

Corporate Rokoko and the End of the Civic Project

- The making of the public sphere and political clubs. -

*Discussion between Professor Jürgen Fohrmann[1],
Dr Erhard Schüttpelz[2] and Stephan Dillemath*

PART 1 _____

D: I'm interested in a particular aspect of the formation of a civic public. This is the founding of those structures and forms of communication which could be described as condensation points of political consciousness.

They include political clubs and associations, secret societies and lodges, political parties, trade unions, worker and student leagues, brotherhoods, student fraternities, gymnastics clubs, anarchist circles and many more. Then there are also the artistic, religious and scientific connections, which should not concern us here unless they played a vital role in changing state structures.

I'd like to describe a curve, from the dissolution of a system revolving round a single point, namely the absolute representative of God on earth, via the civic democratic developments of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, through to the present day. We are now in a transitional phase on the threshold of Corporate Rokoko, where a global court revolves around a virtual monetary unit.

Secrecy versus the public: civic disobedience in administrative units

D: In the old absolutism, state power devolved on one place and one person. Absolute sovereignty of the one was then supposed to become the sovereignty of all individuals. What were the decisive processes which enabled citizens to take political power and decision-making processes into their own hands and then, ideally, share them out among all?

F: We have to look at the various centers which fed the emancipation processes of the 18th century:

One was the rationality of the town. This had always been a center of civic activities with its town clerks, chroniclers etc.

Then there were the universities, also laws unto themselves, from which an emancipation movement developed.

Only then came what may actually be called, in the sense of Habermas [3] and others, a genuine civic public: the salons, clubs and lodges, everything that became virulent in the 18th century.

These are the three large areas which operate with the concept of public. They represent a unique mixture of special rights, as well as a larger accessible public.

D: The *'standing, writing army of overburdened state servants, corn clerks, office workers of all departments and all the crustaceans stacked together in the crab-pot of state bureaucracy'* [4] were the first to try their hand at clandestine resistance?

F: A public does not exist in a vacuum. Moreover, it has to do with the ordinary necessities pertaining to the formation of the state.

The chancellery is one of the first structures in which regulation begins to be a matter of course. This not only means dealing with the arcane, a secret which the ruler needs to administer. It is also regulation in the sense of a governmental public, intent on communication.

D: So disobedience, civic courage and unauthorized assumption of authority within the administration were important factors?

F: Such a chancellery was a pivot of communication - and already completely functional, i.e. independent of the ruler. These areas developed their own rationality which little by little transcended their actual allotted function.

D: But that was only one strand.

F: The other was erudition, which was gradually spreading, the *'Res Publica Litteraria'* which at its core always addressed a whole public. For there is an imperative in erudition that says, *'learning is really for everybody, and whoever is not educated is not part of humanity.'* The opposite concept is barbarism. That is, there is always an extensive public which is being addressed even if as a rule it does not function as one...
For the learned of course tried to hold on to their special rights, not allowing any others. Thus there was always this dichotomy between a movement towards openness and a tendency to exclude.

S: From the 18th century onwards this can also be seen as a tactical move. The secret alliances and lodges which were preparing an openness and a public, had in fact to remain hidden from the state power of the king and the nobility. All through the struggle against those possessing power, the model of secrecy and monopolization of discourse can be seen, right up to the self-torturing *'K groups'* [5] which were also concerned to expose secrets and at the same time hold on to them.

F: The civic public which was establishing itself claimed to be universal, wishing to embrace everything. On the other hand, it was very concerned not to allow everything its validity. I believe these were two movements which always belonged together. It is a kind of enlightened speech which does not want to retreat behind its own enlightenment.



Civic and aristocratic communication

D: When did people start feeling the need to determine affairs of the state together, discard the monarch and rule themselves as a common subject? Which organizational structures paved the way for the French Revolution?

F: Like Koselleck [\[6\]](#) , I see civic society as emerging out of freemasonry. Lessing formulated the idea, and Koselleck places it at the center of his theories.

S: Freemasonry is only one example, a pseudonym for all kinds of universalist trends within and around freemasonry.

F: ...the making of literary culture, the organization of reading circles by readers themselves, republican clubs, debating clubs, all sorts of things. All that dates from the middle of the 18th century.

There were of course precursors, but the great take-off took place parallel with the development of the Reader. In other words, to the extent to which society was placing far more stress on self-education and on the opportunity for everybody to communicate, so types of organization were forming where communication could take place.

Methodically speaking, this presupposes the ability to acquire information oneself, and handle it. It also presupposes the possibility of exchanging such information in a circle where one is not immediately put down, but where there is a form of real exchange. In this way subjects are set free to become what might be described as subjects capable of communication in a universalist society.

And since one cannot communicate hierarchically when everybody is a Reader, there are relatively swift political consequences from this practice. It is here that I see preliminary elements that helped to prepare for the French Revolution. As an after-effect of that revolution, say, within the framework of Jacobin clubs, there are very determined endeavors to use this politically.

D: To what extent did civic communication oppose that of the court? In both cases there were tea-parties and tête-à-têtes.

F: Communication at court is quite different in nature, we can see that from the novel *Dangerous Liaisons*. Here there is a very forced field of observation: everyone is trying to work to their own advantage through mutual and careful observation of others. Success in conversation and the chance to participate in it in a particular place of course structures the hierarchy at court. This finds expression in communication and is based among other things on skill in communicating: the aim is to achieve distinction.

On the other hand the court allows no form of specialization. At court one must be in a position to prove one's sophistication by being able to discourse effortlessly on all manner of topics. There is an easy change of subjects, nothing is fixed.

Functional differentiation versus ethics: the patchwork of specialists in cahoots

D: It was probably inevitable that the arts and sciences should specialize at court, as it was only there that they were given their own space for purposes of artistry and entertainment. The court's ignorance of these specializations was of course derided by those involved, which naturally aroused the curiosity of the bourgeoisie.

F: I would put that differently, taking Goethe's [\[7\]](#) Tasso [\[8\]](#) as my example. In the old model, the monarch not only represents all positions in society but also tries to turn everything which constitutes this society to his own advantage. Now with Tasso and his antagonist Antonio, two system references oppose each other which can no longer be connected to the world at court. The first, Tasso, tries as an artist to judge the world solely according to aesthetic principles: 'Is this beautiful or is it not beautiful?' - that is the decisive question. The other, Antonio, is a politician and says: 'Is this useful or not useful for achieving my political goals?'

Both stances are completely anti-aristocratic. One is already a modern politics, and the other is a modern aesthetic approach to the world. To

use Luhmann's [\[9\]](#) words: both indicate a society which is functionally differentiated in that it is subdivided into quite discrete functional areas which no longer mirror each other in any way. The idea of the court, on the other hand, was that all functional areas could again be represented in that one point, the pinnacle, the monarch.

S: Seen from the court's point of view these two characters are figures of disloyalty. Artists no longer need to be loyal to any particular persons or values, nor, in that sense, do politicians, because they have to utilize everything strategically. That is, the citizen would see the court as completely artificial, false and dissimulated, and the court would see all these civic figures as simply disloyal and of course brutish, philistine etc.

F: Since the 19th century we have been able to observe closely how the respective forms of coherence in these different systems develop. The Art system develops, and the Politics system develops. But they are not split off from each other, for 'social semantics' will only tolerate such drifting apart up to a certain point. It develops an instrument, its own discourse perhaps, which attempts to, in the end, bring everything back together. And that, as I see it for the 19th century, is ethics.

Ethics has always been used as an argument against differentiation. Schiller [\[10\]](#) started off the idea that art should again be seen as useful because it is there for the education of human beings. Politics should of course also be orientated towards the best, 'Summum Bonum'.

The whole of literary theory, in Young Hegelianism [\[11\]](#) etc., is pledged in this way to moralize art. Any politician who does not join in with this is seen as weak and characterless etc., and art which does not adhere to it is too sensuous and obscene and only full of self-interest. These were the two charges leveled at the political movement 'Junges Deutschland' [\[12\]](#).

S: And under the protection of these arguments the old hierarchies, which have now become quite different ones, are then partly shunted back into place, for example that hierarchy between men and women.

F: And the divide opens between, on the one hand, an art system that since Early Romanticism has been repeatedly revolutionizing itself and which has no interest in being thus straitjacketed into a universal mode, and on the other, a pretension to ethics and morality which transports a totally philistine understanding of art.



Hierarchy, anti-hierarchy. Elitism. Enlightened speech etc.

D: Within a civic public, the intellectual and artistic elite is always conceived as an enemy when it is attempting to bring about change in politics and art. For the artists and intellectuals, however, this will to change is a life concept, used to define their own sovereignty. In fact this almost always means acting in opposition to the decisions of the majority.

F: The validity of opinions is now no longer dependent upon birth. This is the crucial difference in the claim to universality which was developed in the 18th century and which is closely related to the agenda of erudition and the academy. Whereas before one could state: 'Everything I say has to do with the fact that I was born an aristocrat, that is what makes it valid', now the civic project was: 'Behind all differences of class there is the universal concept of man'. Suddenly one could speak in the name of mankind.

S: This claim to humanity in the most universal sense was, unlike 'humanitas', totally opposed to the hierarchies of the time and of course to the existence of hierarchies in general.

F: Yes - that was one trend.

S: As a political party or as the avant-garde, one must immediately monopolize speech in a pretension to speak for others. We have here

again the dialectic of secrecy and openness. But the concern was of course foremost anti-hierarchical, Leninist partially, too.

D: ...?

S: In my opinion there was a certain German Leninism in the 18th century, the peripheral as opposed to the otherwise central nations. The claim to universality in regard to mankind promised that this anti-hierarchical aspect here, or in Russia or America, might work.

F: That of course could not assert itself with this enlightened gesture although it was repeatedly attempted. In the lodges, for example, lots were drawn anew each time to determine the seating arrangement. Not even there should a fixed order become established. The idea behind this is a society of equals, isonomy.

Enlightenment also has to do with the ability to set a colon. An enlightener is someone situated in front of, or on the left side of the colon, then comes the colon [\[13\]](#), and then the statement. The addressee is all the way over on the other side. An essential constituent of enlightened speech is that I only exist on the left-hand side of the statement, of the colon, where I can say

WHAT EXISTS: EXISTS.

This relation cannot be reversed.

In its first phase, enlightenment is dogmatic, one can clearly see this in the 18th century. The enlightener who speaks does not want the addressees themselves to become enlighteners, who in turn enlighten others. This type of dialectic is indeed thematized in the second phase, but that is actually no longer enlightenment. It leads to other forms. The structures of sociability in Early Romanticism attempt to perform exactly this interplay, that is, no longer allowing a fixed position or a fundamental asymmetry.

S: Be on both sides of the colon, and if possible at the same time!

F: Yes, that's the basic idea behind it and it leads to an ironic method.

But the elitist aspect can only be seen at all when the enlightened speech position can itself be observed, when it can be clearly discerned that it is always the same one telling us from the left-hand side of the colon what the world is like. The accusation of being elitist is made the very moment the relationship of communication can be perceived as being cemented.

S: This often results in the claim that it can only be a select number of persons who are capable of setting the colon in such a way, namely the geniuses.

F: Karl Philipp Moritz [14] introduces this in quite an interesting way. In his opinion it is not about advancing the whole of society. It would, moreover, suffice if nature showed in only a few individual human beings what it was capable of, with the simultaneous awareness of 'perceiving the whole as a shipwreck and using this as an opportunity to acquire the right of salvage'. That is of course an absolutely radical statement for the 18th century. First of all dismissing the teleologically-oriented process of everything improving from day by day, and secondly saying that we are no longer interested in this kind of teleology, because it is totally sufficient when special individuals...now this almost sounds like George [15] or Gundolf [16]...

S: ...yes, it's an artist's justification...

F: ...when special individuals try to demonstrate in nature and as an expression of nature what nature in its perfection is actually capable of, while at the same time acting so anarchic...whatever anarchic means...anyhow, trying to collect whatever serves their purposes...., or as Moritz calls it, acquiring the right of salvage.

From the streets to the university and the long way back again. The university as a revolutionary instrument.

D: Let's return again to the 'anarchist' appropriation of governmental power: Why did the civic clubs become so radical in the process of detaching themselves from the court, where did the flame come from that ultimately ignited the French Revolution and the overthrow?

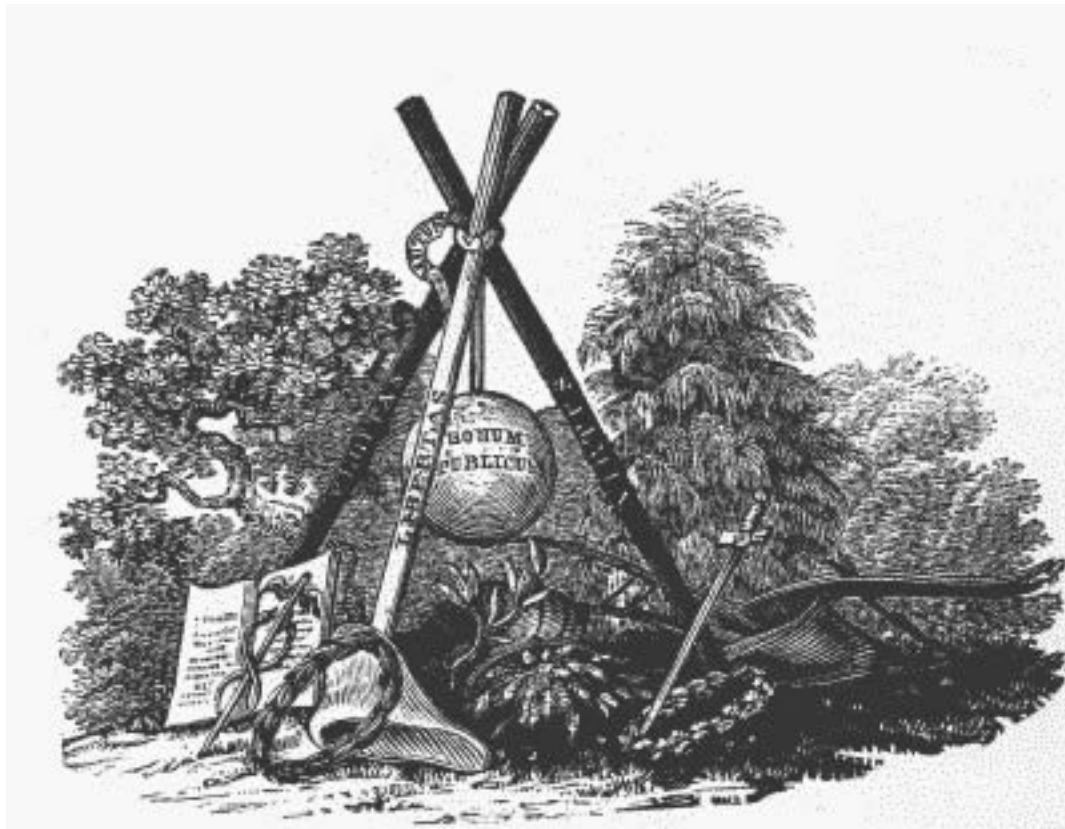
F: In Germany this took place in a very reserved manner...extremely reserved, except for the occurrences in Mainz [17]. I see the actual revolutionary element not in the political formations but in an altered concept of sociability. A society adjusting to communication combined with the notion of Romantic sociability which makes communication a precondition for individuation. This can only perhaps be formulated in such a complicated way.

In other words, I can only develop myself when communicating with interested and competent people. I must therefore create an institution enabling this. This institution is first of all the social circle, then the university. I must also create a new space at the university in which communication can take place, and that is the seminar, which did not exist in such a form beforehand.

The university was invented, according to a theory of Wehler [18], as a revolutionary instrument of a (bureaucratic) intelligentsia to effect a forceful thrust of modernization in this society. Taking a look at the foundation files of the Berlin University, for example, one understands that the idea of a comprehensive form of communication, including the reciprocal exchange of the roles of student and teacher, was indeed grasped as a model for revolutionizing society. I would place the concept of revolution more in these microstructures than in political demonstrations of will.

S: Which would explain, in regard to Germany, the fact that at the same time a lot of people such as Hegel, Fichte [19] and others who took sides with the French Revolution then turned to this Prussian model. In regard to France, one of course must speak about the middle of the 18th century and its structures of sociability, as well as the transmissions between aristocracy and bourgeoisie which triggered the French Revolution in the first place. The revolution was not carried out by peasants from the provinces but by the higher tiers of society themselves. This was made possible by an altered, more comprehensive communication structure which then made this claim for the whole of society and simply did away with the remains of absolutism. Looking at England, one must again speak differently, as a revolution was never experienced there. But there was a quite similar transmission between aristocracy and bourgeoisie, and due to the resulting altered structure of sociability in the 18th century a degree of freedom was achieved which did not exist in such a form in Germany.

D: Changing structures of sociability everywhere. Germany is lagging behind, and as the possibility of a radical political revolution appears to be non-existent, hopes are placed on a free, supposedly revolutionary university education.



'Burschenschaften' (student fraternities) [20] and a new nationalism

D: Was that the point at which most of the tiny revolutionary student circles, such as the society for human rights around Büchner [21] and Weidig [22], drifted off into totally different directions and later

advocated opposing positions? I have in mind the 'Burschenschaft' model with its increasing nationalism, whilst Büchner himself sought for possibilities to thematize political conflicts in his art.

F: When talking about the student-fraternity model one must keep in mind that there are quite different, usually doubly-coded forms. Democratic and anti-feudal on the one hand, hopelessly nationalistic and reactionary on the other. When it comes to establishing hierarchies, the national movement is of course up front.

The student-fraternity movement itself is a formation stemming from the old 'Landsmannschaften' which were regarded as 'Nationes': students coming from the same region joined together and helped each other out.

Their political impetus is originally to be seen in the context of the Wars of Liberation. That led to moments of abstruse one-sidedness, like in the case of the persistent revolutionary Harro Harring [23] who ended his life standing on the market place in Husum and stabbing a knife in his heart, still wearing black armor, dressed up as a member of a student fraternity...

S: And beforehand he fought for the revolutions in Denmark, Poland, Greece and at all fronts concerned with national liberation.

F: Then we have the revolutionary clubs that already play an important role in the early socialist movement. This is the actual hour of birth of the socialist movement from which Marx and others then emerged.

And parallel to this there's the formation of a civic culture of clubs. This was extremely important for stabilizing this awful 19th century because it organized the entire society...via grotesque artifacts, songbooks, club fanaticism - it can't be pictured horrible enough.

S: The aristocracy and monarchy were not interested in forming a nation-state - that is the axiom. In the forming phase of nation-states in all of these countries at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century the egalitarian aspect was per se something anti-aristocratic.

F: In an attempt to describe nineteenth-century society, one finds on the one hand a still totally segmented society, but on the other hand the claim is made that, despite this segmentation, this society constitutes one nation. Both run parallel and seem to get along for a relatively long period of time.

It is basically the old anthropological argumentation. When Arndt [24] proclaims that the nation is the community of inflamed hearts, it is quite simple: no matter if aristocrat or bourgeois, the main thing is that one has the same inflamed heart. This then ties a whole nation together. The broad range of organizational forms in the 19th century which constitutes the interior structure should then ultimately be brought together to form one great nation.

D: We did, however, forget one thing which came before this: the allegedly so apolitical Romanticism.

The communication model of Romanticism.

S: That may very well be the decisive chapter.

F: Romanticism has to do with precisely this model of sociability, but it is not only the concept of sociability that is to then support the university. The strict Early-Romantic project consists in a communication model outlined by Friedrich Schlegel [25], in Conversation on Poetry for example: love needs love as approval. That is why we emerge from the depths of our inner-self to find ourselves again in the inner-self of another human. He states: there is the operation of reciprocal communication and beyond reciprocal communication lies death.

That is a totally emphatic concept which presupposes the possibility of symmetrical communication in which asymmetrical communication situations can be translated into symmetrical ones. Or, to put it differently, that the communication situation itself can be kept symmetrical even if asymmetries exist.

This is then elaborated by Schleiermacher [26] in his theory of social behavior as the perfect theory for the Romantic social circle - with the huge claim that this is what constitutes the world.

It is therefore a unique coincidence that a certain epistemology, understood as reciprocal learning, should simultaneously be an organizing principle of society, or at least of a smaller circle. As a concept this cannot be thought of radically enough. Unfortunately, it only lasted for a short period of time and then drifted off into other forms, like Catholicism, nation etc., which all contain concepts of communication as well, but no such symmetrical ones.

S: Why couldn't this be maintained?

F: Schlegel tried to describe this in his Lucinde [27]. But... I have to start again because it is really complicated to describe: The presupposition is that communication does not always only thematize communication itself, i.e. that communication, in its urge to say 'this is the right model', does not only say the same thing again and again and thus become tautological. And the mistake, if I may say so, the mistake Schlegel made in Lucinde and other texts is to force Romantic communication into a tautology. In other words, one must possess procedures that put into practice - and not only describe in a self-referential way - Romantic communication.

S: This is also the reason why Schlegel and Novalis [28] in the first years used up an incredible amount of topics.

F: Yes, they used all these topics and in the end they always came upon the same idea.

Another reason why this might not have worked is that the project was still oriented towards the philosophy of identity. One could, however, use the notion of difference as a guiding concept and envision a project that does not presuppose the fact that, in the end, identity will be the result, and that everything will lead to the One, but that conceives the opposite and aims at preventing or delaying this result.

D: This could perhaps also be described by saying that the concept of idealism imploded because it remained too immanent. There were then attempts to develop various other structures out of the ruins of these forms of communication, structures that increasingly referred to the outside world. But these were then more or less bureaucratic constructions such as social clubs and associations, early forms of political parties that organized themselves around specific contents and sought to gain political influence, or that on the other hand affirmed existing conditions.

F: However, many of these clubs also imploded because starting at a certain point all they did was celebrate their existence as a club. This can be compared to the concept of love that only celebrates itself as a concept of love. The problem is: if people share a common interest in each other, then there must be a sufficient difference so that something can be learnt from one another. On the other hand, there must be enough in common to secure the basis for communication. The model of Romantic communication later imploded because the relationship of tension could no longer be sustained.

PART 2 >

FOOTNOTES:

>[\[1\]](#) Jürgen Fohrmann, German professor of German (Bonn after 1990), professional Germanist of German Studies (Bielefeld in the 1980s)

>[\[2\]](#) Erhard Schüttpelz, born in 1961, amateur musician and amateur scholar, Cologne and other places, present whereabouts unknown.

>[\[3\]](#) Jürgen Habermas, born 1929, second-generation member of the Frankfurt School. He devoted his life's work to defending and reclaiming the project of enlightenment critique, or what he calls the 'philosophical discourse of modernity'.

In his early work, such as Knowledge and Human Interests (1968), he adopted a Kantian and Marxist-inflected approach, seeking to reconstruct the genealogy of the modern natural and human sciences by inquiring back into their social, historical, and epistemological conditions of emergence.

In his later (post-1970) work he adopts a different perspective, a theory of 'communicative action' derived largely from speech-act philosophy.

One reason for this turn toward language is his conviction that the project of modernity had run into criticism through its over-reliance on a subject-centered epistemological paradigm. His aim is to reformulate that project in a theory committed to values of truth, critique, and rational consensus, pinning its faith to the regulative precept of an 'ideal speech-situation'.

In the 1980's he intervened in the so-called Historikerstreit - the debate about right-wing revisionist accounts (Nolte et al.) of National Socialism being a reaction to Bolshevism, equating both in the notion of totalitarianism and thus relativizing the Holocaust.

In his later years, Habermas ranked as a state philosopher for the Social Democratic/Green Party coalition government, e.g. advocating the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999. Three weeks later, however, he changed his mind in regard to the bombardment, because it wasn't 'expedient'.

He might have remembered 'that an indestructible moment of communicative rationality is anchored in the social form of human life.'

>[\[4\]](#) From: 'Life of Quintus Fixlein' by Jean Paul, 1763-1825. His eccentric and discursive novels, full of humour, sentiment and irony, were among the most widely read books in the early 19th Century. In 'Life of Quintus Fixlein' he opposes both 'poetic nihilists' such as Goethe and Schiller and 'poetic materialists': The true poet maintains the middle course between these two extremes, 'clothing Nature in ideal infinity'. His theoretical works are wayward and discursive like novels. The qualities of variability and discontinuity later became reasons for his decline. The sentiment, the humour, the irony and the verbal arabesques, which at first delighted, seemed too deeply steeped in self-indulgence. Nevertheless, many of his works have by their deep humanity escaped the oblivion into which the others have fallen. Like the various 'Siebenkäs' revivals have proved more recently, the combination of contrasting facets, which defy classification into any distinct literary school or political cause, deserves our greater appreciation .

>[\[5\]](#) Small communist parties in Germany mostly founded in the early 1970s.

>[\[6\]](#) Reinhart Koselleck, German historian, University of Bielefeld 1970s-90s. Widely known and acclaimed for his research in 'historical semantics', i.e. a history of historical keywords (e.g. 'people', 'nation', 'revolution' etc.), also known for his temporalization of 'temporalization'. 'Modernity' in Koselleck's vision of history began around 1750, in the so-called 'Sattelzeit' ('saddle time', the period flanking the French Revolution by 50 years), letting temporalization 'mount the horse'. Koselleck, the keyword reader, (each of the books in his library from his time as a student onwards contained a keyword index), once surprised his critics with a social history of Prussia; he spent some of his boring academic meetings drawing cartoons of colleagues (a catalogue was published). His epitaph reads:

R.K.

Let me quote again the last keyword of history

The research I could not finish in

Time.

>[\[7\]](#) GOETHE (1749-1832), German national hero and writer. See Cultural Trademarks

>[\[8\]](#) 'Torquato Tasso' , 1890, written by Goethe, the cultural trademark.

>[\[9\]](#) Niklas Luhmann, PhD in 1966, German sociologist at the University of Bielefeld, still haunting the place with his 'research project: theory of society, period: 30 years, costs: none'. Luhmann started as an administrator and developed the only social theory and cybernetic epistemology that came to terms both with the good old Federal Republic of Germany (understood functionally) as well as with the not-so-happy future past and globalization (read in a dysfunctional way). Terminology slightly shifting all the time, stable frame of mind, sitting in the sun for hours reading and writing his famous index cards. In the early 1970s most leftist thinkers dismissed him as a system-supporting technocrat, but in the '80s and '90s nearly all of his former opponents acknowledged at least some of the advantages of Luhmann's approach (even some leftist activists of 1999: „fight the system, and let Luhmann tell you what the system is'). Incidentally, in the 1990s most leftist '60s thinkers (Bourdieu, Habermas, Castoriadis etc.) had become system (i.e. nation-state, social welfare, social democracy) supporters themselves, and Luhmann's approach by then seemed more subversive because less sentimental - Luhmann himself still being as system-supporting and open to change as in 1969. In retrospect, of course, any of these positions and shifts seems as absurd as any other, because like all classical sociology (Durkheim, Weber, Parsons etc.) the theory seems most of all - another mirage - to project a utopian image of the values and pursuits of its time and society. The epitaph on Luhmann's tombstone quotes Brecht (of all people):

N.L.

A Theory of Society (1969-1999)

Proposals is what he made.

Incessantly.

>[\[10\]](#) Friedrich Schiller, 1759-1805, German writer & philosopher. See National Trademarks

>[\[11\]](#) Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, philosopher, 1770-1831, distinguishes between the subjective, objective and absolute spirit. The objective spirit, as opposed to the limited subjective spirit, represents the ethics of communities, from the small unit of the family

to that of the state, and establishes the laws containing the highest forms of ethics. Above and beyond this, the absolute spirit permeates the three spheres of art, religion and philosophy. While the subjective and objective spheres of the spirit generate the forces of history, the absolute spirit induces, through its conciliatory and harmonic properties, a sense of purity and perfection. In this Hegel sees the goal of aesthetics in art.

>[\[12\]](#) 'Junges Deutschland' was an aesthetic and political movement in Germany (ca 1830-1849) after the Romantic period which used art, writing and journalism against the oppression and censorship of the Metternich era, turning away from Idealism and Romanticism towards political reform, religious tolerance and emancipation from accepted sexual morality. The bolder spirits emphasized that action, not theory was required. Supporters included Heine, Börne, Wienbarg, Mundt, Gutzkow, Freilingrath, Laube.

>[\[13\]](#) ENLIGHTENER : statement to addressee!

>[\[14\]](#) Karl Philipp Moritz, 1756-1793, little known, and still secretly important writer, (see Anton Reiser), poet and editor of a periodical on 'knowledge of the soul by experience' (Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde).

>[\[15\]](#) Stefan George, 1868-1933, endowed with ample means, he determined to devote himself to poetry and to cultivate beauty for its own sake. Influenced by Mallarmé he saw beauty in the sensual, especially aural presentation of a highly selective vocabulary in disciplined deliberate organization. Consciously writing for an elite he saw himself as an educator and leader in the renewal of a debased culture. He selected a circle of friends, or rather disciples, who shared his views and seconded his efforts to renew German civilization by creating disciplined poetic beauty. Later, the tone of his poetry passes to the prophetic, apocalyptic and monumental and evokes the vision of a new Germany, which was to be realization of Hellas (ancient Greece).

>[\[16\]](#) Friedrich Gundolf, 1880-1931, was a disciple of George. Editor of monumental monographs on Goethe and George, for some years after the 1914/18 war he enjoyed an almost pontifical authority.

>[\[17\]](#) During the French Revolution, Mainz was for a short time (1792-93) the center of a separatist movement under Georg Forster.

>[\[18\]](#) Hans-Ulrich Wehler, German historian, University of Bielefeld (again), worked - among other things - on the social history of the 19th century bourgeoisie and working-class and on Wilhelminian imperialism.

>[\[19\]](#) Johann Gottlieb Fichte, 1762-1814, studied in Jena and became an enthusiastic student of Kant's philosophy. He devised a system on his own, based on Kant's thinking. He rejected Kant's 'thing-in-itself', and saw existence solely in terms of the self. For him only the EGO exists 'in-itself'. The world around it, comprehensively classified as the Non-Ego, is a creation of the EGO. Fichte preached moral virtues, especially patriotic ones. He seems to have been prepared to transfer

the EGO to the German nation, which would represent the supreme incarnation of the moral deal. By 1805 a tendency towards mysticism had manifested itself in his thinking.

>[\[20\]](#) Burschenschaften: A term originally (1790) applied to the student body at a university. From 1814 it was applied to a student movement which grew out of the Wars of Liberation (Napoleonic Wars). The Burschenschaft was from the outset hostile to the reactionary policy pursued by many German heads of state and desired the political unity of Germany. The Burschenschaft was banned in 1819 and denounced as 'Demagogic Movement'. Local Burschenschaften continued to meet clandestinely in many places, and the trend of the movement became more radical. An attempted uprising led to a wave of arrests all over Germany. Tough students continued to be politically active in the 1840s, the Burschenschaft as such was quiescent, even though many of the politicians in the Frankfurt Parliament of 1848 were former members of a Burschenschaft. In the second half of the 19th century, it developed into a union of social clubs of nationalistic and latterly anti-Semitic character.

>[\[21\]](#) Georg Büchner, 1813-37, writer and poet. During his studies he became keenly interested in the ideas and activities of movements against authoritarian government and political oppression, which he pursued with vigor. He founded the 'Gesellschaft für Menschenrechte' in March 1834, which was modeled on the 'Société des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen' of 1830, and expressed his radical socialist ideas in the political pamphlet 'Der Hessische Landbote'. His aim at this stage was a Hessian peasants' revolt, because he was convinced that only the use of force would effect social justice and remedy the stressing conditions of the lower classes. The mainspring of his courageous but dangerous political activities was his deep sympathy with social misery. In an age of economic crises and reluctant constitutional and fiscal reforms, the peasants had reason to be particularly aggrieved at their lot.

>[\[22\]](#) Friedrich Ludwig Weidig, 1791-1837, schoolmaster and pastor, leader of the illegal Liberal Party in Hesse. He was the author of the clandestine pamphlet 'Leuchter und Beleuchter für Hessen'. Early in 1834 Büchner joined his circle of conspirators. Both wrote and distributed the political pamphlet 'Der Hessische Landbote' (which failed to stimulate active resistance). In the course of his subversive activities his contacts to many revolutionary movements were noticed by the police and led to Weidig's arrest in 1834. Betrayed by one of his own ranks, Weidig was kept in prison without trial. He allegedly committed suicide in his cell in 1837. His poems were published posthumously in 1847.

>[\[23\]](#) Harro Harring, 1798-1870, a prolific writer, chiefly of political poetry, and a stormy petrel of 19th century demagoguery, he traveled restlessly through Europe. Dramatist in Vienna, commissioner in a Russian guard stationed in Warsaw, repeatedly expelled as an agitator from various German states, from Switzerland, from Norway, and from Denmark. His points of rest were the USA and London, where he was a member of the European Democratic Central Committee.

>[24] Ernst Moritz Arndt, 1769-1860. His single-minded fanaticism and his energetic, direct prose style made him particularly apt for his role as an anti-French propagandist, praising military virtues, hatred of the French enemy, and death for the Fatherland. The undoubtedly sincere combination of religion and ruthless bellicosity made his writings the most effective patriotic poems of the War of Liberation (Napoleonic Wars).

>[25] Friedrich von Schlegel, 1772-1829, leading spirit of the new Romantic School. His creative works are eccentric and negligible, but his critical writings are brilliant, provocative and fertile. In 1808 he became a Roman Catholic and took service with the Austrian Government, spending much of his life in administration.

>[26] Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, 1768-1834, ranks as the most important Protestant theologian of the Romantic movement. His sermons were esteemed for their sincerity and religious fervor as well as, at the time of national depression, for their patriotism.

>[27] Published in 1799, 'Lucinde' reflects on his love for Dorothea Veit, with whom he spent two years in Paris; he married her in 1804

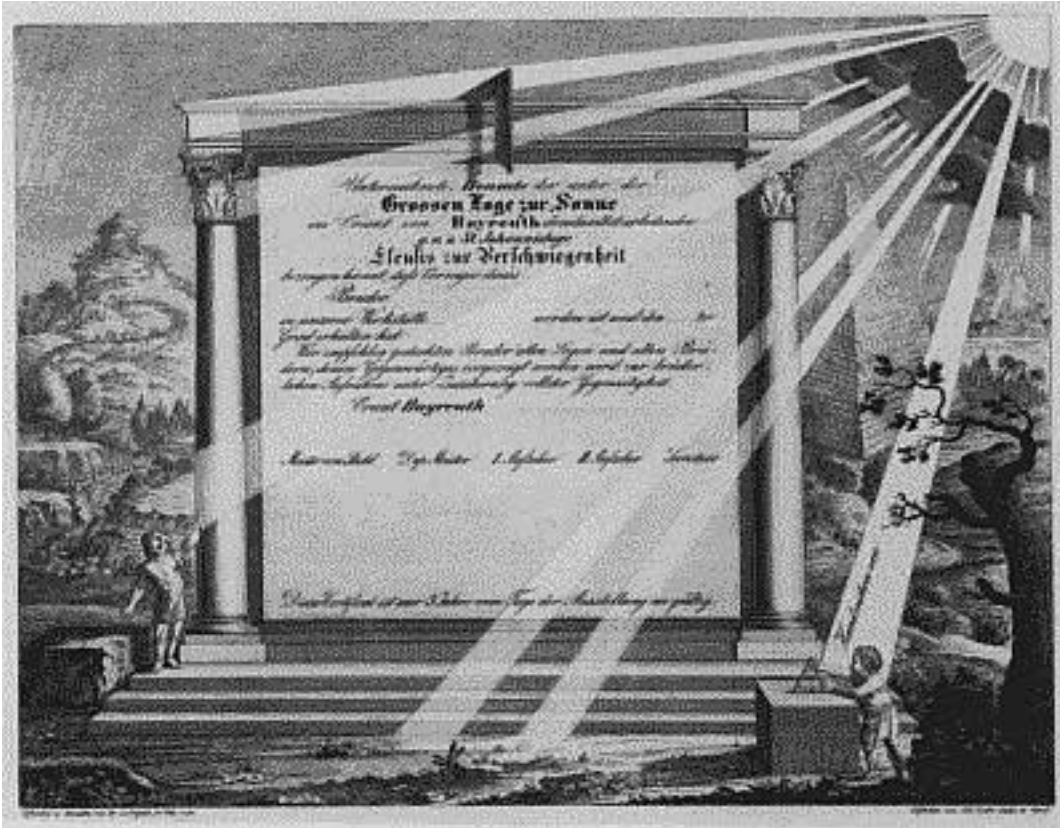
>[28] NOVALIS, 1772-1801, was both by temperament and creative gifts the truest poet of the first Romantic School. In 1794 he met 12-year-old Sophie von Kühn, with whom he deeply fell in love. They were betrothed four months later, and in the same year Sophie developed pulmonary tuberculosis. During her illness, Novalis was working as an administrative assistant in the salt-mine offices of Weißenfels and in the stress of these months, which was augmented by the illness and the death of his brother, he underwent profound religious experience. The death of Sophie in March 1797 led to a crisis, a reckoning with death, which finds expression in the 'Hymnen an die Nacht'.

Corporate Rokoko and the End of the Civic Project

- The making of the public sphere and political clubs. -

*A conversation between Professor Jürgen Fohrmann ,
Dr Erhard Schüttpelz and Stephan Dillemath*

PART 2



Cultural bourgeoisie. Political concepts, cultural traditions.

D: But ultimately, something like a German nation-state did evolve, and there is of course great joy in view of the new and common identity. The bourgeoisie begins to literally cite its new cultural legitimacy and dramatize it in an inordinate way.

F: The precondition for this was that the club as club became central for social life. Because there were no longer any real issues that the club was concerned with, one just checked the calendar to see what could be celebrated and simply celebrated as an end in itself. One adjusted to a structure of cozy social gathering and focussed on the celebrating as something deemed specifically German.

S: But I also see this problem in the second half of the 20th century. There is already much too much stemming from the tradition of modernity that can be celebrated. All the arts sections of newspapers and magazines after 1945 basically consist of this, and it is incredibly paralyzing when it all has to do with occasions for celebrating.

F: What is interesting in the second half of the 19th century is that there could have been a strong counter-movement initiated by the workers' education clubs. But with their aim of leading workers to education these clubs were essentially imitational, as education was already predetermined as a civic project.

D: So instead of attempting to develop an independent concept of education, they adhered to the ideal of civic education. But the revolutionary efforts at the beginning of the 19th century led to the creation of a number of instruments on a political level for directly improving one's own situation, such as social structures, trade unions, defensive alliances and so forth.

F: Sure, and this is coupled with the party movement which effectively established itself during the German Empire. What is interesting is that trade-union and class-struggle aims usually have no concept of culture.

There seems to be some sort of divide. On the one hand we have a rather traditional concept of culture, and on the other a political concept intent on advancing things. But is it a good political concept if it doesn't integrate a cultural concept? There are of course a few well-known exceptions: Brecht [\[29\]](#), Tretjakov [\[30\]](#) and others endeavored to perform 'operative art' tied into a revolutionary practice.

S: This is a consistent German problem because there is a cultural concept stemming from the right opposed to the allegedly cultureless left. As Rembert [\[31\]](#) poignantly puts it: 'What the rightists do they call 'culture', what the leftists do they call 'politics''. Especially the political right and the cultural left.

D: But it's a similar situation in other capitalistic countries.

F: Since the middle of the 19th century, one can observe very nicely how culture is defined as and claimed to be a German characteristic. This so-called 'German movement', which was nothing more than a cultural assertion, described German culture as a culture of inwardness which created the German essence, as it were, as opposed to the empty, superficial culture of the rest of Western Europe, France and England. This can already be dated back before 1900, to Dilthey's [\[32\]](#) inaugural lecture in Basle, in 1867, in which he outlined the difference between the emptiness of European enlightenment as opposed to the inward path of the Germans.

S: Basically, the century-old anti-feudal cue, the court as something artificial, the hideous intrigues etc., is now taken up again and sold as an anti-Western affront.

F: I would also view it this way. The Germans called it 'Sprache des Herzens' [\[33\]](#). But now the language of the heart has turned into education. And therefore, it is stated, our education must be defended against the barbarism of empty enlightenment coming from foreign countries. That is the main impetus of the culturally-conservative rightwing which at the same time represents politics, this is quite evident.

D: In other countries the left also had difficulties translating pragmatic, political struggles into cultural ones, didn't it?

Differentiation / De-differentiation.

S: All political movements, and especially leftist revolutionary movements, try to attract followers with the program of de-differentiation. Therefore, the differentiation that culture, art, literature etc., wants to achieve for itself is not taken seriously. This was a big problem with Brecht, for example: trying to find a differentiated aesthetic position for himself while simultaneously incorporating elements of de-differentiation in a programmatic manner. This is an interesting contradiction in his work, but still a fundamental problem with which leftist movements, as far as they organize themselves in parties and the like, have never come to terms with.

At the same time, one could also say that rightist movements were never able to cope with modern art. Those positions can only be integrated afterwards. Beuys [\[34\]](#), for example, can now be lionized by the FAZ [\[35\]](#), and what is celebrated can then easily be integrated - of course not during the course of the artist's lifetime. It's not as if they had finally discovered the magic word enabling them to deal with real art.

F: No, the rightist concept of culture counts on de-differentiation as well...

S: ...and on mortification, everything has to actually be dead first.

F: That's quite clear, while a non-rightist, leftist concept of culture in a strict sense counts on differentiation, if I may put it like that. There are only very few attempts that again operate with a different concept of a public. Negt and Kluge [\[36\]](#) come to mind, for example. They are the only ones that quite intelligently tried to combine a political concept with a cultural one.

D: Is it, then, about artistic sophistication with an integrated propaganda apparatus? About research and public relations?

F: The rightist concept of culture takes the easy way, because it is clear from the very start that hierarchies also remain existent in the cultural sphere. That's why it's more important to lionize an author than saying something interesting about him.



Aesthetic theory and self-description.

D: One can draw clear parallels between the cultural bourgeoisie during the 'Gründerzeit' [37] and the culturalization occurring today. In both cases the aim is to perform massive restoration work on the national structure using the old stones from the cultural construction kit. Now, too, national culture is to provide the fundamentals for German priority and legitimacy in a European house.

However, the artists of the decadence at the end of the 19th century observed the symptoms of their ailing, their nervousness; they described these symptoms and translated them into works of art. At the end of the 1990s, we may well be equally nervous, overtaxed and decadent, but constrained like under a thickly-woven blanket of repression and unconsciousness. As artists and intellectuals, we rotate in the clockwork of the POP and entertainment machines and point our blunt fingers of critique at a stereotype enemy as someone vis-à-vis, instead of including ourselves in an analysis of the conditions and recognizing the stuffiness as a symptom.

F: Nevertheless, the situation in the 19th century must clearly be differentiated from what we experience today in regard to a renaissance of meaningfulness.

On the one hand, that period was very much interested in aesthetic refinement which in term pushes art theory ahead. But where in certain forms of the history of ideas art theory was not pushed ahead, e.g. in the George circle [38], one can clearly observe situations that are similar to today - those of the new rightist notion of meaningfulness and importance.

The articles of these people merely consist in saying: 'There is a meaningful object. I know which object is meaningful. I can write about that object because I myself am meaningful and important. And only the reader who can appreciate this is also meaningful and important.'

That's all these articles have to say! To this end, an enemy is constructed, and the enemy is of course garbage, trash, things that don't belong there. They operate with this simple opposition, and I view the George circle in a similar way.

Others such as Hofmannsthal [\[39\]](#), who can't be positioned in this fashion, at least tried to retain a sensitivity for aesthetic productivity and didn't let things drift off into a lamenting, weepy tone which one finds in certain variants in Thomas Mann [\[40\]](#). This lamenting is back again today in statements like 'Western civilization is endangered', 'We must preserve values' etc. I find this unbearable and genuinely right-wing.

It is certainly the advantage of the Fin-de-Siècle movement that it was interested in aesthetic theory. The people who take up this tone today, however, are not really interested in aesthetic theory but in reiterating a certain rhetoric of meaningfulness, they are pure epigones.

S: I'd like to once more return to the question of hysteria and the nerves. The breaking apart of Victorian society with its rigid moral code is first perceived only in a pathological way. This is also where psychoanalysis derives its keywords of hysteria, nervousness etc. from. These are basically all pseudonyms for certain social developments that have already taken place. Totally new spaces were created where people could act themselves: Bohemia, Schwabing [\[41\]](#) and so forth. At the turn of the century, a behavioral pattern was normal that no longer fitted into Victorian society and which only possibly later gained acceptance, in the 1920s. At the turn of the century, all this is dealt with in terms of pathology. But this should not be taken too seriously. It was observed from the viewpoint of a moral code that was no longer valid.

F: Within the culture of the 'Gründerzeit' there were simply no forms of self-observation, whereas afterwards you could have taken out a licence on them.

D: In the phase of restoration from the 1970's until today I do not see this self-observation either. Some texts do take pleasure in showing a certain amount of self-reflection, but that is actually more a cliché of contextualization and thus remains rhetorical. At the present time, I know of no attempt to position oneself critically.

F: That's a strange thing I don't understand either.

D: On the one hand, the conservative culture-machine shovels meanings from one pile to the next - on the other hand, the left only sees its enemy over there. Nothing but smugness and complacency on the right and on the left. And now I can quickly add: '...and also a part of me...', but that again remains mere coquette rhetoric as long as including oneself does not become an aspect of one's work.

S: These are exactly the discourses and genres of self-observation and self-critique in the 1960's and 70's that could not be maintained and further developed today, not even within the context of a certain renaissance of the 1960's and 70's. At the time, this was a huge

project which made the concern so dynamic and simultaneously so difficult. There are no parallels to this today. What we have are art magazines publishing an entire issue on the topic of sponsoring, and not a single word is lost on their own dependency on sponsors. Today, we are faced with a discourse understanding itself as leftist, a discourse which is not intent on analyzing its own conditions of production - and this particularly includes the power one possesses: everything revolving around the question of why texts should be written in a certain style and in no other; which jokes are still allowed and which ones are not, and so forth - all the hierarchies involved in the production of opinions and circumstances. Around 1970, there were hundreds of people who wanted to analyze exactly these conditions in their own groups and within themselves, and record what happens in the process by shooting films etc. When a group organizes itself today, you can bet your last bottom dollar that this is precisely what they do not want to analyze - they're keen on analyzing other groups. Okay, there are exceptions.

F: Why couldn't this type of political culture be prolonged? All this took place really not too long ago.

The lack of self-analysis is the reason why there is no public that criticizes all the junk we have to watch and read everyday. No criticism of this culture of bashing, this desire to win on a very primal level: I will finish you off and have fun doing it.

Laughing at the victims is no longer penalized - it is, moreover, rehearsed as a political gesture. And there's no counter-politics saying: 'What you are doing here is the shittiest thing one can do.'

PART 3 >

FOOTNOTES:

> [29] Berthold Brecht, 1898-1956, ranks as one of the greatest 20th century lyric poets. Versatile in style and temper, his vast output bears the stamp of his own humanity and political commitment. The specific 'point of view' permeating his work as a whole is no less idealistic than the classical brand of idealism. In objecting to the classical concept of 'Das Ewig Menschliche' he wanted to demonstrate that change was both necessary and possible.

> [30] Sergej Michailowitsch Tretjakov , 1892-1939, Russian writer, member of the group 'Lef' representing Ego-Futurism and later 'Novyj Lef' which went for abolition of traditional artistic writing and for 'faction' literature which aimed towards changing society.

> [31] Rembert Hüser, born in 1961, academic German writer. After early works in the style of capitalist realism and polemical reviews and experiments, he developed a highly metaphorical style which plays with contradictions and lots of quotations and seems to lead to lampoon or humorous bewilderment. Serving champagne to his real friends and real pain to his sham friends or unsuspecting enemies, he used to quote Brecht: 'Our defeat explains nothing'. Present whereabouts unknown, suspected to live in Schalke.

> [\[32\]](#) Wilhelm Dilthey, 1833-1911, philosopher whose main interests were historical and literary.

> [\[33\]](#) 'Language of the heart'

> [\[34\]](#) Joseph Beuys, 1921-1984, draftsman and object artist, studied at the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts (1947-51), where he later became a teacher. In 1962, he made his first public appearance with happenings. In his life and work he attempts to unite nature and spirit and to include a mythical, archetypal thinking and magic-religious associations aimed against deterministic rationalism. Beuys' attempt to translate artistic creativity into all fields of life led to diverse political actions like the foundation of an office for direct democracy and a free university for creativity and interdisciplinary research.

> [\[35\]](#) Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (until 2018, Germany's conservative state organ)

> [\[36\]](#) Alexander Kluge, his films were in part harshly criticized for being 'puzzle cinema' and 'enlightenment work for the enlightened who want to be entertained in their special way'. His commitment to the art of film was, however, publicly acclaimed. With the foundation of the production company DCTP (Development Company for Television Programs) Kluge's culture TV occupied all conceivable niches and thus displaced smaller initiatives. However, for those attempts on the side of private television stations to restrict the rights of the independent 'window programs' Kluge was viewed as 'ratings killer' and 'electronic highwayman'.

Together with the sociologist Oskar Negt, Kluge wrote about 'Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung' ('Public Sphere and Experience') (1973), 'Geschichte und Eigensinn' ('History and Obstinacy') (1981) and 'Maßverhältnisse des Politischen' (1992). Here, the highly acclaimed writing team raised the question of what is political about political action in 15 variations.

Even before the poststructuralists and feminists, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge began the critique of Habermas by articulating the notion of an oppositional public sphere, specifically that of the proletariat. What is important about their argument, is that Negt and Kluge shifted the terrain of the notion of the public sphere from an historico-transcendental idealization of the Enlightenment to a plurality and heterotopia of discourses. This crucial change in the notion of the public sphere assumes its full significance when it is seen in relation to liberal democracy. The great ideological fiction of liberalism is to reduce the public sphere to existing democratic institutions. Habermas' critique of liberalism counterposes a radical alternative to it but one that still universalizes and monopolizes the political. Negt and Kluge, in contrast, decentralize and multiply the public sphere, opening a path of critique and possibly a new politics.

> [\[37\]](#) Gründerzeit, ('period of promoterism'): The years after 1870, in which, partly as a result of industrial development and partly through the considerable sums obtained as reparations from the French, numbers of companies were floated in Germany, many of which failed, inflicting widespread and severe financial losses.

> [\[38\]](#) Stephan George and his followers, see footnote 14

> [\[39\]](#) Hugo von Hofmannsthal, 1874-1929, was brought up in Vienna in well-to-do circumstances. His early work is characterized by luxuriant aestheticism and fin-de-siècle melancholy. His narrative work reflects what he variously expressed as a 'Sprachkrise', 'Lebenskrise', and 'seelische Krise' (crisis of language, life and soul), but he also explored a new path, expressing subconscious motivation in disciplined verse.

> [\[40\]](#) Thomas Mann, 1875-1955, possessed immense creative and intellectual power and a faculty for assimilating knowledge and injecting life into it. His vision, especially after 1918, embraced the temper and the problems of Europe of his day. His style is internationally mannered, yet lucid, and as an analyst he shows penetrating acuteness.

> [\[41\]](#) Bohemian part of Munich, around the 1900s home of experimental lifestyle for all kinds of artists and intellectuals from all over the world.

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PART 3 _____

Corporate forms of organization.

D: Again the question: How did political consciousness once constitute itself? Which structures were created to then distribute power crystallized in one point to a type of self-organized governmental system?

I think we are now at a point in time where this idea of a civic democracy is no longer effective. The decision-making processes are again and increasingly converging on a central but this time virtual point. In my opinion, we're approaching a global and new type of absolutism which I would like to coin 'Corporate Rokoko'. There are of course still nation-states which the citizens once created as a structural shell, but they are now nothing more than administrative units of the new global power structure and they are increasingly

disintegrating into business locations competing against each other. They are economic regions defining themselves solely via global competition. The absolute ruler, the central position of representation that was once occupied by the king, is now a virtual figure, namely global monetarism. Just like the various courts, the corporations and their followings now group around this central point.

In such a context, how can citizens or intellectuals still feel responsible for a common agenda?

S: Exactly. What we are talking about is this central point which is defined by the French word 'sujet', meaning subject and citizen. The subject, as it developed in the 18th century and was incorporated by the state in the 19th century, addressed the state - whether as poet, terrorist or political citizen. And now people start realizing that the state is no longer there as a direct addressee for all kinds of protests and demonstrations and so forth. As a result, a certain moment, a certain form of addressing, which one had grown accustomed to, has disappeared.

D: Therefore, one no longer feels responsible for bringing about possible changes, one is no longer 'obliged to revolution'. Meanwhile, thinking about revolutionizing the Federal Republic of Germany is of course nonsense; one would have to begin with Western Europe, and this shell, too, is already long since covered by another shell.

F: But why is this the case? The problem seems to be that the public, which was hitherto addressable, has now, on a global basis, turned into an absolutely virtual entity.

The public of the 18th century principally conceives itself as finite. Via a democratic model one can reach all subjects one wants to reach, and these subjects can amongst themselves come to a decision effecting action.

But when communication gets so extensive, like on the Internet, that one can no longer see with whom one is communicating, then one can no longer trust that this will result in an ability to act.

D: But on the other hand, one discovers that there are many small instances of a public organizing themselves subculturally. Their communication is highly differentiated, but difficult to understand from the outside.

F: I believe this type of globalization produces an absolute surplus of information, an entropy of information. And when corporations are the ones that predominantly define this field and only little can be filtered as information, then it becomes unclear how to access this information in the first place, because corporations usually do not function according to public principles.

D: Couldn't one envision that some of these small public instances - which needn't be local, meaning assembled at one place, but that communicate across the globe - , could constitute something like small, semi-autonomous units in a global state? Couldn't small pockets of

resistance or 'soviets' or 'principalities' constitute themselves in opposition to the regionally-incorporated 'kingdoms' of corporate locations? In other words: tribes, cooperatives or clans? Or am I already talking like a communitarian?

S: The problem will definitely consist in that none of these interest groups can make decisions for the others, and together they won't be able to do so either. This is true for all cultural and ideological contexts. At the beginning of the 1960's and in the early 70's, such groups still had the incredible feeling that by practising a certain form of self-critique and self-determination, something could be created for those with whom one worked together. It remains true, however, that all power structures and all hierarchies are based on eternal repetitions that must be performed day by day and year by year for the conditions to be upheld. It is, therefore, all about finding the point where the repetition no longer works - and to find such a point or several such points can take pretty long. So it's better to conceive an agenda that will function for decades, even if the agenda looks like nonsense during certain periods of time. And several people had this staying power, people who started off early enough, not in 1968 but in 1958.



Bohemian research institutions.

D: Let us rather return to the beginning of the 20th century and talk about different escapist attempts or attempts at self-therapy, Monte Verità [\[42\]](#) and the community of fruit eaters for example, or expressive dance...

F: ...green communes that already existed back then, or the garden cities...

S: ...but what is most important, and this applies all the way up to the AAO [43] or the psycho set-ups of the late '70s, is that it was performed as a type of research. There are the records of 'Kommune I' [44] intent on establishing 'what is actually happening with us now?'. That was clearly a form of self-analysis, a very individual or strange kind of investigation perhaps, but these were principally research institutions. This has absolutely nothing to do with sensitivity groups only wanting to tune themselves to a certain groove. The whole beatnik thing of the '60s was characterized by a kind of research. And what belongs to research is that one does not yet know what the outcome is. The really paralyzing thing about whatever type of discourse is when one always already knows what it will lead to. Or when one knows what the outcome will be for a couple of weeks and then again for another few weeks, and so on. That is just as paralyzing. It's then better to leave things to chance, and chance also plays a role in the 17th century in motivating actions, in the *Picaro*.

F: Starting with the 18th century, the subject is no longer dominated by rank, but the subject seeks its own intersections with other spheres itself. That would be the one side, and I additionally see a counter-movement in these interest groups attempting, at least on a symbolic level, to create an all-encompassing context in life via clothing, behavior etc. These two movements appear to run parallel without being thematized as a conflict. On the one hand, the impossibility to allow oneself to be subjected to the totality of the given circumstances, because there are still so many other important things, and on the other hand, the attempts pointing to the globality of life-world contexts via design and attire.

This of course is tightly connected to the change in communication relationships in our society. Communication in our field is indeed so differentiated that there are no longer any major books, because there is no longer a common context of communication making these books appear as major books. This, I must point out, is not meant as cultural pessimism!

S: The organizational forms of art and science, however, do seem to still function. But what about political events, how are they organized?

F: As a common political context after 1945 there was only the project of the student movement. Later, this movement raveled out to thousands of different political interests. They could partially be bundled again, but no longer within the framework of the idea of a common communication context.

The only major point of reference which played a role in all political discourses was the Shoah, the holocaust. As the negative image of a gigantic catastrophe it describes a limit for our post-war society, and that can clearly be used as a moral argument and amalgamate certain political discourses.

d-dffrttd utopias.

D: I would now like to return to the question of condensation points. What is evidently important is the fact that they exist at all and that certain social developments and problems condense there, that they can break open, be organized and given complete expression. The artists of the decadence first became aware of the encrusted situation at the end of the 19th century and translated this into an aesthetic concept. Afterwards, there were several attempts at an experience of awakening and self-therapy. These experiments, research projects and seminars within a certain Bohemian class and taking place at self-created institutions were then, however, covered up and suppressed by the two world wars. National Socialism certainly drew a lot of that chaotic energy into its pathological order.

S: In the first half of the century, there were especially in Russia and Germany certainly utopian moments in the discussion of modernity in which various elements were able to converge. That then exploded again, and today such a situation no longer exists; in the second half of the century it can only be celebrated.

D: The Third Reich was also laid out as a big utopia.

F: There was a high degree of technical differentiation, but simultaneously this attempt at creating absolute social de-differentiation. The entire culture of clubs and associations was almost completely synchronized during the Third Reich and replaced by a strict organizational structure. This affective economy ought to be examined in regard to its homology, its structural similarity... What does it mean from an emotional point of view for me to become a member of a club? Why do I do this, and what did the fascist ideology attempt to replace it with? The Nazis didn't invent very much in this regard, moreover, they forced everything else around into line and eliminated all differences. Everything is choric, German classes have also become choric. Everyone must stand up to speak and all recite together. And this destroyed the political culture in Germany with a lasting effect and for a very long time.

S: As far as the avant-garde is concerned, after 1945 one must say that all the early organizational forms of the first half of the 20th century could now no longer function. They could perhaps be parodied and thus prolonged, something that Situationism for example did, but to renew the likes of the Bauhaus via 'Ulm' [45] or 'Gruppe 47' [46] - that didn't work. There were still organizations, but the organizational forms were already shattered. What was viable were loose, Bohemian forms of organization; they could still assert themselves, but as part of a modernity broken within itself.

D: On the other hand, political concepts that were developed prior to the world war or in the 19th century were then applied to the Third World and there again tested in revolutionary movements, by the Sandinistas, Zapatistas, Che Guevara, the PLO or the Civil Rights

Movement in the USA. In Germany, I view the last attempt at change in the student movement and the RAF [\[47\]](#) .

F: Yes, I would regard the student movement and the RAF as the last movement that made the attempt to bring together politics in a way that created a unified communication context. That is certainly true. But with the RAF it no longer worked in this way. Reading their texts again, one does not discern an interest in communication but only in action. And because this was no longer questioned, the machine just ran loose, it all became very mechanical.

S: But it still stands there as a totally one-sided address to the state.

F: The state actually became the only communication partner for the RAF.

D: What the RAF couldn't achieve: now the state is abolishing itself.

F: That's why there are no political parties anymore. It is no longer clear how to deal with ideological and party fronts because there are no longer any. For this reason all political activity has become indistinguishable, and that's why it's so difficult to develop a political concept. In this situation the parties then sit down and try to invent concepts that can be used as arguments against another concept, e.g. one invented by the opposition. This is rhetoric and it is sold as designer rhetoric.

D: Politics basically imitates the rhetoric of the corporations. The design of the promises always has priority and must be new, because the products can't satisfy one's desire.

F: The ubiquity of design nowadays perhaps constitutes a universal coherence. But still one could ask why no intellectual group or class attempts to raise its voice against this rhetoric of design.

D: Because they're busy bemoaning the loss of the welfare state. This is the way monarchists must have felt after the heads were already chopped off.

But I think the ornaments of power have changed, and we are already in a different structure with another aesthetics without actually wanting or being able to perceive it.

F: That might be true, but it's not very comforting.



Ornaments of power.

D: During the baroque and rococo era, the form of a crooked shell, the rocaille represented the aesthetics of absolutism for more than 200 years. Which ornament has power given itself since then?

F: We could write a few essays on this. The aesthetics of power is always bound to the representability of power, i.e. an emblem, a body or a state is required that can be represented as having been given power. The body of the king is a physical carrier, a carrier of the message of power, it is a medium.

Up to the National Socialists, ornamentation of power is readable. The Nazis were the ones who tried to quite consciously introduce it, like in the Riefenstahl [\[48\]](#) films. But after the war, it is already a parody and at the time even perceived as a parody, e.g. Ludwig Erhardt [\[49\]](#) and the 'Wirtschaftswunder' [\[50\]](#). Heinrich Lübke [\[51\]](#) speaks for Germany, that was indeed the involuntary Wilhelm Busch [\[52\]](#) of this development.

S: Or Polke [\[53\]](#), the Polke-in-himself which he later showed us.

F: And then there was certainly still the politics of big gestures which in fact already performed the inversion of power. A gesture of humility, like Willy Brandt's [\[54\]](#) going down on his knees, does not exist any more today. There is no longer a representation of a political power connected to the state nor a representation of a big gesture... I have no idea how something like that should work.

D: Today, the corporations are not the signs of power, instead signs represent the power of the corporations. Which signs are preferred and what do they look like?

F: Any good advertising is of course funny. That at any rate is quite strange. Perhaps power has been shifted to the ubiquity of the joke. One could certainly ask what led to the fantastic career the joke suddenly made.

Doesn't it have to do with the absolute availability of all objects, as the insignia of all power?

S: That is sort of an answer: the ornamentation of power represented today would first of all pass over to advertising...

D: Advertising is not only an expression but also the affirmation of the given conditions, and because advertising can not and does not want to change existing economic circumstances and power structures, it is in a true sense conservative. The more progressive it seems to be the more conservative it is. In addition, it expands to all areas of the public due to the increasing privatization. Advertising in magazines, on billboards or on TV is only the oldest form in which it shows itself.

F: This advertisement can itself no longer produce heroic gestures but only ironic ones. It is the simultaneity of joking and being serious, namely serious in regard to having to sell and joking in regard to presentation, which only has to be funny. So it really doesn't matter what it is that must be presented. An uncanny availability of all objects that are to be presented in a humorous discourse. That is at least an attempt to answer the question.

S: Would that be a continuation of ornamentation?

F: Yes, but ex negativo.

D: Is that baroque? Everything is available and translated into an ornament, into certain ironic and stereotype manifestations. Communication at court is also characterized by this: esprit triumphing over the objects and topics talked about.

F: Yes, perhaps this is an inversion of the baroque. The idea in the baroque period would be that everything which exists, all items, can be translated into images. Everything is combinable, although baroque semantics was not organized in such a humorous way.

D: But allegorically. And the allegorical figures, just like the ironic ones in advertisement, illustrated and stabilized the existing conditions.

F: There is also usually no relation between product name and company. With modern corporations, the relationship between signifier and signified has totally drifted apart. The product is concatenated in a completely different way. The reason being that the concatenation

structure within product advertising targets something totally different than designating a point of reference which could be associated with the corporation.



A new sovereignty?

D: During the course of this conversation, we repeatedly had to operate with contradictions and pairs of opposites: secrecy vs. 'intended public', differentiation vs. de-differentiation etc.... The entire fragility of the civic project seems to result from its latent schizophrenia and the double binds as a consequence of the problematic demarcation between the self and the other.

Individual identity is constructed differently in systems and religions that revolve around a central point or god. There, contradictions occur on a higher level and the subjects humbly submit to the system.

A new ideology or 'form of government' therefore demands a new concept of subject.

F: Yes, that is also Luhmann's thesis: As soon as systems become more complex, the subjects are also expected to become more complex. It's as simple as that.

S: Does he mean individual subjects as well?

F: People ought to improve. And this can be achieved on the one hand by increasing aggregation, which is a quantitative argument, and on the

other by having a bigger choice, a qualitative argument. This would establish a high degree of participation in totally different system references and global contexts.

It is his big hope that this improvement will occur. And that is exactly the success story of modern subjectivity: namely to leave one's class and choose for oneself which parts of reality one wants to include in one's life. Free choice is often not possible, but at least a tentative choice can be made and one's own life built up in a modular way, like using a construction kit.

D: But that is still along the lines of the development of a civic concept of subject. However, at the point at which we started the conversation, a bigger break occurred. Is it at all conceivable that a new ideology or religion could do away with this additive, multiple-choice concept of subject?

F: The entire subject concept seems to be a communication problem. I can keep on differentiating, but then again I require sufficiently de-differentiated circumstances that allow for communication to commence in the first place. Increasing differentiation does not allow for a more general mode of communication, only for a very specialized type of communication without feedback loops. Suddenly, I no longer have even two fields in common with another subject.

And this is exactly what leads to de-differentiation, the gateway for promises: to say that based on one ground, life can be reformed, be it Christianity or Europe, mysticism or sects, it doesn't matter - it's all the same stuff.

I see a wavelike movement between differentiation and de-differentiation, back and forth.

D: Even if one realizes that sovereignty is not possible because one is always part of some system or another, the concern in my opinion is still always the attempt to establish and maintain sovereignty. A new self-conscious way of dealing with political and economic constraints and ideologies, against global Corporate Rokoko . Everything else would be helplessness, actually obsequiousness in belief.

S: Because alone one does not have the ability to assert oneself sufficiently, one's own network must not be given up. One must try to expand it without making it break apart, which is in itself a paradoxical endeavor.

This is an inherent problem, as the network ought to expand, and up to a certain point this does succeed, but exactly this then leads to the old network disintegrating.

Everything that was successful to a certain extent after 1945 was based on temporary alliances. There was no officially organized group that asserted itself to any significant degree. That's a problem we must clearly see for the future as well. One cannot rely on the fact that a group organized as a label will remain especially stable as a subject.

The same problem existed with the Early Romantics in Germany around 1800, that everything is only a temporary alliance.

D: Condensation points would therefore constitute an especially intense communication situation which is, however, only temporary because it disintegrates, must disintegrate. Still, the question is how that then continues. Does it influence the surrounding de-differentiated conditions of communication, does it serve as an example or guideline? Did it ultimately have an impact?

F: Sovereignty is really only an ideology. It consists in the hope that the group can decide on its stability itself, or that associations can be freely chosen and one can act freely within these networks. But that doesn't work.

D: But a type of behavior is conceivable that doesn't give a damn about the aims of the respective system. Sovereignty of the people 200 years ago meant: removing the head from the central body.

S: One can chop it off like a head of cabbage.

F: It can be put that way, but those are the antiquated remains of a pre-modern society. The utopia of monetarism is that the sovereign subjects show their sovereignty by saying, 'I enjoy being a subject which thinks in monetary terms'.

And that's exactly what this designer rhetoric and aesthetics is selling us: '*I love to smoke*'.

That is the formula for modern subjectivity.

S: So if one thinks there should be a type of asceticism ... those models already existed.

D: Asceticism is only a mirror-image of '*I love to smoke*'. A new sovereignty within Corporate Rokoko would have to be different.

F: '*I love and hate to smoke*', these are my final words, let's leave it there!

FOOTNOTES:

> [\[42\]](#) Monte Verità was between 1915 and 1925 an international commune near Ascona. A test site for all kinds of escapist tendencies: dadaists, expressionists, expressive dance, anthroposophy, psychiatry, eurhythmics, amongst them Werefkin, Wigman, Jung, Steiner.

> [\[43\]](#) AAO (AKTIONS-ANALYTISCHE ORGANISATION) In the first half of the 1970s, a commune was founded in Vienna around the at the time almost 50-year-old artist Otto Mühl with 'free sexuality and communal property'. The aim was to fight the 'nuclear family' and 'sexually-crippling couple relationships'. Revulsion, hatred, depression and incestuous desires were to be 'lived out and overcome' on the path to creating a 'new human being', father and mother 'therapeutically' murdered and raped.

By the end of 1976, about 25 such communes existed in Germany, France, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Holland and Austria with close to 500 members from the leftist, alternative milieu.

Private property was turned into communal property. Freedom to chose a profession and education was abolished starting in 1984. All members of the city communes had to work in commune-owned firms (selling life and health insurance policies). From 1983 on, no new members were recruited, the number of members was to be maintained in a natural way via the 'production of children'.

In 1991, Otto Mühl was arrested and sentenced to several years in prison for, among other things, 'sexually abusing youths' and 'rape'.

A former leading member of the commune declared: 'We who at the beginning protested against the authoritarian father-society ended up with a fascistoid educational ideal. We thought we were a revolutionary living and working community with communal property and free sexuality, but it was in fact an experiment with authority and the principle of 'obedience''.

> [\[44\]](#) Kommune I, the first seriously funny and spontaneous, free-living and free-loving late-1960s social experiment in Germany (West Berlin) which became immediately the center of media attention. Many of Kommune I's members were prominent student leaders in the nearby Free University, including Fritz Teufel and ex-situationist Dieter Kunzelmann, others were life-style advocates like the model and actress Uschi Obermeier and Rainer Langhans.

Kommune I became prominent for advocating and carrying out humorous 'praxis'. In allegiance to Marxist theory, where 'theory' was the discussion of how to best bring about the revolution, 'praxis' was direct action attempting to bring about the revolution, an idea which prompted many leftist Germans to support the early actions of the Baader-Meinhof Gang. For aspiring terrorists, the primacy of praxis was absolute.

After Kommune I fell apart many of its members participated in the low-level terrorism of the West Berlin Tupamaros, and several went on to form the urban terrorist group called 'Movement 2 June'.

Teufel went to prison after sending his judges to hell, in a set of incredibly funny trials. Langhans ended up as a softheaded guru for Munich's upper class.

> [\[45\]](#) A little town in the southern part of Germany.

> [\[46\]](#) A loose association of authors founded in 1947. The group had no political or social program, but encouraged criticism of political and social conditions.

> [\[47\]](#) 'Red Army Fraction', military organization of Germany's radical Left, using strategies of guerrilla warfare against the capitalistic hegemony of the West and its exponents. It was born with the liberation of Andreas Baader from prison on May 14th, 1970, an action in which Ulrike Meinhof and Horst Mahler took part. Their struggle aims at destroying the imperialist feudal system, politically, economically and militarily. It is being conducted in the form of international action against the military allies of the United States-NATO and, in particular, the Federal German Armed Forces. Within West Germany, the struggle is being conducted against the armed forces of the state, representing the monopoly of power by the ruling class, embodied in the police, the Federal frontier police, and the security services. The power structure of the multinationals, that is, state and non-state bureaucracies, political parties, corporate unions and the media are also included. Some of the founding members allegedly committed suicide in their cells in 1977. The group announced its disbandment in March, 1998, after it had no political and aesthetic support. But: despite all-out efforts of the security forces of the COIN, the last generation of the RAF remained undetected. Unlike any other guerilla, it had learned from its predecessors.

> [\[48\]](#) Leni Rieffenthal, born in 1902 and probably still alive. Photographer and filmmaker. Allegedly concerned with 'Just Beauty' she was The Third Reich's most important visual advertiser. See advertising as art, art as advertising.

> [\[49\]](#) Ludwig Erhardt, 1897-1977, minister for economic affairs and Chancellor of the German Federal Republic. Father of the Wirtschaftswunder (economic miracle), he led post-war Germany into the social market economy, a kind of 'Capitalism Lite' which combines the principle of competition with social protection. Here, competition should not proceed uncontrollably, the state however ought to limit itself in creating a frame of arrangements.

> [\[50\]](#) Wirtschaftswunder, miracle of economical upswing in WEST Germany since 1948. The pride and the admiration which adhered to the word at the beginning have faded to a more skeptical valuation and over the years this has led to an ironic use. See Wirtschaftswunderbauch, see Ludwig Erhardt.

> [\[51\]](#) Heinrich Lübke, 1894-1972, president of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1959-69. Notorious for his clumsy appearances and unintentional humor, funny speeches and corny jokes.

> [\[52\]](#) Wilhelm Busch, 1832-1908, German draftsman. His encounter with Dutch paintings of the 17th century turned out to be the key experience - they became models he never achieved. He contributed his drawings to various journals. The pitiless world he depicts is at the borderline of comic, and funnily debunks human malice. The graphic virtuosity, however, veils pessimistic tendencies with often lovingly detailed genre studies. As a cheerful German house and home humorist the crucial

parts of his work are played down by his extreme popularity and the tendency to take humorous literature less seriously than it deserves.

> [\[53\]](#) Polke, German painter, born in 1942, studied at the Düsseldorf Academy from 1961 to 1967. After early works in the style of Capitalist Realism he developed, free from any group membership, an ironic visual language, which plays with contradictions and stereotyped images and seems to lead to lampoon or humorous bewilderment.

> [\[54\]](#) Willy Brandt, original name HERBERT ERNST KARL FRAHM. He assumed the name Willy Brandt as a refugee from Nazi Germany in Norwegian exile. Later German statesman of renown, leader of the German Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, or SPD) from 1964 to 1987, and chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1969 to 1974.

He concentrated on improving relations with East Germany, other Communist nations in eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union, formulating a policy known as Ostpolitik ('eastern policy'). Right wing detractors claimed that this signaled West Germany's acceptance of the permanent loss of those eastern lands whilst some years later the chancellor of ponderousness, Helmut Kohl harvested the fruits of this politics reuniting West and East Germany after Brandt had stabilized the relations with eastern Europe.

Brandt received the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1971 and he resigned in May 1974 after his close aide Gunther Guillaume was unmasked as an East German spy.