

MEMORY AND IDENTITY PROBLEMS IN POST-WAR GERMANY ACCORDING TO AGE GROUPS

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National identity problems have been the centre of interest for German intellectuals throughout the eighties. Numerous books and articles about the subject have figured for years at the top of the bestsellers' list, and the publishers spoke with satisfaction about a long-lasting boom. A quick glance at some of the titles gives an idea of the main characteristics of these publications. Contrary to French, English or American considerations about their nations, usually dealing with precise institutional, social or economical problems, the German works show a tendency towards generalization and philosophical or psychological interrogation. The number of question marks in the titles is striking, as for example: *"What shall the Germans become?"; "What is German today?"; "What is typically German?"; "Back to the Nation?"; "Are we a Nation?"; "Do you love Germany?"*¹ In other titles, the use of an adjective underlines the difficulty of the subject: *"A difficult native country; "The difficult native country; "The country of the Germans. Report from a strange country; "The tamed Germans"; "The insecure Republic"*²

There is no doubt that German intellectuals are uneasy about their national identity. It is unlikely that their feelings of insecurity are shared with the same acuity by other social groups. Nevertheless, there is a certain unaffectionate attitude toward the Federal Republic common to the whole German youth which gives the impression that general doubts are actually wide spread; and this in spite of a recent "new nationalism". So why

is it that, notwithstanding the political stability and economical wealth of their country, Germans seem to have problems with themselves which are unknown to all their Western or Eastern neighbors?

All of the books and articles quoted above deal with this very question. The answers they give are manifold. Some authors defend the thesis of a German "Sonderweg", others find cultural reasons, still others political ones. However, all of the authors agree that the traumatism of the recent past - (the ruin of the Third Reich and the subsequent partition of Germany) - is the main cause for the troubled relationship between the Germans and their country.

This traumatism was not just confined to the destruction of the country, the death of a whole generation, the cessation of a political regime and the end of a quasi-religious ideology. Its most severe consequences were to be found in the fact that parts of the past had to be eradicated from the minds of the German people, so that they might be able to carry on. Thus, since the defeat of 1945, many Germans seem to have been caught in an intractable predicament: the Nazi past has been too massive to be forgotten, and too repellent to be integrated into the normal narrative of memory.

Memory - be it that of the individual or that of the group - is the construction of a coherent and significant representation of past events. If, for one reason or another, such a construction is impossible, the conscience of the memorizing subject or group will try to find strategies permitting nevertheless the idea of a continuity, be it a twisted one; because, without such a continuity, i.e. without links between the present and the past, no history, and, consequently, no identity is possible.

The concept of strategy is a military term. It denotes a situation of antagonism and can be defined as the sum of tactics unifying the behavior of one or more people in the striving for victory. By employing the term "memory strategies", we indicate that there is a conflict between the person who remembers and the thing (or the set of things) to be remembered, and that this conflict can be resolved in several ways, implying gains and losses. These gains and losses have a direct impact on the physiognomy of memory itself and an indirect one on the identity of the remembering subject or group.

There are, of course, all kinds of memory strategies, ranging from amnesia to embellishment, or the falsification, of the past. In this article, we shall try to describe some of them by observing different German age groups throughout several decades. As we shall see, the work of memory is manifold, fluctuant and apt to change with time.

Our analysis is based mainly on one of the publications quoted above, i.e. Marielouise Janssen-Jurreit's book "Do you love Germany?", in which the editor has collected about forty essays of German intellectuals depicting their feelings about their country. She defines the purpose of her book as follows:

"The question 'Do you love Germany?' is not an inquiry about a new nationalism. It is meant to disentangle the whole personal muddle of identifications with, and rejections of, Germany and the experience of being German in the different biographies. I expect from the authors some insights into the tissue of contradictions and idealizations, the inner strife, the delicacies, absurdities and neuroses that determine our relation-ship with this country. How much of Germany is part of ourselves?"³

The authors, aged between 25 and 91, represent the gamut of the

educated Germany, ranging from the student to the writer, the actor, the politician and the economical expert. All political opinions are represented. The age groups are distributed follows: six authors born between 1950 and 1960; seventeen authors born between 1940 and 1950; this is by far the biggest group and, as we are going to see, also the one which has the greatest problems with the Nazi past; nine authors born between 1930 and 1940; six authors born between 1920 and 1930 and five authors born between 1895 and 1910.

The question that is at the source of all the subsequent considerations reads as follows:

"Have not the people who caused the German ruin and were responsible for millions of deaths loved Germany with all their hearts? And here we are again at the beginning of our neurotic circle: we cannot, because we forfeited our chance; but we want to, because we have the impression that something is missing. Nevertheless, a part of the German soul is still imprisoned in the "Führerbunker". Now that we are looking for new national interpretations, we can still not exclude the risk of delusion."□4

Most of the essays are written as little "Bildungsroman", describing the mental education and the vicissitudes of memory of their authors. Five authors chose to write fiction, thus eluding the difficulties of a direct confrontation with the subject. It is certainly significant that four of them stem from authors of

the youngest age group, who feel, in a way, most embarrassed by the problem of national identity. As we are going to see, the generations born during or after the war feel much more burdened by German culpability

than those directly involved in the disaster. We shall try to find out the reasons for this apparent paradox.

We shall now analyze every generation separately, so that in the end we might get an idea of the evolution of each of them, as well as of the differences and resemblances of the various experiences.

First age group: authors born between 1950 to 1960 and younger

The authors of this age group were, at the time of writing their essays, between twenty five and thirty years old. Three of them stem from the "alternative", left scenery of the Federal Republic, the two others do not disclose their political opinions. Three of them are writers, two scholars.

Only the youngest author, Anja Rosmus-Wenninger, born in 1960, has directly studied Nazism: strikingly enough, although German guilt and destruction are omnipresent in the various essays of each of the age groups, almost none of the authors has devoted much time to the investigation of the epoch of the Third Reich. As all of them are intellectuals, this fact is certainly most significant. Quite clearly the emotional burden it implied seemed so important to them that most of them reacted by avoiding the subject.

Anja Rosmus-Wenninger, however, had started up an inquiry about the Jews of her home town, Passau, while still at school. Immediately, she met with the most determined resistance. As her testimony is the only one which also gives an insight into the reactions of other social groups to the subject of Nazism, we shall reproduce at some length the description of her thorny road:

*"Sometimes I had the impression that the whole city was conspiring against me. Files had been lost, were lent out for years or had disappeared through official channels. I was persecuted, harassed and calumniated in my homeland, only because I was inquiring about the recent past. How can I love a country whose inhabitants simply do not want to recognize their past? (..) How can I feel secure, if every night the telephone rings because I am working on a book about the Jews of Passau? There are people living in this country who regret that I was not living in the Middle Ages, where I would have been drowned or burnt at the stake. Others would have liked to see me 'gassed in a concentration camp, torn and cut into pieces' in order to 'shut my stinky Jewish mouth'."*⁵

*"Already in 1936, two distinguished Passau priests had denounced Jews to the Gestapo. The Jews had to run the gauntlet of the town and disappeared for good in the prison of the Passau District Court. There is no trace of them left. But the two priests, whose names are under data protection and therefore cannot be mentioned, died only recently, one with the reputation of a saint, the other as a resistant to the Nazi regime. Because I had given this information, the custodian of the Passau diocese, the CSU City Counsel and press referee Franz Mader, accused me of 'monstrous defamation'."*⁶

This was the first of two defamation trials Anja Rosmus-Wenninger went through in order to finish her book. During this time she was constantly molested by her co-citizens:

"When I opened the shutters in the morning, somebody was standing there. When I went shopping, when I drove to the city or went to church, somebody followed me. Even in the restaurant I was observed and someone would write down what I was saying. Foreigners patrolled in front of my parents' house. A CSU City

*counsel participated in the watch. I was told that the Office for the Protection of the Constitution had been warned against me. (...) I was told that my child would be kidnapped if I did not give in during the trial and if I published my book."*⁷

□

□□□□ Eventually, Anja Rosmus-Wenniger won her law-suit. Her courageous attitude provoked strong reactions and the demonstrations of sympathy she received were as important (if not as numerous) as those of hostility. Thus, her final judgment about Germany is very balanced:

*"If I, as a simple student, can take a town to law and win the trial, than it is proof for me that this State is basically functioning well. It took me four years to get hold of the Nazi files. (...) But I must admit that after this quarrel and this holding back of documents the city really is assisting me now; presently, I can work in peace."*⁸

In her age group, Anja Rosmus-Wenninger is the only one who has a clear idea about Nazism as a historical reality. She has worked on the subject and formulated her opinions about it, and this clarification helps her to no longer suffer from it. At the same time she knows what the political reality of the Federal Republic looks like; she knows its limits and weaknesses, and also its strength.

This is not the case of the other authors born between 1950 and 1960, who are visibly not at all at ease with the subject: neither with present day Germany, nor with its past. Contrary to the next age group, i.e. the authors born during or just after the war, for this youngest generation the guilt feeling does not seem to be preponderant. It is much more an impression

of unreality, of not belonging, causing a lack of identity, that prevails in this age group. These sensations are well expressed by the following fiction:

*"I am 1,92 m tall and I was at the hairdresser's the day before. My neck is shaved. In spite of the hot weather, the pensioner beside me wears half boots. Just like me. He realizes it and inspects me from top to toe. I press my lips together and look like facing a pain. I avoid conversation. He seems to be impressed. He is unshaved, the collar is worn out by the grey beard. 'Boys like you, that's exactly what we needed at the time! Put on a fine uniform, field boots, tighten the belt and then: stand at attention, boy! Germany! t'was something straight!' He hangs comfortably back into his trousers and finishes his inspection with an expression of satisfied approval. Nobody asks me. This guy has jumped one generation, he has talked with the dead. With those from Stalingrad and with their murderers from Berlin. Has nothing to lose. Only wants to draw a little more on the old pictures. The real ones, his own, not those from the TV. (...) Germany has been an order. This old man has stored it. But nobody gives it any more, and nobody executes it. His time is over. The order "Germany" is impracticable, and with this order, all others have also expired."*⁹□

The concept Germany does not have a clear sense for these authors. Neither does it hurt any more, as for the previous generations. By the middle of the eighties, when most of these articles were written, one could already observe an alleviation of the burden the Nazi past had constituted for the Germans during the whole post war era. It left a kind of void that was to prepare the ground for the following great controversies, which were going to oppose the partisans of a reinterpretation of Nazism and, at the same time, spokesmen of a new nationalism, and those who, on the

contrary, recognized the Nazi crimes as the pivotal element of their political conscience.

There is only one testimony in this book which deals with the sensibility of the youngest generation. Those who, by the middle of the eighties, were between 15 and 20 years old. We reproduce it here because, although being the only one, it corresponds well to information from other sources that characterize the attitude of the generation born at the end of the sixties or the beginning of the seventies. The passage quoted below is the report of a father who is traveling with his daughter to Eastern Europe in order to show her his former home:

"Summer 1984. I travel by car to Poland with my (great) daughter Regine. I want to show her where her father had lived as a child. (..) Not far from Cracow is Oswiecim (Auschwitz). (..) Strangely enough, I had repressed the fact that Auschwitz is a city. (..) Regine tells me that she cannot really imagine what had happened there. The fact that hundreds of thousands of people have been murdered here is inconceivable for her. 'It is like a horror film!' She accepts the idea that this is also 'her German history' but only with her intellect, and reluctantly."10□□

The Nazi era, which had already become a little abstract for the authors born between 1950 and 1960, but had still overshadowed their conscience and disquieted them as a vague interpellation from the past, seems to have vanished from the conscience of the youngest generation. This past does not have any links with their present, it is simply not understandable, it does not "mean" anything to them. This is quite the opposite for the next age group we shall deal with: the authors born

during or just after the war, the next youngest age group represented here.

Second age group: authors born between 1940 and 1950

The intellectuals born between 1940 and 1950 belong to the generation that was marked by the student's movement of the sixties. Politically they were almost without exception on the Left, and many of the authors represented here identify now with the "Alternative", a green and pacifistic Germany. Their relationship with their country is very complex and has undergone major changes in every decade since the fifties. Strikingly enough, the biographical accounts of this age group are quite similar, especially there the authors had the impression of being most original in their response to the challenge of the past. Apparently, the initial shock was so great that there were few possible patterns of reaction.

*"To be ashamed to be German. I feel how these thoughts stir me, how they produce a whirlpool that draws me always further back into my childhood. And how all the tranquility which I have succeeded in attaining for the here and now vanishes."*¹¹□

□

This is the common starting point of all seventeen contributions of this age group: shame, confusion and, at first, very little knowledge. The general silence of the adults over Nazism was not analyzed by the children, but heavily felt. Thus, the childhood of this generation passed in a vague uneasiness, the impression that one had something to hide, but without a clear conscience of what it was.

"To the child, born just after the currency reform, his fatherland seemed of bad origin, ill reputed, to be disavowed. Typically German was a common invective of his parents, and when his father was

*asked abroad where he came from, he answered mostly from Austria (as they had some relatives there, the parents said that this was not a lie), or from Bavaria, but never from Germany. (...) Later on, the young boy learned a little more about this hazy, uncanny, strange and partitioned Germany, and he learned to despise it. (...) This country represented for him everything he hated (...): garden gnomes and car fetishism, schmaltz and plush, political conservatism and rigidity, lack of humor and untruthfulness, sentimentality and brutality, love for animals and misanthropy."*¹²

This evolution is quite typical. Most of the authors discovered abroad that there was shame in being German, and reacted with self contempt and the desire to no longer belong to this country. Contrary to older or younger generations, there was not one reaction of defiance or pride among the authors of this age group. The inherited guilt was overwhelming and accepted without question. One can even note a certain masochistic pleasure in perpetually harping back to the national vices which, in some cases, seem typical German qualities, in others only general bourgeois ones.

However, after a time of affliction, most of these intellectuals looked for a way of escaping this situation. For a while, many of them took refuge in a vague cosmopolitanism: they tried to speak foreign languages perfectly and without accent, and to melt into the countries they traveled to or lived in. But all this was of no avail, because they were recognized as Germans and identified with the country, even if they themselves did not want to identify with it.

"The others looked upon me precisely as part of that which I had always wanted to avoid belonging to, from that which I had tried to be an exception. But there was no way out. The further I went from

*Germany, the longer I was gone, the easier came the attribution from the outside. And more and more automatically. (..) In France, my attitude was mocked at; but who in the States, in Canada or in India could even imagine how much I had fought not to be German any more? Nobody knew what it meant to be looked at as a German, although I had tried to be different from all other Germans."*¹³□□

The unsuccessful attempt of a whole generation of German intellectuals to "be different from all other Germans" culminated in the student movement of the sixties. For the first time Nazism was discussed with the parents; but in such an excessive way that the subject failed to be treated adequately. The infuriated sons accused their fathers of being at the origin of their psychological misery, their shame and the partition of Germany. However, their own desire not to be burdened by any responsibility from the past led them to accept the very general theoretical framework of fascism that blurred the specificity of Nazism. National history was considered old fashioned and reactionary, internationalism was the slogan of the day. For the very first time this age group had the impression that it "did not matter" to be German. This is the reason why the student movement was felt as a true liberation by this generation of intellectuals, and why it left much deeper marks in the Federal Republic than in any other country.

In the seventies the enthusiasm vanished and, at the same time, the political extremism. The authors of this war and post-war generation became adults and established a more realistic relationship with themselves and with their country. They became interested in its concrete problems, approved its social network, the freedom and the general functioning of the society:

"When he went abroad in the seventies, it could happen that he explained how things worked in Germany (and especially "that they worked"), and sometimes he thought even with a little bit of pride of his country and his compatriots: of their self-critical and apathetical relationship with their State, their cleanliness and their wealth which, due to a dense social network, they needn't be ashamed of. (..) He even had the impression that people were now more beautiful, not so gluttonous and red-faced, bullnecked and short fronted as before.»¹⁴

However, something was still lacking. Germany had a present now but it did not have an acceptable national past. There was not even a clear criterion of what made it a nation:

*"Germany has no place any more."*¹⁵

"If there were a historical justice, Germany would no longer exist.

And, as History is never totally unjust, Germany really does not exist any more. The two republics that coexist today on German soil have names that conjure up administrative necessities, not love.

One can accept the

Federal Republic and recognize the GDR, that's all. (...) Maybe I

speak only for my generation. Perhaps younger people feel

differently about it. But I ask myself what kind of anchor their

feelings find in the abyss of the German past. None of us, busy in

our every day activities, is born from a national womb; we are not

children of one folk. We are retort babies, raised in an aseptic

territorial chamber from the grace of the victors, fed with ideologies

made in USA, cut off from our traditions and our national identity.

*The first authentic, individual examples of post-history."*¹⁶

Contrary to the youngest generation represented here, (there are reasons to believe that the next younger age group has again another position towards this problem), the partition of Germany is felt by the authors born between 1940 and 1950 as a real damage. Not one of them

defends the point of view of national sovereignty. The territorial loss is considered as a just punishment for past crimes committed by Germans. Nevertheless, Eastern Germany remains a constant reference in many articles; not at all a political one, but a reminiscence of landscapes and cultural heritage. At the same time, the question arises of what Germany is, if not a territory and not a nation. None of the authors has an univocal answer. The only thing they all agree upon is the language, which they love and consider as their real "homeland". At the same time, they are attached to certain regions, to their people and their ways of life; in short, a mixture of cultural patriotism and localism, which is all the final deception of the eighties still allows:

"Then came the eighties and a new chancellor of such provincialism that perhaps even the Germans did not deserve him. There were new nationalist accents. (...) The extreme rightwing drew the attention brutally with the outrage of the "Oktoberfest".

"Martial tones came from the peace movement, which in its cultural and political arrogance spun fantastic ideas about a withdrawal from Nato and the reunification of Germany, independently from the two blocks. And on the right wing, on the left wing and from the green, one could even hear anti-Semitic voices, disguised as anti-Zionist opinions. (..)"¹⁷

The authors of this age group are now in their forties, and still live in Germany. Naturally, most of them found a modus vivendi that allows them to finally accept their country. Quite often, it consists in an identification with the alternative" scenery. Nationalist convictions are still not to be found within this generation. Many authors accept living without "roots" in the conventional sense of the term, clinging to the language and

the German culture, and to everything that gives the every day life its specific physiognomy:

*"Apart from Kohl and from Derwall, from administrative miff and from the weather, one can finally stand this country. (...) If one accepted living here, one could experience every day as sensually as in Madagascar or Malibu and, after having managed to hold out during the first thirty years, one does not mind the whole wretched History so much any more. The first thirty years were quite bad. One had to subsist and try not to become crazy, sell oneself, commit suicide or become a killer, but afterwards one began to belong in one way or another. And once you belong, you need not continue to hide anything of our history; you simply experience and take with you what is everywhere important and transitory - women, cities, forests, the whole life."*¹⁸

Third age group: authors born between 1930 and 1940

The authors born between 1930 and 1940 were children or adolescents at the end of the war. They are the first age group who have personal recollections of this time, and as these recollections are the first ones that marked their conscience, they have a strong impact on their whole outlook on life. In all cases, the experiences of these years have been negative, and could be nothing else. The world of the adults was one of destruction and confusion: the towns were in ruin, and people were either refugees themselves or had to cope with the refugees coming from the East. Hunger and privations determined daily life, and all this is reflected in the articles of this age group. Nevertheless, what was most decisive was the sensation of an overwhelming deceit:

"I have tried to keep Germany away from me. It was my father, the National Socialist, who had loved this Germany more than anything else. He went voluntarily to war for Germany. (...) To his daughters he wrote soul stirring letters from the battle fields about German birds, deer and forests, German landscapes and cultural places, German soldiers who fed the hungry animals and helped the civilians: lies that conceal mass murder, plundering, rape and the pleasure of participating in that. My father, for ever a stranger, had been shot in the head near Stalingrad. Germany: "His country. Even as a child I had tried to find out where my country was and what the word homeland really meant; if I was missing something if I didn't have one. There was no place that corresponded to this word."19

The adults who had cheated this generation of its childhood are judged without pity in most of the essays. The children felt the bewilderment of the parents when one started to talk about Nazism, about the dead Fuehrer and the lost war. A huge silence surrounded the subject of the "things that had happened in the East". At the same time, the men did not stop talking about their lives as soldiers. These adults could definitely not serve as examples for the children, who looked with resentment for other paradigms:

"My parents could not serve me as an example. (..) I did not want to stay in this country where my father had not played with me and my mother had not hugged or kissed me. There had to be a society that was based upon love and the free development of the individual, and where there was no more war. The Jews who had passed through the hell of German fascism could do it! Because I needed ideals, I went to Israel."20

This is not unusual, but it is a mostly unsuccessful stratagem. As the author was not interested in the Israeli reality, but only in herself, the

journey was a disaster. The Israeli who failed to embody the ideal that she was looking for were judged with the same severity as that with which just before, she had judged her parents.

This is quite typical of the attitude of almost all the intellectuals represented here. The general indifference toward the victims of Nazism is one of the most striking elements in all these essays. The only real problem of the authors is how to cope with their past, but there is no desire to know the other side involved by it. Sometimes Israel is chosen as a possible object of identification, usually via the social experiences of the Kibbutzim. But as this is not paralleled by an interest in Jewish history, not even the recent one, this identification never lasts very long. One of the most important phenomena which we have been observing in the recent years, i.e. the divergence of Jewish and German memory concerning the Nazi past, is already contained in the psychological disposition of this age group.

This does not mean that the authors refuse altogether to investigate about Nazism. On the contrary, this age group is the first one to feel independent enough to inquire about the reasons for what happened:

*"The Nazi tyranny broke down when my political conscience started to develop. I felt shame and understood that, as a German, all my life I would have to bear the responsibility for its consequences. (..) So I read Thomas Mann's Dr. Faustus in order to grasp the reasons for the catastrophe - reasons that were not only due to German history, but also to German character. People like Hitler (..) exist in all places and at all times. But they don't come to power everywhere."*²¹

More than in the war and postwar generation, this age group has lived two lives,²² a first life of suffering and repression of the past, generally characterized by a self-righteous attitude. Death and destruction were only in their paths, the injustice was one done to them, the innocent children who had to bear the guilt of their parents. After this followed, usually, a phase of shame and self contempt and, finally, one of appeasement. The general options of these authors born between 1930 and 1940 are much like those of the previous generation: there is a lasting distrust of the idea of nationalism; a conscious approval of democracy and the ideals of freedom and social progress; and an infallible attachment to the German language. German history is not understood, but accepted as an inescapable responsibility.

Forth age group: authors born between 1920 and 1929

If the first recollections of the generation we have just analyzed are those of the ruin of the Third Reich, the authors of this age group were children or adolescents when Hitler came to power. They assisted at the collective ecstasy that reigned in Germany during the first years of Nazism, took part in it or were at least impressed by it:

*"I was twelve years old when Hitler's rule began, and 24, when it broke down. (..) National Socialism was to me a quasi religious Weltanschauung. I remember very well how an older schoolmate, who was a member of the SS, confessed to me one day that Adolf Hitler was sacred to him, and had the same importance for him as Jesus Christ for a Christian. (..) I must admit that I was fascinated by the confession of this schoolmate."*²³

The disillusion that this age group experienced corresponded to the heights of their expectations. Most of the authors felt not only bereft of an ideal, but mysteriously that they'd been made fools of by destiny. They

had been too young to really choose Nazism as an ideology; they had been born into it and raised in it as in the very air they had been breathing. By the end of the war, this generation felt totally confused and cheated.

Nevertheless, as they had already their own memories, and not only that of their parents, as in the former age groups, they could react individually to the challenge of the situation. It is striking to see in the different essays that the personality of the author hardly interferes at all in the younger generations, as far as their response to the past is concerned, especially not in the war and postwar generation. The experience had not been their own, the guilt and the shame were inherited. In a way, this was an abstract problem, although it was real to them and hurt in a very concrete manner. But there could be no "personal response" to it, contrary to those who had lived this epoch themselves. Thus, the differences between the various essays of the older generations are much more characteristic than in the previous ones; there is no predictable pattern of reaction as in the younger age groups. Only the basic feeling of disillusion is shared by everybody. In the beginning, one of the more frequent reactions to this was an attitude of spite:

"One possibility of justifying the waste of one's emotional strengths and the humiliating impression of having been abused was the attempt to play the theory off against the practice. It started with the common

"The Fuehrer did not know about all that!" When this could no longer be upheld, one said: "Only the war and 'that with the Jews' he should not have done." But surprisingly enough, the Fuehrer could quite easily be

*detached from the trinity 'Fuehrer, folk and fatherland' which we had believed to be inseparable for such a long time. One could dissociate from him as from an unworthy lover. But what about folk and fatherland? That was not a freely chosen object of love. It belonged to one's existence. It was our heart. Can one live without a heart? Wolfgang Borchert wrote in his "Manifest" of 1947: "For we love this giant desert called Germany. This is the Germany we love now, and more than ever."(...)" She (i.e. the author) loved the giant desert Germany, she loved it with burning despair as never before, because destruction was the only giant thing left of the "Tausendjährige Reich."*²⁴

With the passage of time, the despair was forgotten, and quite often the love too. Not always: this is one of the things that depends on the author's personality. For our analysis, the important fact is that feelings change and things tend to be forgotten, as long as they belong to one's own history. This is the normal working of memory that transforms experience by adapting it to the person's present. However, memory works apparently better with real experiences than with inherited ones, even if the emotional impact of a transmitted and consequently, only imagined event can be as strong as that of a real one. Thus, none of the intellectuals born between 1935 and 1950 would have stated that time obliterates the dark sides of a nation's past, as does this author born in 1921:

*"All nations have dark times in their history. How else can it be? Even every single life has such. When they have passed they fall into oblivion after a certain while. There are nations that have paid much less for their faults than the German one, others have paid more."*²⁵

Interestingly enough, these considerations do not lead the conservative ecologist author who articulates them to an ordinary nationalism. On the contrary, he warns against it, which means that the dark sides of the German past are perhaps not altogether forgotten!

Fifth age group: authors born between 1895 and 1919

The evolution towards a greater autonomy of the authors' judgment regarding the Nazi past is completed in this last age group. The recollections of this generation go back beyond the First World War and sometimes even to the beginning of the century. To these intellectuals, the Third Reich is only one period among others of their life, and not forcibly the most important one.

Consequently, the year 1945 is never mentioned as a kind of zero hour where everything stopped and started anew, as in many of the former articles. It is, on the contrary, embedded in a continuity without rupture - at least as much as the authors' own lives are concerned. Even if it becomes clear from the essays that personal and collective history are intertwined in their memories, vital continuity proves to be always stronger than an intellectual feeling of rupture. Thus one author describes his impressions of November 1938 in the following way:

"The good relationship with my country which I had acquired during my school years and my period of professional training broke down in the notorious "Reichskristallnacht". I remember perfectly well the pictures of devastation in Stettin and some days later in Berlin. (...) The burnt smell from the ravaged synagogues which lasted for several days, the robbery and destruction of all Jewish property made me aghast. Time and again I asked myself of what crimes German people were capable even in peace. In view of this State organized vandalism I thought for the first time

*that this was the beginning of the end."*²⁶

Nevertheless these recollections which are, as the author says himself, pictures, as all normal memories, are no obstacle to further changes in his relationship to Germany. This lawyer is convinced that the inclination to chaos is no longer one of the typical German temptations, and that it is

*".. high time to remind the world of the fact that coming generations are not involved in a collective guilt constituting an eternal hereditary burden."*²⁷

As with several other authors of this age group, he considers Germany as his "*problem child*", one of those children who are always more dearly loved by their parents than normal ones. However, the relationship of these authors with their country remains lucid: not one of these intellectuals tries to mitigate the Nazi past or even to deny its frightful aspects, as was sometimes done during the great controversies of the eighties. But they regard it in a perspective of duration. What this duration is made of depends again on the vision and the individual temperament of each of them. Thus the most vehement and absolute condemnation of Nazism and, at the same time, the whole German history also stems from an author of this oldest generation: □

"In our situation every open or hidden, emotional or even legal reference to "the nation" is an aggressive act, and nothing is more superfluous than to distinguish between national and nationalist. (...) Nobody will ever convince me that a certain Hitler was the instigator of all crimes. The majority of the nation were his accomplices, they would have murdered half of the world if they had won the war. Today, if they could

do what they wanted, they would exterminate the Soviets, not to mention the Poles, because Silesia belongs to us!"²⁸

German history and their own lives are essentially the same to these elderly people. The response towards both of them varies according to experience and personality. But they certainly do not belong to this new species of history-less men which is so characteristic of postwar Germany:

"After the war something new happened that distinguished Germans from other people: they got into the habit of looking away instead of facing things. Thus all knowledge about the nation and the past got lost. They have become a people without history. That is not a good state. It creates boredom as does the company of people who deny their own history."²⁹

Conclusion

The evolution of minds and memories we have been discussing throughout this article is still in a state of flux and is not likely to be completed within the next few years. Nevertheless, we can already ascertain some general tendencies which correspond well to other sources of information concerning the German conscience of the Nazi past.

Starting with the youngest generation, we see a kind of void left by German history. Nazism is no longer felt as a personal responsibility, it seems rather remote and with little connection to present day German society. The guilt feeling has altogether vanished. Nevertheless, a widespread sense of unreality, of not belonging, and a general difficulty in defining a national identity are important consequences of this situation of a *"people without history"*. The question of how this void is going to be filled remains an

open one. The only thing that seems to be quite certain is that it is going to be filled, for no people can live indefinitely without history.

The second and third age groups we have dealt with, i.e. authors born between 1930 and 1949, are the only generations that have really been permanently shocked by Nazism. They had to cope with their parents' guilt and responsibility, but had no personal recollections to help them do so. Caught in the pitfalls of abstraction, many of them sought a solution in ideology. When this proved to be of no help, they resigned and dropped their efforts to establish a natural relationship with their country.

Older people did not have to make these efforts. To them, Germany was not a matter of choice, but of birth. They did not fight with phantoms, which are always invincible. They only had to remember.

1 Egon Bahr, "Was wird aus den Deutschen?", (Reinbek, Rowohlt, 1982); Helge Pross: "Was ist heute deutsch? (Reinbek, Rowohlt, 1982); Rainer Roth: "Was ist typisch deutsch?, (Freiburg, 1979); Arno Klönne: "Zurück zur Nation?, (Diederich, Horizonte, 1982); Karl Märzsch: "Sind wir eine Nation?, (Stuttgart 1982); Marielouise Janssen-Jurreit (ed.): "Lieben Sie Deutschland? (Piper, 1985).

2 JM. und S. Greiffenhagen: "Ein schwieriges Vaterland", (List 1979); Rudolf Thadden: "Das schwierige Vaterland", in Werner Weidenfeld (ed.): "Die Identität der Deutschen", (Hanser, 1983); Humbert Fink: "Das Land der Deutschen. Reportage aus einem sonderbaren Land", (Pinguin, Innsbruck, 1986); Hans-Peter Schwarz: "Die gezähmten Deutschen", (Stuttgart, DVA 1985); Kurt Sontheimer: "Die verunsicherte Republik", (München, 1979).

3 Marielouise Janssen-Jurreit, "Lieben Sie Deutschland",
Munich, Zurich, Piper Verlag, 1985, p. 10.

4 Op. cit. p. 19

5 In German: "..damit ich endlich meine ,stinkige Judenfotze halte."
Op. cit., Anja Rosmus Wenniger, "Leiden in Passau", p. 98
- 99.

6 Ibid., p. 99.

7 Ibid., p. 101.

8 Ibid., p. 104

9 Op. cit., Hubert Winkels, "Ich mal Deutschland", p. 315 - 317

10 Op. cit., Hans-Ulrich Klose, "Zeitreise", p.266

11 Op. cit., Melitta Walter, "Hassliebe", p. 185.

12 Op. cit., Florian Seidl, "Ein wenig", p. 309 - 310.

13 Op. cit., Sibylle Plogstedt, "Ta nemka oder Das Schicksal
eines Nachkriegsgefühls", p. 263.

14 Op. cit., Florian Seidl, "Ein wenig", p. 311.

15 Op. cit., Barbara Sichtermann, "Lediglich eine Beziehung", p. 31.

16 Op. cit., Barbara Sichtermann, "Lediglich eine Beziehung", p. 34.

- 17 Op. cit., Florian Seidl, "Ein wenig", p. 312.
- 18 Op. cit., Jörg Fauser, "Der Weg nach El Paso", p.141.
- 19 Op. cit., Christina Thürmer- Rohr: "Letzter Liebesanfall", p. 48.
- 20 Op. cit., "Deutschland, meine Trauer, du, mein Fröhlichsein", p. 123.
- 21 Op. cit., Gerhard Baum, "Ich liebe das Leben", p. 247 -
- 22 Op. cit., Claus-Heinrich Meyer, "Sehnsucht nach dem lustigen Deutschland", p. 195.
- 23 Op. cit., Hans Albert, "Erfahrungen mit der Nation", p. 225.
- 24 Op. cit., Eva Sternheim-Peters, "Du trägst es im Herzen, oder du findest es nirgends und nie!", p. 79 - 80.
- 25 Op. cit., Herbert Gruhl, ".. so, wie ich mein Schicksal liebe!", p. 40.
- 26 Op. cit., Hans Werner Osthoff, "Zwiegespräch an der Oder", p. 242.
- 27 Ibid., p. 246.
- 28 Op. cit., Erich Kuby, "Liebe? Zu welchem Deutschland?", pp. 61 and 66.
- 29 Op. cit., Grete Weil-Jockisch, "Vielleicht, irgendwie...", p. 59.