

Afterword: *Nicht blutbefleckt?*

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“G”ood heavens, I’ve never thought of it,” Milton Babbitt exclaimed when a Canadian journalist asked him about the possible influence of the Cold War on his thinking about—hence his writing of—his music. “It certainly didn’t have any influence on me in any musical way,” he insisted, even while admitting that the politics of earlier decades had “profoundly influenced his politics and philosophy,” according to the interviewer, Paul Mitchinson—and even after Martin Brody had broken the ground for musical studies of “Cold War culture” with the seminal article to which Peter Schmelz makes reference in his introduction: a study precisely of Babbitt, conducted not by (let’s say) an unsympathetic West Coast music historian, but from within the family of academic serialists, albeit by a member of the clan who could be described, in words he had used to describe another, as “a staunch and impassioned, if progressively more disenchanted, partisan.”¹ Babbitt had sat for interviews on the way to that article, and Brody thanks him for this “cooperation in editing them.”² Had he forgotten? Did he suddenly disagree with what he had told his interviewer?

Would that it were so simple. The seeming contradiction arose out of Babbitt’s widely shared conviction that politics-and-philosophy was one thing, composing another. But that conviction was an aspect of his politics and philosophy; and Brody had very effectively shown how Cold War (and prewar) anti-Communism had furnished Babbitt with the incentive to develop his intransigent brand of music theory as well as the music that the theory justified, and that in turn gave the theory a raison

¹ Paul Mitchinson, “The Sound of Political Dissonance,” *National Post*, 21 July 2001; Martin Brody, “‘Music for the Masses’: Milton Babbitt’s Cold War Music Theory,” *Musical Quarterly* 77 (1993): 161–92; Martin Brody, review of Joan Peyser, *To Boulez and Beyond: Music in Europe Since The Rite of Spring*, *Notes* 57 (2000–2001): 153.

² Brody, “‘Music for the Masses,’” 186.

d'être. Babbitt's composing and theorizing have always been symbiotic—famously and influentially so. The music and the heady combination of visionary speculation and rigorous analysis that accompanied it were mutually validating; and for a while that symbiosis of music and analysis was powerfully institutionalized in the pioneering Princeton Ph.D. program in composition and in its clones, the countless other degree programs that Princeton's made not just possible but necessary.

That Princeton degree program, inaugurated in 1962, was a major trophy of the Cold War. The call for it had come in 1958, the year after Sputnik, in Babbitt's celebrated if generally misunderstood manifesto "Who Cares If You Listen?"³ What is misunderstood is its purpose, which was not to mock the lay audience or the composers it liked so much as to convince the academic community (and his own university's administration in particular) that the most advanced music composition had reached the point where it deserved recognition as a type of scholarly or scientific research. That "immediate and eventual" purpose required an ever more resolute and vigilant restriction of "serious" musical discourse to a logical-positivist purview—or what Babbitt (in an article that Brody subjects to a useful gloss) more simply and loosely called "'scientific' language and 'scientific' method"—as well as an ever more abstract and technical conception of musical content and value.⁴ The retreat into the ivory tower that Babbitt advocated in this piece has been compared to Schoenberg's *Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen* of 1918,⁵ but a more apposite comparison would be to Guido Adler's "Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft" of 1885, another disciplinary blueprint that sought academic acceptance for a formerly excluded branch of musical learning by casting it in rigorously scientific terms, Adler's borrowed chiefly from the biological sciences as Babbitt's were borrowed from the philosophy of science.⁶ The science envy of the Cold War period had a lengthy prehistory.

³ Based on a transcript of an improvised lecture, originally titled "The Composer as Specialist," which Babbitt had delivered at Tanglewood in the summer of 1957 (thus a couple of months before Sputnik); the article was originally published in the February 1958 issue of *High Fidelity* magazine, and endlessly anthologized thereafter.

⁴ The article is "Past and Present Concepts of the Nature and Limits of Music," delivered, significantly enough, at a musicological congress, and published in its proceedings: *International Musicological Society, Report of the Eighth Congress, New York 1961*, I (Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1961): 398–403; repr. as the lead essay in B. Boretz and E. Cone, ed., *Perspectives on Contemporary Music Theory* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 3–9 (the quoted phrase is on p. 3).

⁵ E.g., in Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents* (2nd ed., Belmont, CA: Thomson/Schirmer, 2007), 481.

⁶ On Adler's aims and achievement, see Kevin Karnes, *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History: Shaping Modern Musical Thought in Late Nineteenth Century Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). The document itself is available in English translation, with a useful gloss, in Erica Muggleston, "Guido Adler's 'The Scope, Method, and

But the Cold War changed it, or at least intensified it, significantly. The logical positivism Babbitt so admired, preeminently represented on the Princeton campus by Carl Hempel, was (among many other things) an instrument for the critique of politics and resistance to political or religious propaganda.⁷ Given the geographical origin of the school, and the fate of its members, it was fascist propaganda that strict empirical verificationism was seen at first to resist. For Babbitt, veteran of the political skirmishes of the New York intellectual scene of the 1930s, the chief resistance would always be to Soviet-style communism. Rivalry with the Soviet Union in the era of the superpowers, after science had vouchsafed the decisive Allied victory in World War II, was what gave science the measure of glamour in the late 50s and 60s that it took to (among many other things) persuade Princeton to authorize a research degree for musical composition. That the music recognized by that degree would be twelve-tone music went at first without saying. Twelve-tone music was the only music sufficiently abstract, autonomous, consistent, and self-referential to withstand a logical-positivist critique.⁸

The status of twelve-tone music as a no-spin zone, a haven of political nonalignment and implicit resistance in the postwar world was widely touted and accepted from the start, both in Europe, where it could be seen to embody the “neither/nor” option within the territories formerly held or occupied by the fascists (now being wheedled by the two formerly allied, now opposing Cold War powers),⁹ and in America, where Aaron Copland, for one, sought refuge in it when called to account for his erstwhile political engagements.¹⁰ These were among the factors determining serialism’s seeming natural selection—in a development no one had predicted before the war—as a musical lingua franca, or even as the basis for a new era of common practice, with a prestige that even Stravinsky found irresistible. And they were what made the ideal of “total serialism”—the use of neutral, culturally unburdened algorithms to control an ever greater number of musical

Aim of Musicology’ (1885): An English Translation with an Historico-Analytical Commentary,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 13 (1981): 1–21.

⁷ See Babbitt’s essay, “My Vienna Triangle in Washington Square,” Revisited and Dilated” (1999), in Stephen Peles, et al., ed., *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 466–87.

⁸ Or so its advocates argued: see Benjamin Boretz, *Meta-Variations. Studies in the Foundations of Musical Thought* (Red Hook, NY: Open Space Publications, 1994); this long essay is actually Boretz’s 1970 Princeton dissertation, completed under Babbitt’s supervision, first published in *Perspectives of New Music* 7, no. 1 (1969–70): 1–74; 8, no. 2 (1969–70): 49–111; and 9, no. 1 (1970–71): 23–42.

⁹ See Mark Carroll, *Music and Ideology in Cold War Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ See Jennifer L. DeLapp, “Copland in the Fifties: Music and Ideology in the McCarthy Era” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1997).

parameters, in addition to pitch—so attractive. These new connotations were even projected backwards onto the work of the original Viennese trinity, with an assist from Babbitt's tendentious claim, in the article cited in note 7, that Schoenberg, Schenker, and the Vienna Circle of logical positivists were the three points of a triangle within which he located his own turf.

This was of course a serious historical error: Schoenberg's intensely subjective and metaphysical conceptions could scarcely have had less to do with the philosophy of logical positivism; but for Babbitt—and, following Babbitt, many others—it became an article of faith as they traced the ancestry of the highly rationalized American academic serialism of the Cold War era to the origins of Schoenbergian atonality in fin de siècle Vienna, and yet further back to the universal, canon-defining figures to whom Schoenberg himself had appealed for validation. That patrimony—unrecognized and unclaimed in the Europe of "Schoenberg est mort"—gave the American serial ascendancy its biggest push. The Cold War was one of its essential preconditions.

Babbitt's seemingly disingenuous disavowal of Cold War influence was typical of its beneficiaries. The politics of the apolitical stance fosters compartmentalization, and this too is something that goes much further back than the Cold War. Our German romantic heritage has conditioned us to imagine, in the words of Schopenhauer, that "alongside world history there goes, guiltless and unstained by blood (*schuldlos und nicht blutbefleckt*), the history of philosophy, science and the arts."¹¹ The thought is undeniably attractive for the alibis it makes available. Defenders of aesthetic autonomy habitually ward off the threat of political or social contextualization with nervous sarcasm: "an unsuspecting public is led astray," according to a typically forced parody by Pieter van den Toorn, "by the formalist, specialist 'talk' of 'cold-war' meanies such as Milton Babbitt, Igor Stravinsky, Robert Craft and Allen Forte"; but never fear, he teases, "the same public is nursed back to musical health and well-being, however, to an appreciation of its own best interests, by the sympathetic intervention of its friendly neighborhood historical musicologist."¹²

Equally squeamish—and equally strategic—is Charles Rosen's phobic reaction to reception studies, by now the most widely practiced and uncontroversial aspect of contextualization.¹³ It leads him to regard any

¹¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga und paralipomena* (1851), best known by musicians as the epigraph to the score of Pfitzner's opera *Palestrina* (1917).

¹² Pieter C. van den Toorn, "Review-Essay: Will Stravinsky Survive Postmodernism?" *Music Theory Spectrum* 22 (2000): 104.

¹³ This reaction is most vividly viewed in "Did Beethoven Have All the Luck?" Rosen's review of Tia deNora's *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius: Musical Politics in*

contextualized study, even my Oxford History, as an implicit “claim that the history of any art is the concern only of the receivers and not the creators.” This, he warns, “is unwisely reductionist,” as indeed it would be, were it my claim.¹⁴ What I do claim is that stories are the creation of tellers, not doers, that they are thus distanced from the events that they portray, and that they are rhetorical constructions that respond to many intellectual currents and have political and social, as well as aesthetic, objectives. That late twentieth-century reception was in large part molded by the Cold War is by now, as Peter Schmelz suggests in his introduction, the consensus among professional historians, as attested by the long list of scholars he adduces (Beal, Willson, Bergman, Carroll, DeLapp-Birkett, Fosler-Lussier, Paul, Shreffler, et al.); and that consensus has received an effective popularization at the hands of Alex Ross.¹⁵ But Rosen is enraged by the suggestion. His attempt to discredit my account of twentieth-century music history and historiography with slyly calculated praise is a case in point. “Volumes 4 and 5 of *The Oxford History*,” he writes,

are devoted to the twentieth century, and are the result of formidable research, presented in the liveliest way. The movements in the history of the last century are laid out at length: neoclassicism, expressionism, atonality, futurism, symphonic jazz, minimalism, electronic music—all there, with all the gossip, the factional struggles, and the internecine warfare in the different camps. The information is well organized with the chief emphasis on music in America, and Taruskin’s account is magnificently detailed. What he is unable to do, however, is give us any idea why anybody would want to write, or listen to, most of the music of the century that he treats at such length.¹⁶

I accept this assessment with gratitude, in all its aspects. The favorable comments, working here as a foil to set off what Rosen regards as my failure to accomplish the chief historian’s task, actually relate to what I regard as legitimate historiography, whereas the failure is a failure of advocacy. Advocacy is not a historian’s task, and a historian who indulges in it is in fact a propagandist. As one who regards Rosen’s liter-

Vienna, 1792–1803, in the *New York Review of Books*, vol. 43, no. 18 (November 14, 1996), and the ensuing exchange with the author (vol. 44, no. 6 [April 10, 1997]); in Rosen’s later collection, *Critical Entertainments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), quite shamefully, he reprinted his original review and his answer to DeNora, but not her rebuttal.

¹⁴ Charles Rosen, “From the Troubadours to Frank Sinatra,” Part II, *New York Review of Books* 53, no. 4 (March 9, 2006).

¹⁵ *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), of which the final third is by a considerable margin the freshest and most original part.

¹⁶ “From the Troubadours to Frank Sinatra,” Part II.

ary output—all of it—as Cold War propaganda, I am heartened that he perceives the distinction between our objectives and our methods the same way I do. But while I accept and appreciate his judgment, I dispute the facts as he presents them, for my account abounds in explanations of why many have wanted to write, perform, and listen to the music of the twentieth century, although it is presented without the obligatory endorsement Rosen correctly finds lacking.

It is that sense of obligatory endorsement that characterizes Cold War accounts of modernist music and provides a counterpart to the obligatory rejection demanded of historians writing on the other side of the long-lasting geopolitical divide. This comes out most clearly when Rosen reaches my chapter devoted to Elliott Carter (and devoting a whole chapter to Carter—something other reviewers have noted with surprise and occasional indignation—should leave no doubt as to the historical importance I ascribe to him). Carter is a composer Rosen has long and fervently championed both as a performer and as a critic. My account of Carter's career took specific note of Rosen's role in promoting him, and that insured a counterpunch:

Taruskin finds himself goaded by the prestige Carter's music has recently gained to write forty pages on him that are detailed without ever being illuminating, unable to explain why some find the music so eloquent and fascinating. I know of no other distinguished scholar so anxious to display not only his talents but his limitations with such panache, as if they were stigmata.¹⁷

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The last sally is witty, but it is contextualization itself that for Rosen counts as a limitation—as indeed, in some ways, it is. My whole purpose in writing those forty pages was to account for and interpret Carter's superlative prestige, dating as it did precisely from the European premiere of Carter's First Quartet at the 1954 Rome festival of contemporary music, an event sponsored by the Congress for Cultural Freedom—the most prominent and by now (thanks to its subsequently disclosed CIA connections) most notorious cultural organization on the western side of the Cold War. I did little else but quote rapturous comments—from Stravinsky, William Glock, Joseph Kerman, Andrew Porter, Bayan Northcott, and Rosen himself, among others—testifying to their belief in Carter's eloquence and allure (an enthusiasm that in the case of that First Quartet, among other works, I fully share, although the *Oxford History* was not the proper place for me to say so). But I did not and do not acknowledge that such responses are wholly innocent, spontaneous, and unmediated reactions to the immanent qualities of “the music itself.”

¹⁷ “From the Troubadours to Frank Sinatra,” Part II.

They are not *schuldlos und nicht blutbefleckt*, and I did not instruct my readers to embrace them. The cardinal tasks of the historian, as I conceive of them, are to maintain skepticism in the face of such claims and exhortations; if not to dispute taste at least to interrogate and account for it; and, above, all, to disenchant auras and demystify discourses. Those are indeed limitations, if one so chooses to describe them. They are the constraints and injunctions that preserve the special identity and the special mission of scholarship amid the manifold pressures that constantly threaten to divert or seduce it to other purposes.

Carter was as emblematic a figure on the one side of the Cold War divide as was, say, Tikhon Nikolayevich Khrennikov on the other. Both were well trained and highly competent makers; both produced works that defined a standard of orthodoxy—of exemplary values given a model realization—within their respective milieux; both were beneficiaries of organized prestige machines; both were insulated from negative critique; both were rewarded with every prize and perquisite of rank within the power of their respective milieux to bestow; and both enjoyed major careers and achieved true historical significance (and in Carter's case, as he approached his hundredth birthday, genuine if relatively minor media celebrity) without having any real audience for their work. That is one of the things that the Cold War made possible. Any account of such careers that does not emphasize the role of propaganda in their maintenance is an example of that propaganda.

All of this has always gone without saying when speaking of Soviet music and the Soviet musical establishment. But why should it be any less obvious on the other side? Merely because it's "our" side, and what is ours is transparent? And above all, why should it be kept from view? Because a perceived political advantage is at stake? That asymmetry is a historiographical blemish. As long as it remains, the role of Cold War politics cannot and must not go without saying when speaking of Carter or Babbitt; or the political (and, at first, the Allied military) sponsorship of the Darmstadt Ferienkürse; or the role of politically connected philanthropic foundations in the maintenance of modern music in America; or the high subsidies set aside for the dissemination of avant-garde music on West German radio, where stations (in the cunning words of Björn Heile) "competed for prestige but not for resources," and which lasted only—and exactly—until reunification.¹⁸

But is it really so transparent or invisible? Do we not see more than we claim or say we see (or allow ourselves to see?) Is it not plain as day that the same artists and spokespersons who habitually deride political

¹⁸ Björn Heile, review of Amy Beal, *New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification*, in *Music & Letters* 89 (2008): 686–87.

contextualization habitually use the language of politics to describe artistic phenomena? Open practically any text on twentieth-century music, historical or analytical, practically at random, and you will see words like *progressive* or *conservative* or *radical* or *reactionary*—the same words you will hear in any political campaign (not to mention *revolutionary*, a word that is also seen a lot of use in marketing). “Varèse,” writes Arnold Whittall, “whose early contacts were with Strauss and Busoni, and whose style was grounded in Debussy and Stravinsky, was never as determinedly progressive as Ives or Satie.”¹⁹ “Some of Scriabin’s devices,” James M. Baker complains, “seem surprisingly conservative.”²⁰ “Although they are cast in seemingly traditional moulds,” Ethan Haimo reassures us, “the forms of [Schoenberg’s] Wind Quintet are quite revolutionary.”²¹ (Love that “quite”!)

Such usages are not innocuous. They do sow confusion. When used to describe artistic styles and methods, they are not purged of their political associations, and the proof is the persistence of the wholly mistaken assumption that “progressive” artists are politically progressive as well—an assumption that has been much shaken over the last couple of decades by the gradual emergence (against much opposition from idealizers) of evidence as to the actual political sympathies of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Webern and many other modernists; yet it nevertheless persists, adding to the complacency with which Cold War attitudes have withstood changes in the political weather, including the end of the Cold War. But without understanding why Stravinsky, Schoenberg, or Webern should have been led at various times to embrace the political right, including its most *blutbefleckte* strains, one can hardly hope to understand modernism as a cultural phenomenon. Or anti-modernism, for that matter: when George Rochberg broke with modernism in the 1970s, he was attacked as a political reactionary as well as an artistic one, and the pitch neared hysteria. “His works could become cultural fodder for the New Right: Down with progressive thought! Down with progressive music!” ranted Andrew Porter.²² “I used to wonder,” John Rockwell has confessed, “how could highly politicized neo-conservative critics like Hilton Kramer and Samuel Lipman idolize modernism? Surely, I assumed, modernism had a built-in revolutionary component.”²³

¹⁹ Arnold Whittall, *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 268. The sentence comes from a chapter called “Radicals and Rituals.”

²⁰ James M. Baker, *The Music of Alexander Scriabin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 20.

²¹ Ethan Haimo, *Schoenberg’s Serial Odyssey: The Evolution of His Twelve-Tone Method, 1914–1928* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 108.

²² Andrew Porter, *Musical Events* (New York: Summit Books, 1987), 292.

²³ John Rockwell, “Music View: Reactionary Musical Modernists,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1988.

If such views look silly now, it is scholars like the ones who have contributed to these issues of the *Journal of Musicology* whom we have to thank for having brought the hidden discourses of the Cold War into the light of day.

In his introduction, Peter Schmelz writes of the “difficulties surrounding a topic as contentious as the Cold War, especially for those who still personally recall its tumultuous events.” Perhaps that is why most of the scholars who have thematized the Cold War in their work come from younger generations, for whom the Cold War is as closed a book as the Civil War or the Hundred Years’ War. But those of us who did live through it remember the period not only for its tumultuous events—I for one will never forget wandering aimlessly all day, a seventeen-year-old college sophomore, from movie theater to movie theater (and they were all full of wanderers like me, even at noon), on Thursday, October 25, 1962, when the Strategic Air Command was in the air in a state of full readiness for the only time in its history, when Soviet freighters bearing military hardware were approaching the quarantine line John F. Kennedy had declared around Cuba, and when millions like me were convinced it would be the last day of their lives—but also, and perhaps more significantly, for the routines and conditions that made us constantly aware of our helplessness and fragility. From first grade until high school, I was accustomed to taking cover under my classroom desk in instantaneous response to a barked command over the school public address system that might interrupt any lesson or activity. Streets in my neighborhood bore signs warning that they would be closed “in the event of atomic attack.” The magazine *Junior Scholastic*, distributed to all American schoolchildren monthly, regularly showed us drawings of robotic Communist legions poised to strike at a word from their maniacal leaders. Everyday conversation was peppered with phrases like MAD (mutually assured destruction) and “nuke-speak.” Popular culture flooded us with doomsday dramas: one week Rod Serling’s *Twilight Zone* might show us neighbors killing neighbors over access to fallout shelters during a sneak attack; the next week we might see a fantasy of stopping time, with the bomb-bearing rockets visible in the night sky, and no possibility of starting up again without bringing on the looming catastrophe.

I believe it is fair to say that the Cold War gave Americans a far greater scare than any of the actual wars our armies fought overseas. (And not even the Civil War threatened massive civilian casualties.) How could anyone’s psychic equilibrium remain undisturbed? (Mine was definitely unbalanced: I could never take seriously plans or promises that had to do with anything that lay more than a few days in the future.) How could the artistic expressions of such psyches fail to

reflect that disturbance? According to Robert Fallon, not even the sublimely unobservant Messaien managed to escape. And even Arnold Whittall recently conceded of Allen Forte, that most ardent upholder of the *Schuldlosigkeit* of atonal (and tonal) music, that “no doubt the extent to which he was intellectually formed by war and Cold War should no more be discounted than the extent to which some British analysts were formed by grammar schools” (even if, unsurprisingly, no follow-through was forthcoming).²⁴ No wonder it was an age of artistic extremes. Is there any point in pretending that the autonomous history of art, unaided, had brought art to such a pass?

Today’s young scholars have no emotional investment in such a pretense. Somewhat alleviated fear enables more dispassionate perspectives, whether on the musical history of the Soviet Bloc, which can be viewed now other than as a monolith, or on that of the postwar West, where politics took the form of frantic endeavors to hold political engagement at bay. The quotation from Louis Menand adduced by Peter Schmelz in his introduction, insisting that when contemplating a picture by Jackson Pollock one does not “think about ‘artistic free enterprise’ or the C.I.A. or the cultural politics of *Partisan Review*,” is an excellent example of that frantic endeavor: a particularly odious defiance of historians, and an attempt to counter their influence and control what viewers shall think. Menand’s further contention that, instead, “you think about how a painter could have taken all he had experienced across a creative threshold that no one had crossed before, and produced this particular thing” in no way contradicts the historian’s project. It is just that he espouses, and advocates, an unaccountably (and inadmissibly) partial—and sanitized—version of the experience that impels, governs, and finds itself embodied in artistic creation.

With Pollock, surely, one is not dealing with someone who is *schuldlos und nicht blutbefleckt*. But the guilt and blood a critic like Menand will admit into a discussion of Pollock is presumably only guilt over booze and fornication, and the blood shed in a fatal car crash. Most musicologists won’t admit even that much into a discussion of their favorite composers. But Pollock was an entirely knowing beneficiary of Cold War promotion, and so were John Cage, Morton Feldman, and any number of others of whom it is still conventional to say that they were far better appreciated in Europe than at home. The role of Cold War policy in

²⁴ Arnold Whittall, “Allen Forte in *Music Analysis*,” *Music Analysis* 26 (2007): 10. The reference to grammar schools was an oblique concession to Dai Griffiths’s “Genre: Grammar Schoolboy Music,” *Critical Musicology Newsletter* no. 3 (1995), repr. in Derek B. Scott, ed., *Music, Culture and Society: A Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 143–45.

their histories is part of our history, and we must report it. May the essays in these special issues of the *Journal of Musicology* spur our discipline toward an infusion of *neues Blut* and a new recognition of our proper *Schuldigkeiten*. It is and will remain for us *der rechte Fleck*.