrating as it was and is. Sorry to say that this was especially true with my social-democratic friends. The basic experience of these engagements for me was to get expertise in analysing problems, negotiating, integration, counseling, and loosing against political authorities. In other words: to be in and out at the same time, a well established outsider.

### *Working Collective:*

Under these conditions to be an academic of institutions and networking among alternative initiatives in academia and in public was not so far apart. Let me give just a few examples. The first one was a basic school of team-work for me. Still writing on my dissertation in 1970 I found, on a sideline, two surprises: that there had been lokal working class liberation committees even in Germany, and in almost every city, that had regenerated civic life at the grass roots and had been repressed by most Allied authorities, and even more from public memory ever since. Second, that I could find a dozen of graduate students of history from all over Western Germany, who also had found traces of this phenomenon in their regions of research, and we combined in 1972 to form a working group to recover this repressed experience of working class initiative. As it turned out, but for three social democrats and me, all others came from most of the then fashionable factions of the new left, usually in bitter struggle against one another, and we debated painstakingly all sorts of leftist interpretations of the 'an-

tifa-commitees'. But we were also historians devoted to empirical evidence, wanting to make an intervention into public memory and fortunately we also liked, in the pub after days of discussion, to exchange often bizarre stories from the inner workings of various 'group authorities' and to share a generous inter-factional laughter. After years of research and discussions and after various crises we had drafts of three quarters of a big and empirical book, and Peter Brandt, then probably still with the Trotzkyites, later to become my successor at the Open University, and me decided that it was time to edit the stuff and fill in the rest and he could invite me for a long quiet summer at his mother's datcha in Norway. There we finalized much of our 'revolutionary' findings, benefiting from the gracious hospitality of his mother Ruth, one of the most charming ladies I ever met, and for reasons of security watched over by the body guards of Willy Brandt. The former chancellor was rather laconic at the dinner table, being completely absorbed with writing his memoirs, two years after he had to leave office because the GDR had smuggled a spy into his antechamber. But on occasional walks with us he proved to be a rich and open source of information on all sorts of antifascist emigree politics, having the memory of an elephant. After more editing at home together with Ulrich Borsdorf, who somewhat later became the editor of the theoretical monthly of the German trade unions' federation, next year our book finally saw the day, including a dissenting maoist opinion against the majority interpretation, formulated by me, which had stressed the grass roots and cooperative character of the 'Antifas' and looked with "rescuing critique" on this repressed ressource of a democratic beginning.

### *Networking and initiatives:*

Networking among the progressive minority of university institutes of history was a similar experience. We were looking for fellows who were interested in antifascist, working class, women's, peoples' and, more generally, every-day history and found them usually in other minor and, with the exception of an innovative bunch of people at the Technical University of Berlin, provincial places in the northern part of Germany and in the elitist Max-Planck-Institute for History at Göttingen, whose outstanding director then, Rudolf Vierhaus, a great scholar and a liberal from the Ruhr with caring authority, had assembled some of the most innovative leftist historians around him, including Hans Medick and Alf Lüdtke. We exchanged our differentiated views, fostered our didactical programs, in some cases even recruited personnel from each other's ressources and finally built up a journal ('Journal Geschichte'), that translated the impulses of 'L'Histoire' for more varied, more critical, more interdisciplinary, illustrated and narrative histories into German and had in the later 70s and 80s the widest,

if still a relatively small circulation (below 10.000) of all scientific historical journals in Germany. I was among it's founders and stayed on the editorial board for exactly ten years.

Such networks of academically established historians were also a backbone to the relatively late reception of the History Workshop movement in the German 'Geschichtswerkstätten'. They relied at the time largely on the collective initiative of assistants and research students in history, combining their efforts for an alternative, more critical and more popular public history 'from below' with local initiatives of amateurs, mostly from the left, trade unions and later from the ecological, feminist, regionalist and peace movements of the 80s in an increasing number of places. Many of them were focused on the discovery of the repressed social and regional history of Nazism. As far as I can remember, I was not a member, but I could give some advise here and there and was clearly on their side. For a greater public I defended with others our approaches in a showdown with Hans-Ulrich Wehler, the protagonist of the Bielefeld School of "historical social science" (and ever since a friend in polemics) at a crowded meeting on "Alltagsgeschichte" at the bi-annual conference of the historians' federation in Berlin 1985. I still think that most of his argument then against us was false or at least prejudiced (he turned to culturalism somewhat later), but for one thing, in which he was right: our practises were anathema to historical synthesis.

On the local level, however, I engaged in various initiatives and two of them were of symbolic value and successful. At the begin of the 80s I helped Detlef Peukert and others in rescuing the Old Synagoge of Essen, once the largest temple in Western Germany, burned down by the Nazis in 1938, being restored from the outside after the war, but now housing a museum of industrial design, for a more decent use: a forum, dedicated to the remembrance of antifascist resistance, the victims of Nazi repression and mass murder, and Jewish culture. At the end of the decade I helped Ulrich Borsdorf, then directing the history museum of the Ruhr, and others to rescue the biggest modernist mine of the 20s from the dangers of demolition. Together with him I wrote a long memorandum in 1987, evaluating its significance for the cultural memory of the region and outlining it's possible uses as a big combine of museums, joined with workshops of art and entertainment in private-public partnership, and sat on the board of the "Bauhütte Zeche Zollverein" in the founding years. Local socialdemocratic politicians and Karl Ganser, the most ingenious networker I ever met, then presiding over the International Building Exposition and using it as an instrument for the redevelopment of the remains of coal and steel into an encouraging ambiente, had taken over the idea and got it moving. It's still in the making, but the two thirds that have been realized meanwhile in differing, but similar ways as we had suggested, are very successful indeed bringing life and culture into the



middle of the closed down mining area and preserving it's most impressive symbol of technology and labour.

A much stronger backbone to the dynamics of history 'from below' was the bi-annual "Pupils Competition 'German history' for the Prize of the Federal President", a rare and exceedingly successful combination of (1) a social democratic initiative to wage a more democratic history by Gustav Heinemann (Federal President since 1969), that had to be taken over by his more conservative successors, (2) with the private industrial Koerber Foundation at Hamburg oriented on innovation and on public responsibility and resonance, and (3) a bunch of historical advisors largely representing a more pluralist edition of our alternative network. This combination spread our mix of recovered alternative traditions, widening interests in socio-cultural, anti-fascist and localist approaches to a history 'from the bottom up', and the encouragement of popular memory work into virtually every German school, generating thousands of youthful projects year by year and thereby transforming the uses of local archives, the acceptance of oral history and the media resonance for our approaches. I joined the advisory board by the mid 70s, and later the national jury, and stayed there for some ten years. Of all my experiences with teams and networks, this one for sure was the most successful and the liberalism of the operating foundation taught me a second lesson in creative team work. They wanted advise beyond their prejudices and didn't accept ours, but forced us time and again into a creative and argumentative group process generating results acceptable for the Federal Presidents and inspiring for schools all over the country. And most of the time it worked.

*'Glokalism' in European and national cooperation:*

Beyond such local, regional and federal lessons of historical networking in memory work, it was in the mix of them with national and 'international' spheres where I encountered most of it's charms and challenges.

When I first started out into a more professional approach to Oral History, the impuls had come from somebody else and at first I did not get down to the grass roots, but moved up, up and away. One day in the mid 70s a friend, then working in a government department at Bonn and returning from a visit to the States, suggested that it should be a major task for contemporary historians specializing in the postwar era like me, to get on record the lifestories of those founding fathers of Westgerman postwar democracy, who had not published memoirs and were still around. My reaction was a productive hesitation. Even before having a tape recorder, I had interviewed numbers of major and minor politicians for my dissertation and our Antifa-project and this experience had

left the same mixed feelings with me as with most historians: indispensable as it had been for background knowledge, it usually lacked in detail and accuracy, wherever it could be checked against archival records. Since my first long stay in American archives in 1965, to be repeated in subsequent years, stretching from coast to coast, and to include interviews with many political witnesses and contacts with senior colleagues, I respected the efficiency of institutions in the States, was impressed with the generosity, vigor and relative moralistic sincerity of much of their political and academic elites, with the difference of their popular cultures and the comforts and alienation of their everyday life and infrastructures. In short: I rather liked America for being so different, and again in strong contrast with many former '68ers (not knowing it before and later on identifying it with universalism), even nowadays I think there is a lot to be learned from contacts across the Atlantic, but taken as a whole I never could imagine why, and how, it should become a model for Europe.

With such an attitude in mind I went back in 1975 and toured all major centers of oral history studies and collections from coast to coast, starting in the Butler Library of Columbia University, including all Presidential Archives, and reaching down to various ethnological and local projects. I wanted to interview the interviewers whether, and how, they had overcome the methodological problems with interviewing living memory. Again I was impressed with the wealth and sincerity of American achievement, but also with its cultural specificity. Coming home I wrote a long report evaluating the knowledge and materials I had gathered, drawing in essence three conclusions: (1) The mass production of subelite biographies in the form of interview-transcripts, to be censored by the interviewees, were peculiar to American culture and publicity and should rather not be followed up on this side of the Atlantic. With the exception that it could be done with full access to the pertinent records, as it was then practised in most Presidential Archives with minor survivors from their respective administrations. (2) The use of the interview in populist and educational projects was an interesting tool for reviving and challenging popular traditions, even though its uses were often romantic and naïve. The most to be learned was, however, from more professional ethnological and history-from-below projects and their increasingly sophisticated methodology and reasoning about the workings of memory and interaction in the interview situation. (3) Given the sharp discontinuities of German history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we should be less trustful than American optimism with the identity of interviewees and their willingness and ability to testify about certain events and relationships in their past. Therefore, even if we were mainly interested in such, we should under German conditions avoid thematically focused interviews and always prefer a life-cycle approach,

generating much more evidence on the interviewee's formation, surroundings and thinking, to be analyzed.

The next step was to gather information about interviewing practices and projects already done or under way in Western Germany, publishing together with Franz Brüggemeier a list of work in progress in 1978 (and again in 1984), a grey paper as a tool for networking and staging or visiting small workshops to exchange experiences. Next step was to reach out to our European neighbours to learn from their approaches and more advanced experiences largely in the fields just mentioned sub (2), but more tinged with European leftist traditions and the rise of a new feminism. In this I profitted from my friendships within the History Workshop, then at it's height becoming sort of a real movement in England and spreading over to the continent, where I could encounter it's translation into French rhetoric and militancy during my year at the Maison de sciences de l'homme in Paris. The best thing however was that in this year a European network of oral historians took shape that I could join to learn and to compose, together with Werner Trapp, a reader from the best of it's researches and reflections, to make them available in German [1980, reissued as a pocket-book 1985]. After all these preparations Detlef, Franz and me designed our Oral History project "Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet 1930-60" (abbreviated LUSIR, Lifestory and Social Culture in the Ruhr) and having been lucky to get enough funds from the Volkswagen Foundation we built up a whole new research group whose eight partime members again turned out to represent a wide variety of former leftist (and future feminist positions), including Alexander von Plato, who had just left the dissolving national executive of one of the three maoist parties then and was to become (besides a close friend) a very empirical practitioner of Oral History and it's best networker in Germany over the two decades to come, building up an institute and archive for biographical inquiries at the Open University and editing the journal BIOS since the early 90s. From 1980 this research group for a couple of years was my next adventure in teamwork and productive pluralism. But since I have contributed reports on the adventure of this project to Paul Thompson's collection of essays "Our Common History" in English, and on it's methodological implications in the last of the three volumes, that the group produced, in German, I stop here in my tracks and turn again to the European context.

From 1978 in England onwards I met at least once year with European (and later on more international) colleagues in 'Oral History' in different countries. They had formed an international association, of which I became the German representative in the 80s and it's president around 1990. Much to the disappointment of our pioneering and most experienced English member Paul Thompson, a builder of a world empire of oral historians along Robert's Rules of democratic procedure, the

confederal structures of this association seem to have been intuitively modeled on those of the EU. I.e. they were utterly undemocratic, but allowed for different national styles to be integrated and proved in the end rather effective and, what is more in and around academia, most of the time pleasurable, friendly, and sometimes even erotic. The core group largely stayed what it had been from earlier on, including a wide variety of characters like Francois Bedarida (Paris), a fine diplomatic scholar fighting brilliantly a losing battle for French to be a second *lingua franca*, but thereby confronting all other languages, Gerhard Botz (Salzburg) mediating between *Alltagsgeschichte* and Historical Social Science, Ron Grele (New York), our cool American leftist, being one of the most experienced in the practice of interviews and in the theoretical reflection on the implications, Philippe Joutard (Aix-en-Provence), brilliant in his French rhetoric about much more than contemporary memory, reaching back to the middle ages in the Cevennes, but lost with the charms of a little boy trying hard to translate this for a somehow English speaking audience, Selma Leydesdorff (Amsterdam), our most vivid and practically minded Jewish member, Luisa Passerini (Turino), unchallenged our beautiful head in theorizing the meaning of silence within memory in many languages and getting aloof from conventional assumptions of the New Left, or Mercedes Vilanova (Barcelona), a down to earth academic mother, insisting on professional standards and no romantic nonsense. And this core group was reaching out to Scandinavia, ranging from the balanced habits of experienced anthropologists to the fascinating “glocal” mission of Sven Lindquist’s “Dig where you stand” (Stockholm), and increasingly to Latin America, later Eastern Europe, Turkey and many other parts of the world. Personally I learned a lot within the ‘glocal’ ambiente of our association and festival-like conferences. Intellectually I gained most from my evolving friendships with Luisa Passerini and Ron Grele, both in my view being outstanding theoreticians of our field and beyond. From our Essen conference in 1990 on “Memory and Social Change”, profiting from the opening of the Soviet world, clearly Irina Sherbakowa (Moskau), Jewish, descendant from the aristocracy of the Communist International, activist of ‘Memorial’ with a strong oppositional impulse and ably outspoken in various languages in her breathtaking analyses of women in the GULag became a star (and for me a close friend ever since). Whereas a silent, and in his silence very perceptive, Chinese visitor for the first time related to a long practice of recollective interviews in the most extended national culture of the world.

I left the association and the field (after unusually long 15 years) in the early 90s, having become somehow notorious because the German member was asked more than once to give at the end an evaluation of the conference and the state of the profession. Of course I was flattered by this impossible task, to have a final word in passing, and my agitation was only somewhat calmed down by the fact, that most of the participants, at this time, were already packing. (At Essen

we issued instead a special number of BIOS with collected essays on the state of the profession in many countries). But otherwise I have been a fan of these conferences. Each of the early and/or senior members of our association was supposed to build up a network of information within her or his country. This loose structure proved to be quite efficient in assembling us all, the major part of the more professional Oral History community of an open minded Europe, by various hundreds, to bi-annual conferences each time in a different place in Europe. Without a stable organization, the chair rotated every second year to the country, where people were willing and able to shoulder the load of organisation and find at least some funds. Dozens and hundreds of propositions from various cultures had to be evaluated and grouped; we carved out little, may-be too little. And the problem of languages stayed with us all the time, because there is no real *lingua franca*, but even more because oral evidence is very difficult to translate indeed, and, last not least, because a superb interviewer at the grass roots and sophisticated interpreter of localized culture can, but often enough will not be a brilliant contributor to international discourse in foreign languages. But in the end we had meetings that stand out for their intercultural exchange, their friendly criticisms, their stimulative theoretical debates, and for their placement within popular feasts, generating friendship and intellectual interest beyond boundaries. We learned a lot about national peculiarities in the experience of similar social groups and got more and more acquainted with the features of private and collective memory and with its silences.

*Beyond the national boarder inside:*

But 'international relations' of Germans in the late Cold War could also be 'national' and when I was first invited to an international conference on antifascism in the GDR in 1984, clearly one of the greatest adventures of my life began. There I met a partner in critical cooperation, Olaf Groehler, deputy director of the huge Institute for German History in the Academy of Sciences of the GDR. Networking could, if in a much more sceptical and complicated, diplomatic and cautious way, also work across the great divide and in the years to come we staged workshops with contemporary historians from the two Germanies, hitherto unknown, on alternatives in and against the Cold War, on both sides of the boarder at Hagen and in Thuringia, near Frankfort and near Berlin. I got invited as some sort of fellow with the historians of the Academy and finally, after a lot of academic and political manouvering, won an extremely rare, if not the only permission, to be granted personally by the head of state Erich Honecker, to do oral history research in three industrial centres of the GDR and get, together

with Dorothee Wierling and Alexander von Plato, permanent visas to move across the inner German boarder for almost a year in 1987. I have told the adventures and lessons of this project extensively in the introction of our book with exemplary interpretations of 30 of our 150 life-cycle-interviews “Die volkseigene Erfahrung” [1991, the title being untranslatable, literally ‘the people’s own experience’, but also that of nationalized industry], and I cannot elaborate here.

Two experiences, however, seem to be noteworthy within our context here: For one that, against our expectations, from the mid 80s networking and memory work became possible to a certain extent even beyond the barriers of the Cold War, if one tried hard enough. Second that we could diagnose from our interview evidence, that within the GDR a socialist value pattern had not really taken roots, but that the cohesion of state-socialism had been due, next to the presence of Soviet forces, largely to an integrative system of social mobility among the now older generations, that was not transferable to the younger ones. When I was fellow at the West-Berlin Wissenschaftskolleg in the following year, I gave a paper on my first interpretations [published in the first issue of BIOS 1988, available also in English and French in Alf Lüdtkes reader on *Alltagsgeschichte*] concluding that a fundamental cultural crisis was on the agenda of the GDR. When the outbursting popular struggle for civil liberties among the younger generations (and massive illegal emigration of even younger ones to the West) brought the regime down two years later paving the way to the withdrawel of the Soviets and finally the incorporation of Eastern Germany into the Federal Republic, we were of course very much moved by the events, but somehow less surprised than many other contemporaries. More I was struck by the virtues and vices of our prognosis, very lonely as it was at the time of Honecker’s visit to Bonn and a general appreciation of the tiny GDR as most stable and even the 10<sup>th</sup> industrial power in the world.

Obviously our diagnosis of a potential for a major crisis had been right, but we had not envisaged the interplay of the socio-cultural with the political and with international power. I had not taken into consideration the inner workings of the Soviet Union, of which I then knew very little and simply could not imagine Gorbatchovs final withdrawel, to provide a more precise forecast. Long before ‘culture’ became the new fashionable paradigm among historians, I had to learn that culturalism was not enough. So the question of how to relate the dimensions of the socio-cultural in history with international power structures has become a challenge ever since and the methodological difficulty of this relationship may be the true reason why I am so retarded with my history of Germany in the second half of the 20th century.

*Advanced Studies:*

Speaking however of networking and administration, in early 1989, to my surprise, I got commissioned to found one of the major centers for advanced cultural studies in Central Europe, after Jürgen Kocka on close observation of the administrative conditions had declined the job. I took it as phantastic opportunity; as I later found out, he clearly is the better administrator. Even though after half a year, the birth of my second daughter, the opening of the new Institute, already staffed with two co-directors and a first row of fellow, by the Minister President of Northrhine-Westfalia Johannes Rau with all notables and media around, and the opening of the Berlin wall coincided within five weeks. Six weeks later I celebrated my fiftieth birthday amidst family and friends. And again six weeks later a wild thunderstorm picked the biggest tree near our little house in the countryside and threw it on our roof, under which Regina Schulte and me were working and the baby was sleeping, crushing almost a third of the cottage, but leaving the three of us unharmed. There is a certain luck about my life. I knew from my former fellowships in Oxford, Paris, and both Berlins that advanced studies not always go together with quietness, concentration, and emotional stability, but when I had to organize them myself, the amount of motion, emotions, and noise around was somewhat unusual.

In planning I had placed my emphasis among other features on three points: (1) We should not try to virtualize a 'school' of thinking about culture, but accept the diversity of unmastered problematics of our time, and different approaches to their perceptions, and invite their tensions into the study groups of our fellows and their interplay, to create a challenging climate of sensible sensitivity. And everything should be temporary: fellowships usually for a year and our study groups (on art, media and power; gender and public space; ecological philosophy and intellectual history; theories of memory; and socio-cultural resources of industrial regions for transformation) for five years. (2) We should invite women and men alike to confront these challenges (instead of carving out women from elite institutions or providing them with a limited playground for feminist specialities) and indeed we ended up as the one academic institution then where the male majority was only small, and gendered perceptions of all matters were present in almost every discussion. In my view that was a big advance, exertion, productivity and charms being equally distributed. Again to vivify and normalise intellectual exchange we should invite, in addition to well established academics, younger promising fellows, even though their selection may cause legitimation problems, given academic envy; but in the first years we were lucky since most of our unestablished fellows got established very soon thereafter. (3) and this point was added in the winter of 1989/90: We should not



limit ourselves to invite, as it was fashionable in the early 90s, some intellectuals from the East to the West, but rather open up a supportive center in Leipzig, with finances for fellowships and workshops, to give intellectuals there a breathing space within dramatic change in order to develop their own experience and at the same time network their way from home into newly opened up intellectual worlds.

I could sell such guidelines more easily to academia than to the politicians around, with the exception of my immediate superior Anke Brunn, then social-democratic minister for science and research in the State of Northrhine-Westfalia, who listened carefully and defended our approach more than once. But most others were expecting quick results, broad publicity, or at least names, they knew from television. Some new and decisive bureaucrats, having started on the party-line, pressed for major research programs and more control, made our autonomy more and more difficult in day-to-day red-tape and finally let us down by blocking the last slice of money for the promised reconstruction of an old mill that should have housed the center after three years of planning a beautiful symbol and a hospitable place. Nevertheless, the institute's take off in terms of intellectual activity, sociability and respect was fast. This was especially due to my co-directors, heading small study-groups: Martin Warnke, an innovative art-historian of great standing and even better judgement and a very aimable, generous person, Sigrid Weigel, a younger, well read, most sophisticated and still very political feminist lit-crit, and Klaus Meyer-Abich, a physicist and philosopher with political practise and now an uncompromising ecologist of almost fundamentalist persuasions. When Warnke said farewell, fed up even prior than me with the out-reach, instead of turn-out, of the bureaucracy above us, he was replaced by Detlev Hofmann, art-historian again, a great debater, full of energy and laughter and famed for his innovative perceptions of museology and memorial-sites, and later we could add Gertrud Koch, covering media, a known specialist of film history and critique with rich international connections, a sharp eye and a dry wit, being of Jewish origin. All of them had a fine hand in picking promising people for invitation, but also enough tolerance to endure the tensions between our approaches and participate actively in discussions beyond their fields.

Besides the work in the more specialized study-groups, we assembled all fellows to a jour fix at Monday night for a lecture, often long interdisciplinary discussions, and a buffet. We were partly housed in an old town hall of one the boroughs of Essen, charming but too small, to give room to the some 30 academics on our pay-roll; however it had a stately hall for our exchanges, that quickly became an attractive place for meetings even from the outside. We or groups of fellows staged many workshops and conferences there, sometimes two



a month, so that our climate and level of debate could radiate. I also liked my monthly travels to Leipzig to back up Dorothee Wierling, heading our extramural outpost there in parts of a dilapidated villa, with the selection of fellows and participating in her very lively workshops. On the other hand I had also and again to face my limits as an administrator, especially my lacking sense for public representation and my lacking ability either to handle the wider political machinery or to get away from it, which I would have preferred. The emancipation of the institute from being part of the state administration and its transformation into a foundation never came, though it had been envisaged from early on. From the start I had not wanted to stay in such a managerial capacity for the rest of my life, but designed the center to be only a temporary place for every academic, including five-years contracts for my co-directors, heading their study-groups of by-and large one year fellows. But finally I withdrew before the end of my own contract, in order to go east and encounter my limits in networking.

Let me leave it at that. The last chapter of my institutional and extramural experiences is still going on and stories are more worthwhile to be told, when they have some sort of an end and are not squeezed between the restraints of an ongoing practise.

### 1.2.3 Hidden agenda?

Amid the diversity of my published work there are recurrent themes and through the discontinuity of my institutional engagements and of my increasing lust for networking and intellectual adventure runs a pattern of reactions, both of which seem to be beyond my control.

#### *Family Patterns:*

Speaking of these patterns first it should be evident from my sketches that it was never easy for me to accept paternal authority. In my early studies I met with a number of impressive father figures, but I did not really get attached to one of them. I was not used to such attachments and mistrusted them, feeling more as a guest in schools of thought and in institutions, where eminence was always male. However there also was a fascination with such institutions and in my professional life I accepted them as frameworks of practice, but also tried to transform them, to soften their authority and to make them more open, integrative, and caring. And when I got into paternal roles myself (and the chances were many), usually I stayed only for a couple of years and acted more like a counsel or – to put it again into familial terms – as a brother or uncle or friend. In short, I

was at odds with my own authority and could not provide stability to others for a longer perspective. And I could not accept my place in hierarchies, getting angry and imprudent as soon I felt somebody exerting institutional power over me and those, for whom I had responsible, and after some battles lost finally drawing the line and leaving them most unresponsably alone. Looking back I think I really was an expert on compromise, but very seldom with superiors.

On the other side you will have seen that this problematic “I” was, within my growing engagement in teams and networks, more and more substituted by changing or associating varieties of “We”. This communal feeling came late into my life, and growing older, I felt younger and it took me decades to get a more balanced appreciation of my age. Somehow I seem to have missed the stages of brothers and sisters, of close friendship and juvenile hords, acting out their aggressions, in my childhood and youth. When I once read a line by Henry Miller, that his youth had begun late (I think at the age of forty), it rang a familiar bell. So I got fascinated with comradeship and adventure, when I already was a father, privately and in institutional roles, and went on my travels. Or took up for instance the familiar “Du”, that I had very seldom used when I was a student and even less in 1968, in most of our teams thereafter. And I liked it a lot when finally there appeared women within these networks and teams. Most of the time I felt much more at ease with them than with many own sex, in work, discussions, and elsewhere. Isn’t it crazy to describe one’s professional life in terms of anachronistic substitutions of family and youth?

### *Recurrent Theme:*

Speaking of themes, something always seems to bring me back to the consequences and inheritances of Nazism (rather than to Nazism as an historical subjectmatter itself). When after my first three publications in this field, I definitely wanted to leave it and researched into urbanism and social control of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that book was never written; instead we completed another book on anti-fascist committees and we did it as a team. When I tried to import Oral History into German academia, there would have been many fields to probe this method. Workers experiences were an obvious choice, given that I worked in the Ruhr, was engaged with trade unions, and that more empirical approaches to the working class were clearly on the agenda in the decade after 1968. But what did we do in our oral history projects, again team-works? We concentrated on the time-span from the 20s to the 60s, both in the Ruhr and in the East, to find out in what ways the experience of Nazism and of the war had formed the perceptive structures of postwar workers, their adaptability to given societal changes and their individualism. When I moved to Jena I clearly wanted to form a research initiative around the cultural history of infrastructures, so to speak

Alltagsgeschichte from the top down, and we discussed there a lot about this idea. But what did I actually do in the mid-90s? Projects about the camps of Buchenwald and their memory. And in 1998, when I finally got a year off from teaching to write in Florence an essay on the history of the future in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe as advance into my infrastructural interests and at least find a start for my synthesis on postwar Germany? I skipped both projects, when I was asked to consult the Federal Chancellery in the making of a policy for the compensation of Nazi-forced labor and almost completely concentrated on this challenge for some two years.

This involuntary recurrence of one big theme, transforming most of my other historical departures or even ruining them, can of course be explained to a certain extent. For one, this theme was always and increasingly present in the German public of the 70s and 80s and rested so, to the surprise of most observers, after 1990. My eagerness to be drawn into institutional responsibility, at least for some while, and to find my place and friends in collective networks and interventions made me, as an historian, susceptible to the workings of public memory. And after all I was specialized in this field from earlier on. But I think this sort of rational explanations is not enough. There seems to be a deeper layer of the private and public conditioning of my subjectivity, responsible for the major decisions on priority and approaches in my work – or should I better speak of intuitions that decided over me? I guess, at least in my age cohort, between the famous ‘sceptical’ and ‘68’ generations, I am not the only one who lacks clear cultural references for his behaviour, for the discontinuity of his rather industrious engagements and the continuous recurrence of themes and patterns beyond his control. And who in advanced years is still undecided whether this source of productivity is a vice or a virtue, a torture or a gift. Or is it a more general feature of specialists of contemporary history, that – not as a whole, but in the last resort – they produce involuntary histories, rooted in unconscious layers of their own memory and co-authored by public memory?

### 1.3 Memory and History

#### Conceptual intervention

In spite of all the recent cultural and biological advances towards a theory of human memory, we still have no real understanding of its workings and of the interplay of culture and nature and of the individual and the collective thereby. Memory is still largely a metaphor. But one thing is sure: both, individual and collective memory is a fundamental human property, to be observed crossculturally at all times and everywhere, whereas History is not, but a relatively late acquisition in the process of civilization –at least as long as History is understood as a field of inquiry that has to do with research into the past in search of a past reality (that of course as such is gone) and with thought about secular processes and development. On the other hand, all other ways of transmitting knowledge about the past, usually going together with unreasonable truths and creating feelings of belonging, were (and are) central to cultural memory, from the first story-tellers and chronicles onwards through more elaborated forms of legendary and traditions, to be preserved and prolonged, well into the contemporary world with its negotiated school curricula and less negotiated political propaganda, its preservation of cultural heritage and its constructions of memorial sites, its imagery of well designed corporate (or whatever) identities and its invented traditions, much of its media, museology and publicity. In cultural memory there are no criteria, whether the message is good or bad, right or wrong, its main criterion being whether a message is believed without reasoning or need of proof. In short: the magic of traditions and more recently constructed versions of collective memory is to be found in a virtual truth, in the efficiency of its transmitting forms and in the emotions of attachment it can arouse.

New about History was, that historians tried to step out of traditions and questioned their truths. They declined the job of the chronicler simply to prolong them for the recent past or to select portions of the traditional knowledge about the past as telling examples for the present, as the slogan ‘*historia magistra vitae*’ had suggested since ages. On the contrary, they turned around in search of evidence for more accurate stories about past reality, allowing for a critical evaluation of traditions, relativized their acceptance in the present by shelving the currency of their truths into former times and produced instead, or fitted the more accurately reconstructed stories into, conceptual constructions of progress, development and process. History is not telling truths, but reaches out to get more accurate knowledge about a past, that is our only field of experience and largely gone, but for some imprints. History is a recollecting process ap-

proaching an unattainable past, that has left only scarce traces and for that reason an always debatable attempt, to construe explanations that might make sense of it's remnants.

Most of this is well known and I reiterate it here only because of the following: within the rising memory boom among cultural studies during the last one or two decades, a special dichotomy has been established between memory and history, that I find not suitable for contemporary history and may-be even fundamentally misleading. In this dichotomy memory is associated with space, images, emotions, ritual, associative interaction, values, and 'traditional societies', a comprehensive label for everything which is not modern or, as Peter Laslett once called it, the 'world we have lost'. History, however, is associated with time, texts, rationality, construction, individualism, relativism and 'modernity', a label for social and cultural processes that began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but only in the 20<sup>th</sup> became true and overriding. I find no fault with the first several particles in the two chains of this ideal type; on the contrary, these juxtapositions are to the point and instructive. I find it rather disturbing, however, that the two chains are placed on the same level and into different times.

Memory is a much wider and more general concept than history and contains a far wider set of individual and cultural practises, and history has by no means done away with it, but is a specifically modern practice within the cultural struggle about the past, and with all sorts of memory-dimensions: old and new traditions, symbols, images, lieux de mémoire, recollections, and emotions that in modern society, strategically as well as involuntarily, are produced and reproduced every day in more diversified and pluralistic ways. In addition, historical practise is on closer observation far from exempt from the emotional and associative impact of memory, whether deeply inscribed in the historians' more or less conscious motivations, in the formation of the institutional and intellectual framework of their activities or in the cultural making of the publics to which they are linked and relate. The imagination and rhetoric of their practise are dependent on styles of narratives and paradigms of thought from the archives of cultural memory. And their results are quite often used, abused, or even produced as stuff to foster or invent what people used to call traditions, values and feelings of belonging to specific collectivities, in short: the cultural formation of peculiarities, that many now call 'identities', which is the domain of memory rather than history.

And finally we know by now, that memory is not just an envelope for cultural practises of traditional societies, but it is beginning to get a history of it's own. Recent research has enlarged our knowledge of the roots and mainstream of European notions of memory and techniques of memorizing since ancient times, elaborating on such beautiful former discoveries like the book on Mne-

motechnics by Francis Yates of the Warburg Institute. Taken together it has shown, that an understanding of both, individual and cultural memory, prevailed all through that was oriented towards the future. The basic question was how to keep something in mind for to-morrow or, by instituting symbols and rituals, to be reminded in ages to come and hand down truths and values into posterity. The turning point (or 'Achsenzeit') of this history of memory, however, is not the intellectual dawn of modernity in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century, but it's high noon around and after the turn to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when people with a foreboding of it's destructive potentials like Bergson, Freud, Proust, Warburg, or Benjamin (all assimilates of Jewish origin) launched, each in his own way of fusing the dialectic of enlightenment and romanticism, another understanding of a layered memory and suggested very different uses and techniques of recollection. Their understanding of recollecting did not relate to a former will, not to get forgotten, and to the power, to find an efficient way to be remembered, but it related to something forgotten, but still latently at work involuntarily. They detected in memory – and more precisely in it's hidden, repressed or preconscious layers – a latent resource of redemption and liberation and suggested new, essentially emotional (intuitive, meditative, interactionist, associative) ways of remembering backwards into one's past rather than following the direction of established traditions towards the future. The traces to be followed on these voyages of discovery backwards ("into the inner Africa" as Freud put it, or "Origin is the goal", a motto of Benjamin) were observations and feelings about the unintegrated in established traditions and conventions of the selves, both individual and collective.

These innovations, that have become so influential as a counter-movement within western civilization during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, resemble in many ways the turn of History against traditional memory and can be seen as a second stage of historicism. This time it began to reach more effectively down into the individual and into collective emotions and desires covered and repressed by the overriding assumptions for instance of development and progress, that History had also constructed as rationalisations against traditional memory, and transformed into hegemonic traditions. Remembering now included the dismembering and questioning of the most powerful new traditions of modernity like the progress of civilization, the collective identity of nations, or the assumption of an autonomous Ego, well established in modern memory. On the other hand, from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the traditional functions of memory also became modernized and theorized, it's dimensions of individual learning, later to be rationalized and instrumentalized by behaviorism and it's dimension of cultural stabilization and reproduction as well. Halbwachs, in utter opposition to Bergson's and Freud's conceptions of recollection, may have overdone his

point, that there is nothing worthwhile in individual memory and all remembering is nothing but reconstructing from social context; in the workings of collective and cultural memory, however, he was much more to the point when unmasking social constructivism as it's backbone and it's occupation of holy sites and public spaces to be largely immune against alternative recollections and historical arguments. Whereas he had turned this critique against the cultural totalitarianism of Hitler and Stalin, half a century later many in his tracks lament what they see as a loss of collective memory in modernity and feel free to fill this gap with social constructs about the past in symbolic forms if they have the ability and the powers to do so.

Thus we are left with two ways of memory in the contemporary world: one transmitting unreasonable truth and feelings of loyalty into the future, based on power, acceptability and symbolic forms, and one recollecting in the opposite direction what has been banned from consciousness and established traditions, and why. The latter is a much fragile effort, based on close observation, on intuitions in reading traces, and on diffuse desires. Recollection however can give dynamic to the deconstruction of the powerful and imaginative layers of memory, that are reproduced everywhere and everyday. Deconstruction does not mean destruction, that would be a childish phantasy of power. It means, however, an important step in quality: it may ban the magic of the social constructions of memory, as if they were selfunderstood, whereas the constructions themselves rest. But the challenge may transform them into something open to debate and reconstruction. With historical practises it is similar. Once History had turned as a recollecting initiative against the traditions of memory (religious, dynastic and others); but either it could only modify those traditions little by little or it had to build up or foster huge intellectual constructions about development, progress, collective identities and what not, far beyond their empirical findings, to give these findings a meaning beyond the critique of traditions and incorporate them into coherent, but unreasonable truth to be handed down to posterity. And there we are. The reaching out of new waves of historical research into the forgotten of micro-cultures and even into the layers of individual memory can ban, or at least irritate, the magic of overpowering assumptions and constructions in present cultures about History that have been taken for granted too long and transform them into preliminary outlines to organize and synthesize knowledge, open to debate and change. The powerful imagery of memory then still will be there, and be it on the TV-screen. But the belief in it becomes more selective, and, within limits, the content of memory can be corrected.

It does no longer sound sensible to me, to wait for or aim at a big theory to come for the integration of the recollected and, assumed we had one and could agree on it, make the same mistake of History all over again. Historical practises

of recollection begin with and against memories and traditions, that are by now usually invigorated by prevailing assumptions and interpretation of History, and they end up by challenging them, by trying to get integrated into memory, thus changing it a little, or by being lost again. Therefore they are more diversified, more linked to and struggling with collective memories, and bring in common people, to study them as media of the memories of their respective cultures to be sure, but also to invite their co-operation in search of the forgotten and repressed. The practise of such partnerships in Oral History is difficult in various ways: because a lyfe-cycle interview reaches into intimacy in public, because the exchange is unequal, and because the interactive process of recollection touches various layers of memory thus generating a diversity of genres of constructions, of legendary, of reminiscences, stories and images, often looking like a puzzle in fragments and with many fragments no longer available. But often they lead to a sort of evidence, that may not only lead to an historical understanding (rather than a psychological analyses) of the person's hidden agenda, but also unearth textures between the public and the private and their evolution over time that generate questions are well beyond the individual for the interpretation of larger groups and cultures. In the end, oral history produces questions, rather than answers, that spill over into other fields of historical interpretation and mediate between diverse dimensions of memory and history.



## 1.4 In Search of Textures lost

### From the historian's laboratory for recollections

As a somewhat extended close rather than a conclusion I want to give an example, how the private and the public, constructions, narratives and unintegrated little scenes interact in the formation of a life-story in most interviews, with the possible exception that in my example the interviewer and the interviewee are the same person, me. I should warn, that such a close with but a small extract will need some patience. In our oral-history-projects we usually divided our interviews into three parts: first we gave the interviewees a chance to tell about their life, as they saw fit with as little interfering as possible from our side. Second we put questions into the loopholes of this public narrative, trying to change the track of memory by asking for instance carrierridden men about their childhood or their mother, or by confronting ladies, who had told everything about their families, with political impulses like 'Have you ever seen Hitler personally?'. 'How do you remember your first encounter with allied soldiers?' or in the GDR: 'Where have you been on June 17, 1953?' (questions that we wanted to put to all of our interviewees somewhen anyhow). In the third section, usually in a second meeting after we had listened to the tapes of the first, we followed this up and tried to clarify contradictions and then put numbers of questions about their work, their politics, their kin and their social environments at various stages of their life from a questionnaire. Even though we were always open to new free exchanges and new stories, this third stage was mainly oriented at generating data that we could use for interpretative and comparative purposes, and also as corroborating evidence. Now I certainly spare you this third laborious stage and skip the first, because as an academic before an academic, presenting his 'persona' (latin for 'mask') for public uses, I would have offered a short version of my professional c.v., most data of which you already know from the prior sections of this paper and for sure I would have not raised the questions at the beginning of such an interview, that I associated with these data earlier on. So let us turn to section two and just ask for our example and for a start: 'Where do you come from? What do you remember first, thinking of your childhood?'

My first reaction would propose essential preconditions before my birth, i.e. they would be drawn from family legendary. In regard to the first question, I would offer a construction and a constructed narrative pieced together from various genres of narrations from memory, of which, however, I do have only few reminiscences, but more of them for the follow-ups that touch the second question.

### 1.4.1 Construction and legendary

The construction, that I would advance first, obviously is designed to explain my liberalism, my need and strength for interventions and my evasiveness and for keeping my spaces for manoeuvre open. I would underline, that I come from a very mixed family background with conflicting dynamics in the long run, a family at the crossroads, so to speak.

#### *Rise and Decay:*

My father's line was protestant petty-bourgeoisie in Swabia, looking back to agricultural hands with their bitter struggle for a living and a place in society, moving upwards through elementary school teachers to the "cashier" (i.e. in nowadays terms 'financial director') of a brewery, a lover of strict discipline and my grandfather (long dead before my birth). Married to a big and warm mom of similar protestant background, they had four children: a daughter (wife of a non commissioned officer all through) and three sons, whose social achievement varied brought enough, even though all of them became minor Nazis. The eldest was a fan of motorbikes in his youth and for us kids later seemed to be an amiable and almost stately figure; however, he never got beyond driving big Mercedes limousines for more or less important bankers. The youngest had entrepreneurial spirit and became a small scale industrialist, first founding a German base for a minor American multinational, then building airports for the Luftwaffe in occupied Europe and later on combining both experiences by working hard for his own firm in the building industry, drawing on American patents and German talents of improvisation, flown from the East. My father was in the middle and was destined, because he was practical and because his parents were down to earth, to become a building engineer, but ran off to become, after some unachieved studies, a designing artist. Fascinated by modern machinery and with his gift for quick and accurate drawing, later to be supplemented by photography, he specialized in publicity for technical products like tools and cars and since the 50's more successfully in the design of industrial exhibitions and fairs.

On the other hand, my mother came from an established rhinish bourgeois family with some radical roots when the French Revolution had boarded the Rhine, but later on breeding lawyers and entrepreneurs, occasionally even taking in a daughter from the landed aristocracy. They were liberal and catholic, they looked generous and joyful and seemed to be on the edge of decay, one of them heading for bankruptcy. Her father still had been moderately successful as a private banker, but deceased early during World War I and his fortunes almost completely melted away in the hyper-inflation of 1923. Yet her mother, a

strongwilled and whitty daughter of a judge, brought both of her daughters to academic study, the first one even to a doctorate in literature, to become a very catholic 'Fräulein' teaching languages in high-schools and the second to be assistant at a modernist academy of art and design at Stuttgart. In her youth my mother represented what the Nazis soon were attacking as "Salonbolschewismus" and for her style it may suffice to say that one of her early abstract paintings got selected for a model house of Le Corbusier in 1928. However, as soon as she was accepted as 'Meisterschüler' at the Bauhaus and more particularly by Paul Klee, she missed her chances of becoming a real painter by falling in love with a charming sportsman, who was a few years younger and then still a student.

*Family Romance and Seizure of Power:*

Instead of moving to Dessau, she founded together with him an atelier for advertising art in the modernist style of my mother and with the technical talents of my father just on the onset of the depression. The partners; both wearing trousers and cutting their hair as males then and he calling her 'Peter' ever since, had a hard though obviously joyful and adventurous time to get the studio established and making ends meet, and in 1932 they married. In that year, my father also got engaged with the Storm Troopers, being detailed to an "artist's storm" and joined the Nazi Party; being otherwise disinterested in politics he never advanced beyond membership or held any office, but he obviously had to stress his masculinity, liked cameradery and made useful acquaintances. From the following year this greatly paved the way of the atelier and changed in stages its style and appearance. Even though my mother was still doing most of the designing, my father seized power by controlling the public relations of the Atelier that finally appeared under his name and demanded of his wife that she should cut her relationships with Jews (one of her closest girlfriends and colleagues from the Academy was a jewel designer from a wealthy jewish family in the Rhineland, that later could manage to emigrate to America) and reluctantly she obeyed in the end. The completely a-political 'salon-bolschewist' got further silenced when she became pregnant in the sommer of 1933, giving birth to my sister and then to my brother within the next years. After this she reappeared as kitschy illustrator of children's books and designer of figurative decorations that stylized gender-roles in such a sweetish romanticism and were so acceptable that one of them even seems to have been built, shortly before the war, as wooden inlets into the new country-house of one of the Nazi-Gauleiter. It was in these days of new harmony that I was implanted into the consenting occupied areas of my

family at the crossroads – as a late comer. Procreated in spring 1939, was I to be a product of false confidence in victory, or just of a rather strange love-affair?

*Nomen est Omen:*

By the way, even though my mother was catholic, excommunicated for marrying a protestant, and my father was completely disinterested in religion, I was to be baptized as a protestant, probably a trace of influences of my grandmothers, both quite pious in different churches, and the parental power in choosing between them. My christian name was borrowed from the dearest brother of my grandfather, the catholic banker, in an abridged form, that was trendy then (Dirk, a similarly trendy and germanizing abbreviation of the banker's name Theodor being the alternative) and in contrast to my sister and brother a second name was added, that of my father. One of the employees of the Atelier, a nice and most vivid Fräulein, was to become my godmother and as godfather a local industrialist was chosen, an earlier member of my father's 'artist-storm troop' who had been instrumental for the establishment of the atelier by placing all of his advertising into the hands of my father. Even my mother found him a cheerful guy. Sorry, I cannot remember to have met him: he committed suicide in 1945.

#### 1.4.2 The composition of narratives

The second general reaction to questions about my early formation would be a bit less constructed from a very subjective evaluation of family legendary, the narrative increasingly relying on selections from my own recollections, that almost exactly set in with the end of the war. The basic theme of this second reaction surely would be, that I did not get to know my father, till I was more than eleven years old, and that in the meantime I passed my childhood in an almost completely female world.

*Males Lost and Female Authority: My Maternal Nest:*

Four months after my father had been recruited to the Wehrmacht, then conquering Poland, I was borne on Christmas 1939, and later he moved (as a driver, a cartographer, finally as a medical orderly) to France, to Belo-Russia and Ukrania. I do not remember his rare presence when he was on leave but a family story tells that when I began to speak and he had got his last one or two weeks off the eastern front somewhen in 1942, I said nothing but "der 'dat soll gehn!" – and that "'dat" certainly was not a kid's version of "daddy" but of "Soldat"

(soldier); I had not accepted the man in uniform as a family member and wanted him to leave. It was only at the end of his life and the birth of my first daughter early in '68 (the second was born in the autumn of 1989), that I found this story no longer funny and had acquired enough empathy to feel it's bitterness for him.

At the occasion of their tenth wedding anniversary he had addressed a long love-letter in his beautifully styled handwriting to "Dear Peter", including an elaborated tract about how he had educated her to become a real woman and mother and how proud he was of her, signed "Heil Hitler, Dein Bö" and when he had returned to the front for the last time, his final joke being: "Frisier Dich mal!" (Dress up your hair, now and then!). Within short, however, there were no more personal news from the eastern front and my mother produced a whole series of charcoal drawings, showing nothing but a morass with trunks and stumps of dying trees. He was missing and it was only one or two years after the war, that she got the news that he was alive, taken prisoner of war by the Red Army. In all he was put into forced labor camps in Ukrainia for more than seven years, partly in mines, later again as medical orderly assisting the camp's female physician of russian-jewish origin.

When he had gone to war, he had ordered my mother not to continue the atelier, but she had nourished us all through the war and postwar by keeping up, and establishing new, client relationships under the worst of conditions and had carried on to produce her seemingly naïv kitsch that appealed to Allied officers as much as it had done before to German ones, me sitting usually besides her desk playing with my favorite dwarfs and enjoying the virtual harmony as if it were real.

When big bombings approached cities even in southern Germany she had taken us kids (and her maid), left the big apartment and atelier in Stuttgart of which I know a lot from photographs, but almost nothing from my own memory, with everything behind and sought shelter with her mother and sister, living together in a three-bedroom-appartment in a small town near the black forest. There my aunt, the catholic Fräulein Dr., (from my early teens my favourite relative introducing me to literature and to catholic cloisters and even taking me along when she first travelled to England and France in the 50s) taught at school, where she was the only non-party member on the staff, volunteering instead with the red cross, and became headmistress upon the arrival of the French troops, for both reasons and because of her fluent French. Mother and kids, owning almost nothing, slept in one room for five years, where my mother also worked first (the maid having been accommodated in the neighbourhood). Otherwise the old building was big, housing a mysterious cloth-warehouse operated, among their many cats, by three elderly spinsters who had inherited this strange business from their father long ago and had left everything as it were.

But for my brother and me and a big tom-cat, that could frighten me to death hopping suddenly down the staircase as a tiger from nowhere, males simply were absent from this world of my childhood, crammed and odd, as it must have felt to most others; but for me it was heaven.

This was especially so since my grandmother, always in black since her husband had died 25 years ago, a small and slender und still energetic figure then approaching eighty, known for her strictness, reigned unchallenged over everything including her daughters. But she had selected me, the latecomer, to soften in old age and spoil me completely, even admitting me to mud around in the kitchen during her cooking when the place had always been strictly off-limits for anybody else. Everybody respected her authority, not least because she was the only one interested in politics (uncompromising against the Nazis, of course), well informed and very whitty indeed. I guess it was from this gentle, caring and courageous little commander that authority became largely something female for me. To be respected it should live up to such standards and, preferably, it should come together with a special liking for me.

*Passing references to early escapes:*

From there I would switch now to stories from elementary school, that I joined in the autumn of 1945 as the youngest among 86 kids in the classroom, with a teacher in her early twenties and with my-be a few weeks of training. Reeducation with no textbooks (or later history books without wars), but the reintroduction of the cane by helpless teachers and, when more male educators came back from war or denazification, the growing refinement of punishment rituals, that frightened and fascinated me though (or because) I hardly got a stroke. I would tell stories such as about the Hoover pupils feeding, which the kids from the surrounding farms poured into the village stream till it was white with milky noodle soup or about sports training in military formation commanded by a returned seargent, with me, pampered and weak as I was, becoming in my teens the worst sport not only of my class, but of my school. (In later days I could persuade a nicer teacher in sports to become my advisor on the pupils paper who led my off the torture of gym hours and doing my editing instead).

I had only few friends during the years of elementary school and they were boys from female families also. With my sister and brother I was close enough in terms of space, by not close enough in terms of age and outside the house they were in a different bracket and gone with the larger boys, my sister being good at football for instance, and my brother rather early becoming good at girls and staging as a heroe in all sorts of rebelish provocations outdoors or at school.