

I was born in 1938 and came to Berlin from Pomerania as a child. After the partition of Berlin¹ we belonged to West Berlin and Berlin was on the front in the 'fifties and 'sixties. It was drummed into us at school and everywhere else that we were on the front. America is great, Jeans and Coca-Cola are the greatest, yes – when I was a teenager, those were the in things. On Tauentzien² I once quarrelled with a boy who lived in East Berlin. He told me about socialism, and in the 'fifties socialism in the GDR³ was still all right. Bloch⁴ and many other writers went to the GDR during its early years. Anyway the boy told me about socialism and then I said to him: "Tell me though, can you buy jeans and drink Coca-Cola?" That was my argument; yes... that's how we were brought up.

Things mostly changed for me in the fifties, beginning of the sixties. I remember Ernst Reuter's⁵ famous speech during the Berlin Blockade⁶ "People of the world, look upon this city!" I heard it on the radio. I thought it was absolutely stupid. Because... the people who lived above us always went to East Berlin to stock up with meat and everything, you could do that then. My parents didn't do it. It was preferable for us to starve. We didn't want to support communism. Our whole school class was dragged to the Titania-Palast⁷ to some kind of American event that was called "Moral Rearmament". Moral Rearmament it was called. It was such a performance. I didn't understand a thing and thought it was pretty stupid, but we were taken there.

Anyway, my beliefs in Coca-Cola and jeans gradually crumbled. Although I enjoyed dancing to Rock and Roll... That was in the fifties, beginning of the sixties, I was at the beginning of my mid twenties and during that time I also got to Hamburg, that's where I saw what a big difference there was between West Germany and Berlin. We were so scruffy and the people in Hamburg were already totally chic. For example we never had shoes, we received shoes from West Germany and then when it rained once they disintegrated on my feet, they were stuck with who knows what kind of glue... Berlin was simply a thing unto itself.

In those days I was studying at the art academy and was then in Freiburg – which was completely different, it was an absolute dreamscape to me. I didn't study at all, I just wandered through the woods, through the Black Forest, yes, day and night, I slept in the forest... I'd never seen anything like it. Berlin was in ruins. Although after the war – I was seven in 1945 – it was a child's paradise. No cars and the ruins - it was fantastic. Only there weren't any forests... and then I was in Wuppertal for a while... and travelled back to Berlin at every opportunity. Berlin was my city!

¹ Berlin partition:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/231186/Germany/58213/The-era-of-partition>

² Tauentzienstrasse: Well known shopping street and location of KaDaWe, a famous department store in West Berlin

³ GDR : German Democratic Republic

⁴ Bloch, Ernst (1885-1977) German philosopher:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/69499/Ernst-Bloch>

⁵ Ernst Reuter (1889 - 1953), Mayor of West Berlin 1947 - 1953:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/500249/Ernst-Reuter>

⁶ Soviet blockade of West Berlin:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/62154/Berlin-blockade-and-airlift>

⁷ Titania-Palast: Cinema in West Berlin.

Whenever I travelled back to Berlin on the train and heard anyone talking in a Berlin dialect I would go and sit near them, “Ah, I’m at home again!” Yes...like that. That was at the end of the fifties, beginning of the sixties.

Once during that time I had to travel to West Germany, to Wuppertal and had sent various things ahead in a parcel. Amongst them was my identity card – although I still had a passport. I had travelled quite a way on the train, before I reached the East German border and had to get off. “You must go back to Berlin, your passport isn’t valid here⁸” It was a West German passport and it wasn’t valid there. Berlin was Berlin. West Berlin was not West Germany and my passport was West German. Therefore it wasn’t valid. So a railcar was brought just for me and I was taken back to Berlin. I thought it was really interesting, the way that I was transported back to Berlin alone in a railcar with a driver just for me. What a wonder! In Berlin I got a new West Berlin identity card within two days. The police still worked then...

Around 1968⁹ my daughter was in nursery, this nursery was established by students who had children and they were increasingly engaged with politics. I had never been politically active at all before, I wasn’t interested in any of that. I was interested in painting, not politics. This movement was stirring though, there was this atmosphere...Anyway I remember what the turning point was for me. I was in a bar with a friend and we met a couple of students there who said we should all say something about ourselves...well divulge something of ourselves. How we lived, what we did and so on. I’d never done that before. Never! It was just taboo. You never spoke about family and so forth. It wasn’t anybody’s business. That this is what they wanted to do was an incredible shock to me. I still remember that I clammed up and started to sweat and then one of them said to me: “Throw a glass of beer at the wall!” Boom. I’d smashed a glass of beer on the wall, nobody realised who had done it and that was the end of that, without telling them anything about myself. All at once family matters were disclosed at the nursery too, you spoke about how you were bringing up the children. They were supposed to solve problems verbally amongst themselves, they weren’t allowed to fight. I was always fighting as a child. It was all completely new to me, but...I didn’t really have a firm stance, I thought, ok, they’re probably right, maybe theirs is the right approach and it’s much better. It made me flounder and I partly regretted later that my child wasn’t allowed to defend herself with her fists and I found it pretty outrageous.

Yes, during the nursery phase I came into contact with the “League against Imperialism”¹⁰ or whatever it was called...they were far left...I went along a couple of times and listened to it all. You had to read and understand Marx...it was all stuff that I wasn’t really interested in, but the people were all so committed, so I went along with them and then I took part in demonstrations too.

For example I was in front of the opera house when Benno Ohnesorg¹¹ was shot in 1967. Because I experienced it all firsthand I became totally appalled by what went

⁸ Citizens of West Berlin were only allowed to travel through the GDR with a West Berlin identity card NOT a West German passport:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Berlin#Transport_and_transit_travel

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_student_movement

¹⁰ Anti imperialism in Germany: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Army_Faction

on there. I stood with my back to the opera house. There was a construction site fence opposite, very close to the pavement. People didn't have any room and they were supposed to clear off quickly, but it couldn't be done quickly because they were stumbling over each other. The "Hooray Persians"¹² were somewhere to the left, beating up the demonstrators and the police were opposite. Then one police car after another arrived, the officer in charge shouted something like "Go, march, march!" and the police started beating out. I was horrified by what was happening.

I stood in a good place in front of the opera house, protected by the police. The police got out to the right of me, it was pure coincidence that I was standing there, but I was able to see everything that went on. However I don't believe that I heard the shot itself because there was such a racket. The shot was either in the middle of things, or just after. In any case the people wanted to get away, but couldn't. They were simply beaten up in front of that construction site fence. Everything was in absolute confusion because people were falling over each other. I have to say though that at that time the police still looked quite civilised. They had rubber truncheons, wore white caps and you could see their faces, but although they looked civilised of course they had pistols. They were armed.

I didn't get beaten up, that was happening opposite. These police wagons arrived full of hundreds of police, I don't know exactly how many those things carry. They kept running at the demonstrators with their truncheons.

We lived quite close by at the time. I think that we fled at some time during the chaos. We lived in Kaiser-Friedrich-Strasse¹³ which wasn't far away. I don't know how it ended. I didn't find out until the day after that somebody had died. Yes. It was a shock. Nothing like that had ever happened before. That the police shot somebody...It was absolutely clear the next day that the police had shot Benno Ohnesorg. In the back. Later it became spun out and distorted by newspaper articles, then it became "No, it was self-defence" and who only knows what else.

Until then I thought the police were relatively harmless. Well, that they ensure that order is kept, they hit out now and again, but they don't shoot people dead. And this belief was...

I went more often to demonstrations from then on. At one time I happened to be at a spot on the Kudamm¹⁴ where there was a police wagon. Informers were gathering there. All sorts of people were there – long haired, elderly... well, anyone you could possibly imagine from the population, waltzed up and gave their reports. There were always demonstrations at the time. They were mostly anti Vietnam demonstrations. We thought the Vietnam War was outrageous. Everything revolved around that at the

¹¹ Benno Ohnesorg, West Berlin student shot by the police in 1967 during a demonstration in Berlin http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benno_Ohnesorg

¹² "Hooray Persians" Cheering Persians - *Jubelperser* - Undercover members of SAVAK, the Iranian Secret Service, who accompanied that Shah of Persia to Berlin in 1967 and infiltrated the crowd of demonstrators. Pretending to be simple supporters of the Shah, they violently assaulted demonstrators without interference by the Berlin police. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=2390

The word *Jubelperser* has become almost synonymous with *Claqueur* in Germany.

¹³ Kaiser-Friedrich-Strasse - Street in the Berlin borough of Charlottenburg

¹⁴ Kudamm - short for Kurfürstendamm - Famous street in the centre of West Berlin

time. I demonstrated with my husband, with people from the nursery and also with other friends. At any rate there was always a few of us.

There were regular enormous gatherings in the auditorium of the technical university, during which the injured came to lament their sufferings at the microphone... Looking back at it today some of it was quite funny. Someone would stand in front of the microphone and wail: "Yes, then they beat me, look at this!" It sounds funny now, but at the time it was very serious. There were always umpteen of us at demonstrations, because there were so many arrests. Sometimes they were just shoved into a car and driven far into the Grunewald¹⁵ or somewhere else and then thrown out there, so that the others didn't know where they were. We always had lawyer's telephone numbers. It was all organised partly to protect yourself.

I always managed to get away. Well sometimes I was just really lucky. Once a chain of police, covering the width of the road, came towards us, we ran at them and one policeman said to another: "We'll let her get past." They did let me go by and all the others were beaten up. Yet again I had been really lucky.

A really awful period began in the seventies. Hanging on the advertising pillar one morning was a photo of the founder of the RAF¹⁶, the one who freed Horst Mahler¹⁷ from jail. Ulrike Meinhof¹⁸ was being hunted using wanted posters. What? I knew her from interviews, she was a very intelligent woman, and had led incredibly good discussions. They were looking for her? The German Autumn¹⁹ started then. In bars people didn't trust their friends anymore. Nobody dared speak their mind, because everyone was suspected of being a sympathiser. This German Autumn held an atmosphere of oppression. A sinister fear spread because of new laws against sympathisers, which meant that suddenly anyone who said anything against the state was criminal. It was a very sick period. There were very few people at the time that you could trust. Before that you could of course openly voice your opinions anywhere. That was no more. It wasn't fashionable anymore.

At first I felt the RAF was okay. I thought Ulrike Meinhof is a pretty intelligent woman who has tried everything; written newspaper articles, held discussions. She has tried everything to bring people to their senses. What else can she do? I'd probably do exactly the same if I'd got really involved in things and I thought Ulrike Meinhof was okay. Of course I couldn't say that anywhere.

At that time I still lived in Eisenacher Strasse²⁰ and the police shot somebody there too. It was 1971, right next door to the block that I lived in. But it wasn't a demonstration, they were plain clothes officers. They shot the man from behind. Somebody in the block opposite saw it from the fourth floor. I heard the shot go off.

¹⁵ Grunewald - Forest in West Berlin

¹⁶ RAF - Red Army Faction: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/494068/Red-Army-Faction-RAF>

¹⁷ Horst Mahler: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horst_Mahler

¹⁸ Ulrike Meinhof (1934 - 1976) - Co-founder of the Red Army Faction: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulrike_Meinhof

¹⁹ German Autumn: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Autumn

²⁰ Eisenacher Strasse - Street in the Berlin borough of Schoeneberg

The dead man's name was Georg von Rauch²¹. I didn't have anything to do with him, I didn't know him. I don't know what he did, but at any rate they simply shot him.

Yes, I lived on the first floor at the corner...that's where I heard it; it was down there on the left. I had wondered why there was a bang and I saw that there were some people there, but it didn't interest me further. It was a gay area in those days, there were always comings and goings between Kleist-Casino²² and Tabasco²³ and from my balcony I could catch the love dramas. Yes, well. At any rate there was always something going on there, but I heard it on the radio the next day and the man from opposite who saw everything spoke about it on the radio. But then it was hushed up immediately. Nothing more. Absolutely nothing. Oh no.

If you had voiced your opinions out loud? I really don't know. I don't know if at the time people were betrayed and then arrested because of it. It's strange that an atmosphere like that, such an atmosphere of fear, can be spread that's partly uncalled for. But there were these anti sympathiser laws under which you could be prosecuted.

Since then I've believed that the people in our democracy are held in such a way as to always keep them peaceful. Always non-violent. Non-violent, non-violent, non-violent. So that nothing ever changes. If anything moves and there's a threat of change, the state shows its teeth. Then it shoots to kill. Yes, we live in paradise under our democracy, as long as we keep quiet and don't think about things. Even about the exploitation of people in other countries, for things to go well for us we shouldn't think about that. That's all fine, that way we can live in paradise here. Sure. But...I don't know. Sometimes I think I'm too moralistic. Too moralistically Christian. What's the point in over thinking? Other people get on with living and that's a better life really.

I believe that democracy only functions among few people. Well, that the number of people where democracy can really work must be very few, let's say a hundred people, who know each other perhaps and are in agreement. And that democracy diminishes proportionally according to an increasing scale – The federal state – Lower Saxony or Berlin, then the federal republic, then Europe and then the entire world. To my mind democracy is no longer possible then. Switzerland is probably a good example, it works quite well there. That's my version of democracy. Whenever I hear talk of "the Western democracies" I think of it as false advertising.

I think that it should work reasonably well amongst a smaller number of people, if it weren't for the human trait, that after a while someone wants to become leader and then people fall out. I doubt whether it can happen. It would really be a stroke of luck to have compatible people who get on permanently.

I experienced grass roots democracy 1980 in Wendland.²⁴ There was a manageable number of people there at first, although it was actually hard to tell exactly how

²¹ Georg von Rauch (1947 - 1971):

[http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_von_Rauch_\(Anarchist\)](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_von_Rauch_(Anarchist))

²² Kleist-Casino: A well known gay bar in the Berlin borough of Schoeneberg, open from 1921 until 2002.

²³ Tabasco: Another well known gay bar in Schoeneberg.

²⁴ Free Republic of Wendland: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_Republic_of_Wendland

many, because people from outside were always coming and going. But at least you knew each other and had something in common, an outside enemy, which played a part too. The village 1004 was supposed to be cleared; it wasn't allowed and was illegal. That played a part and then also that there was a manageable number of people, who all had the same goal and built this village with amazing enthusiasm. And for a while it worked, but that's where my belief comes from; that people emerge after a while and want to be leaders, tell others what to do and give orders. It's not for everybody and then there's bickering... In my view people don't seem to be made for idealistic concepts like that, not on a permanent basis at least. You shouldn't sit and think, I've now got a democracy that will last for a hundred years.

I can only embrace political engagement with which I'm directly involved. Well – here in my neighbourhood there are homeless people under the railway bridge, I bring them things and chat to them. To me that is engagement. I can't relate to it, if I'm supposed to donate to some organisation, or work with people that I don't know, for people that I don't know. Well, for example, World Hunger Aid has no meaning for me.

It's up to the individual. I was quite often in Kreuzberg²⁵ at the end of the fifties, beginning of the sixties. At the time lots of young people had come together who were against the Nazi regime. Some of them had been anti-aircraft auxiliaries... Enlightened people. They had a gallery there where they created art and they gathered in Kreuzberg's bars. Unfortunately I never drank and so didn't really ever belong to them. I was always a bit of an outsider. Anyway there were very, very interesting people there...In Kreuzberg at the time I met Oskar Huth. Oskar was a person who was always on the go. He turned up at specific times in specific bars and drank a lot. He ordered a beer with a chaser first, beer and schnapps and then told stories worthy of publishing. He invented new words and the expressions that he invented were exactly fitting, you'd never heard anything like it. And he could tell stories. He was unbelievably well read. He had learnt to build organs and had later studied graphics...printed graphics. During the Nazi period he had printed butter ration coupons and passports which nobody could tell from the real thing. He'd had to organise a printing press to do it and had heard of a man who had a large printing business. Oskar always reacted intuitively to people. He knew immediately whether or not he could trust someone. He had looked at the printer and knew that he was decent and then he told him what he needed. A printing press that's not too large and consequently transportable and the printer gave him one. He transported the printing press from Kreuzberg to Friedenau²⁶ on a wobbly wooden cart. In Friedenau the Nazi warden of the housing block came towards him. The warden said, "What are you transporting there Herr Huth? Shall I help you? It's so heavy; it'll be difficult to get it down the cellar stairs." And then the warden helped him take the thing down to the cellar, an air raid shelter which was full of people if the sirens went off. Oskar had hung lots of sketches of plants on the wall there, because officially he was employed by the botanical gardens to print pictures of plants. When there was a bomb alarm

²⁵ Kreuzberg – Borough of Berlin

²⁶ Friedenau – Borough of Berlin, approx. 4 miles from Kreuzberg

and the cellar was full of people he printed his passports. He even produced the paper himself. Oskar was a genius. He helped quite a few people to get out of Germany, for example Ludwig von Hammerstein²⁷ went to Canada with one of Oskar's false passports. Later von Hammerstein was the director of RIAS²⁸ Berlin.

Walter had a persecution complex after the war. He was forever scared of being caught and persecuted. People from America came to find him, thank him and give him some dollars and so on. Oskar saw them coming in at the front, went out of the back and fled. He was scared that they were the CIA or something.

Oskar was a wonderful man. They never caught him. He had an amazing amount of luck. When the Soviets came...there was an air raid shelter in a cellar with lots of people in it. There was also a Nazi in a wheelchair and a woman with a child. The Nazi said she should go out and see if it was all right to leave. He shouted at the woman to do it, it was burning on the other side. Then Oskar and another man opened the iron door, pushed the wheelchair out and shut it again. The Nazi burned. Oskar says that was the only murder he's ever committed. The men then had to present themselves to the Russians. Some of them were shot. Oskar was wearing this hat and he wasn't shot because he looked so funny and so human too, yes. He told many stories like that.

I could never tell how old Oskar was. He was still young during the Nazi period. He made his own "unfit for military action" pass. He said "I won't work for that company." Oscar escaped many times by a hair's breadth. He went everywhere on foot, he never drove. He walked from Marienfelde to Grunewald and Grunewald to Wedding²⁹, wherever the people to whom he brought the butter ration cards were hiding. Sometimes he brought butter.

²⁷ Ludwig von Hammerstein – Equord (1919 – 1996): Took part in the failed military coup against Hitler in 1944. Managed to escape and hid in Berlin until 1945. Later became a journalist and then director of a Berlin radio station. <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-9519097.html>

²⁸ RIAS – Berlin radio station: <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/RIAS>

²⁹ Marienfelde, Grunewald, Wedding: Boroughs of Berlin.