Political Languages in the Age of Extremes

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War over Words:
The Search for a Public Language
in West Germany

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The quip, attributed to the satirist Karl Kraus in the 1920s, that nothing divided Germans and Austrians more than their common language still seemed pertinent fifty years later. By that time, in the 1970s, however, the divisions ran through Germany itself and had acquired a definite political dimension. Politically motivated differences in the use of terms sprang up not just between the official languages of East and West Germany, but increasingly within West Germany itself. West German observers evaluating the impact of the 1968 student rebellion and the ensuing transformation of political culture expressed concerns that the German language was about to disintegrate into distinct social, political, and academic idioms. Particular attention was paid to the language used by the political left and the new 'alternative' social movements. Conservative critics feared that leftist theoretical jargon was not only infiltrating academic discourse and public life as a whole but also transforming them fundamentally.[1] These debates were not limited to West Germany. In the United States, best-selling authors such as William Saffire and Edwin Newman expressed unease about the apparent disrespect for 'proper' English and the erosion of fundamental values which they believed went along with it. It became common to argue that the decline of the moral and political order was accelerated by a new language pioneered by the 'counterculture', the media, and advertising—at

[1] For a summary see Peter von Polenz, *Deutsche Sprachgeschichte vom Spätmittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1991-9), iii. *19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (1999); Jürgen Schiewe, *Die Macht der Sprache: Eine Geschichte der Sprachkritik von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 1998), ch. 7.

the expense of what Richard Nixon called the 'silent majority' who had no public voice.[2]

The idea that the fabric of society and the state are closely linked to conventions or rules of speech is an age-old theme, not unlike the idea that individuals and groups wilfully or unconsciously 'manipulate' our world view by using and abusing certain political or social terms.[3] Such criticism has existed since the French Revolution. It received a new impetus from the official and non-official uses of language under National Socialism and Communist Russia. Most influential was George Orwell's depiction of 'Newspeak' in the appendix to his novel *1984*, in which he expressed the possibilities of 'thought-control' by way of a manipulated language. Orwell's exposure of 'Newspeak' could be read as a critique not only of totalitarianism but also, more generally, of the excesses of the mass media and modern commercial culture and their pernicious effects on the polity. Twisting the language—for example, by arguing that 'war' was 'peace'—amounted to more than just twisting the truth; it changed people's minds to such an extent that they began to act differently.[4]

Language, looked at in this way, becomes the battleground for the hearts and minds of the people, in advertising as much as in politics. A similar perspective can be found in the following quotation:

Language, dear friends, is not only a means of communication. As the conflict with the Left demonstrates, it is also an important means of strategy. What is occurring in our country today is a new type of revolution. It is the revolution of society by way of language. To overturn the order of the state it is no longer necessary to occupy the citadels of state power. Today, revolutions take place differently. Instead of public buildings terms are being occupied (*werden die Begriffe besetzt*)—terms by which the state governs, terms with which we describe our state order, our rights and duties, and our institutions. The modern revolution fills them with meanings which make it impossible for us to describe a free society and

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[2] William Safire, *The New Language of Politics: A Dictionary of Catchwords, Slogans and Political Usage* (New York, 1972); Edwin Newman, *Strictly Speaking: Will America be the Death of English* (Indianapolis, 1974); For a survey see Birgit Meseck, *Studien zur konservativ-restaurativen Sprachkritik in Amerika* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987).

[3] For a very broad survey see Schiewe, *Macht der Sprache*.

[4] Appendix: The Principles of Newspeak, in George Orwell, *1984* (1st edn. 1949; New York, 2003), 309–23; John W. Young, *Totalitarian Language: Orwell's Newspeak and its Nazi and Communist Antecedents* (Charlottesville, Va., 1991).

to live in this society . . . [This revolution] occupies terms and thus the information of a free society.[5]

It is clear that this quotation is not taken from a leftist advocate of the German-American philosopher Herbert Marcuse or from a follower of Antonio Gramsci. Rather, these are the words of someone who was critical of the left—not in an academic journal or an Oxford university seminar, but at a political party conference, namely, that of the German Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in 1973, a platform which also ensured that the message would be transmitted to a larger public audience. The speaker was neither a backbencher nor a party esoteric, but a legal scholar, former manager of the Henkel Corporation, and previous rector of the University of Bochum, Kurt Biedenkopf, who had been appointed secretary general of the CDU earlier that year by the new party chairman and opposition leader, Helmut Kohl.[6]

In this essay I will use this passage from Kurt Biedenkopf's speech to explore the peculiar historical junctures in the early 1970s that led to an increased awareness of the malleability of language among intellectuals and politicians in post-war West Germany. The CDU secretary general's speech in 1973 was indeed an interesting turning point in this process. In a first step I will discuss how and why Biedenkopf's few sentences at the CDU party conference were transformed into a coherent essay entitled 'Politics and Language', published in 1975.[7] Although not intellectually brilliant, this essay bore the signature of many authors and, in fact, might be understood as a political meta-text that not only offered a narrative of German history in terms of an evolution of language after National Socialism, but at the same time energetically pushed the idea that West German conservatives should follow the example set by the left and actively 'occupy', or rather 're-occupy', key political terms and thus public language. This venture was intended to be part of a proclaimed

[5] Christlich-Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU), *22. Bundesparteitag der Christlich-Demokratischen Union Deutschlands: Niederschrift. Hamburg, 18.–20. November 1973* (Bonn, 1973), 58.

[6] Wolfgang Jäger, 'Die Innenpolitik der sozial-liberalen Koalition 1969–1974', in id. and Werner Link (eds.), *Republik im Wandel 1969–1974* (Stuttgart, 1986), 15–160, at 102–7; Peter Köpf, *Der Querdenker Kurt Biedenkopf* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), 89–128.

[7] Kurt H. Biedenkopf, 'Politik und Sprache', in Bernhard Vogel (ed.), *Neue Bildungspolitik: Plädoyer für ein realistisches Konzept* (Berlin, 1975), 21–32 (this version is quoted); a shorter version is reprinted in Hans Jürgen Heringer (ed.), *Holzfeuer im hölzernen Ofen: Aufsätze zur politischen Sprachkritik* (Tübingen, 1982), 189–97.

Tendenzwende—a suggestive term which was successfully coined in the mid-1970s by intellectuals close to the CDU in order to describe, and bring about, a fundamental shift in West German politics and culture towards conservative ideas.[8] Moving backwards in time from the 1970s, the second part of this essay explores the links between the ideas of the 1970s on 'occupying' political terms and earlier attempts at language criticism in the Federal Republic. Almost all of these attempts, beginning in 1945, revolved around the question of how to deal with the remnants of Nazi words, terms, and phrases in politics and everyday life. The focus will be on one specific aspect of this debate, namely, on the notion of the 'theft' of words. This notion frequently came up in the context of arguments directed as much against those who argued for a purification of the German language from Nazism as against those on the left who supposedly 'unhinged' terms and words from their 'true' meanings. The student movement transformed and radicalized this earlier language critique. At the same time, many critical observers developed their own critique of the language of the left. The final part of this essay will deal with certain aspects of the new conservative *prise de parole* of the 1970s and 1980, including one that pertains to the issue of 'historical correctness'.

All of these debates have inspired much discussion among German linguists.[9] Historians, interestingly enough, have rarely been involved. In part this has to do with the fact that, also in Germany, the focus has been on the socio-political 'languages' or discourses of the early modern period. Peculiar to Germany is an infatuation with individual terms or concepts (*Begriffe*), and, as far as linguists and public intellectuals are concerned, an almost obsessive fixation on totalitarianism, which provided the key to

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[8] Hermann Glaser, 'Die Mitte und rechts davon: Bemerkungen zur Tendenzwende in der Bundesrepublik', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 42 (1974), 14–36; Clemens Graf von Podewils, *Tendenzwende? Zur geistigen Situation der Bundesrepublik* (Stuttgart, 1975); Axel Schildt, '"Die Kräfte der Gegenreform sind auf breiter Front angetreten": Zur konservativen Tendenzwende in den Siebzigerjahren', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 44 (2004), 449–78.

[9] See esp. Manfred Behrens, Walther Dieckmann, and Erich Kehl, 'Politik als Sprachkampf', in Heringer (ed.), *Holzfeuer im hölzernen Ofen*, 216–65; Georg Stötzel, 'Semantische Kämpfe im öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch', in Gerhard Stickel (ed.), *Deutsche Gegenwartssprache: Tendenzen und Perspektiven* (Berlin, 1990), 45–65; Josef Klein, 'Kann man "Begriffe besetzen"? Zur linguistischen Differenzierung einer plakativen politischen Metapher', in Frank Liedtke, Martin Wengeler, and Karin Böke (eds.), *Begriffe besetzen: Strategien des Sprachgebrauchs in der Politik* (Opladen, 1991), 44–79.

understanding language. German historians, foremost among them the early practitioners of *Begriffsgeschichte*, left discussions of twentieth-century political terms to the linguists and concentrated instead on conceptual changes in earlier periods, the *Sattelzeit*.[10] Thus this essay may also be seen as exploring some specificities of the 'linguistic turn', and not just in Germany. Of particular interest in this respect is the double bind that informs many of these studies, resulting from the confrontation with totalitarian languages on the one hand, and more recent political language struggles on the other. For the heightened interest in the political uses and misuses of language brought about a deluge of academic literature on the topic of language, politics, and social movements. This essay also intends to contribute to exploring the ways in which German historiography is rooted in its own particular *Zeitgeschichte*.[11]

'Occupying Terms'

When Kurt Biedenkopf addressed the issue of political language at the CDU party conference in 1973, he expressed concerns that had been preoccupying many people, not just conservatives, for some time. In fact, his remarks can be understood as the starting signal in an effective rally against the Social–Liberal coalition government and the political left in general. At the time, the CDU and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), were still licking the wounds inflicted on them in the 1972 national elections. The Christian Democrats' attempts to topple Willy Brandt's new *Ostpolitik* had failed, as had the motion of no-confidence against Chancellor Brandt in the Bundestag. The CDU/CSU had not only lost the elections of 1972, but the Social–Liberal coalition under Chancellor Willy Brandt had found remarkable support among the traditionally conservative Catholic electorate. Moreover, the party itself was torn apart by internal strife. The Bavarian CSU, led by Franz Josef Strauß, was threatening to leave the parliamentary group it constituted with the

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[10] See the introduction to this volume by Willibald Steinmetz.

[11] See also Martin H. Geyer, 'Im Schatten der NS-Zeit: Zeitgeschichte als Paradigma einer (bundes-)republikanischen Geschichtswissenschaft', in Alexander Nützenadel and Wolfgang Schieder (eds.), *Zeitgeschichte als Problem: Nationale Traditionen und Perspektiven der Forschung in Europa* (Göttingen, 2004), 25–53.

CDU. In this situation, the need for new impulses in political strategy was urgent. Kurt Biedenkopf was among the key figures who tried to redirect the CDU's attention towards new and politically more rewarding issues. Shortly before he was elected secretary general, he had criticized his party in an article published in the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*.[12] As the influence of the established churches waned, he argued, the CDU was losing contact with the working classes. The influence of 'groups within the CDU oriented towards business and capital' had increased at the cost of groups representing employee interests. More dangerously still, he claimed, 'relations between the CDU and intellectual and cultural groups' were on the 'defensive'. How could the party communicate its aims to the public at large? How could the party, which had just elected Helmut Kohl as its chairman, promote itself and gain a new profile? In the speech he gave at the party conference as the new secretary general, Biedenkopf made this necessary reorientation of the CDU his central point. In particular he emphasized social policy and other issues that he felt were interconnected 'with the changes that are taking place so strikingly in our times'. Above all, however, the political success of the party, he argued, depended on whether it was possible 'to find and practise a language that is our own'; otherwise the party would remain 'speechless'.[13] To speak up, to raise one's voice, was the prerequisite not only for being heard, but also for acting politically.

At the heart of Biedenkopf's reflective yet defensive speech was the feeling that the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the coalition government had a programme that appealed to the public through a string of attractive terms such as 'inner reform', 'peace politics', 'détente', 'humanization of labour', and 'quality of life'. Slightly more controversial than this high-grade vocabulary was perhaps the slogan at the centre of Willy Brandt's bold governmental programme of 1969: the notion that Germans should 'dare more democracy', expand 'liberty' and 'social justice', and thus bring about what Jürgen Habermas later called West Germany's *Fundamentalliberalisierung* (fundamental liberalization).[14] Brandt's

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[12] Kurt Biedenkopf, 'Eine Strategie für die Opposition', partially reprinted in Jäger, 'Die Innenpolitik', 103.   [13] Ibid.; CDU, *22. Bundesparteitag*, 61.

[14] Jürgen Habermas, 'Der Marsch durch die Institutionen hat auch die CDU erreicht', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 11 Mar. 1988, quoted in Ulrich Herbert, 'Liberalisierung als Lernprozess: Die Bundesrepublik in der deutschen Geschichte—eine Skizze', in id. (ed.), *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland: Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung* (Göttingen, 2002), 7–49.

agenda thrived on the idea that the times favoured the reformers; their optimism was supported by strong economic growth and, more importantly perhaps, by the belief that growth could be sustained by economic policies. This language of 'reform' was in tune with similar trends throughout Western Europe and the United States. With respect to American 'new politics', William Saffire wrote that '*participatory democracy, power to the people, and reordering priorities* bestrode the stage, with *quality of life* in the wings'. But the columnist also noted: 'Linguistically, the past four years have been enlivened by a counterattack of the political right.'[15]

For the politician Biedenkopf, 'occupying terms' was a matter of recapturing political territory lost to the opponent. He was neither the first nor the only contemporary to take notice of the Social Democrats' peculiar semantics of 'reform' and 'progress'. Starting in 1969 this theme was widely discussed in newspaper columns, often in an ironic tone. One of the main contributors to this debate was the political scientist Hans Maier, who served as Bavarian Minister for Education and Culture from 1970 to 1986. In various lectures on the topic 'Current Trends in Political Language', which were published und republished, first in newspapers and by 1975 also in the form of an essay, Maier had presented an astute criticism of the language of the German New Left. A student of Eric Voegelin and an expert on political religions, Maier had gained a good deal of practical experience both in dealing with unruly students at the University of Munich, where he taught, and in handling rebellious church members whom he faced before becoming head of the lay organization of German Catholics in 1976. He claimed that the language of the left not only prevented political dialogue, but even exhibited some of the essential characteristics of totalitarian languages.[16] Maier's arguments had sparked

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[15] Safire, *The New Language of Politics*, p. xv.
[16] His various lectures were reprinted as 'Die Sprache der Neuen Linken: Die gegenwärtige politisch-semantische Doppelstrategie', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 July 1972; 'Aktuelle Tendenzen der politischen Sprache', *Bayernkurier*, 21 Oct. 1972, partly reprinted in Bernhard Gebauer (ed.), *Material zum Thema Politik und Sprache*, with contributions by Josef Klein, Mathias Schmitz, Wulf Schönbohm, and Wilhelm Schwarz (Bonn, 1973), 77; Hans Maier, 'Können Begriffe die Gesellschaft verändern?', in Gerd-Klaus Kaltenbrunner (ed.), *Sprache und Herrschaft: Die umfunktionierten Wörter* (Munich, 1975), 55–68; Hans Maier, *Sprache und Politik: Essay über aktuelle Tendenzen—Briefdialog mit Heinrich Böll* (Zurich, 1977), 9–28 (this edition is quoted in this essay); id., 'Aktuelle Tendenzen der politischen Sprache', in Wolfgang Bergsdorf (ed.), *Wörter als Waffen: Sprache als Mittel der Politik* (Stuttgart, 1979); Heringer (ed.), *Holzfeuer im hölzernen Ofen*, 179–88.

a major debate in conservative circles, and some of his ideas found their way into a lengthy, coherent, but stylistically not exactly elegant text entitled 'Politics and Language', which was published under Biedenkopf's name in 1975.[17] In fact, this essay combined Biedenkopf's remarks on 're-capturing terms' from the Social Democrats with some of Maier's earlier and more specific reflections on the language of the New Left. In addition to Maier and Biedenkopf, the essay had several other authors. Among them were the members of a special task force on semantics (Arbeitsgruppe Semantik). The initiative for forming this task force came from a group of younger party officials, among them Wolfgang Dettling, head of the Grundsatzabteilung of the CDU, a section of the party whose ambition was to introduce scientific expertise into politics from public opinion polling to linguistics. Officially the group was headed by the linguist Hans Messelken, Professor of German Language Didactics at the Pädagogische Hochschule in Cologne.[18] But most outspoken were Gerhard Mahler and especially Wolfgang Bergsdorf, who at the time headed Helmut Kohl's office. Although Mahler was originally more active in unravelling the language of the Social Democrats and their chancellors, Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt, it was Bergsdorf who, in the end, built his career on this issue with a long list of edited volumes and other publications, including his Bonn habilitation thesis, published as *Herrschaft und Sprache*. Under Chancellor Kohl, Bergsdorf later became director of the German Federal Press Office (Bundespresseamt).[19]

The Arbeitsgruppe Semantik did not stop at analysing the polit-

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[17] Biedenkopf, 'Politik und Sprache'.

[18] For short surveys see Behrens, Dieckmann, and Kehl, 'Politik als Sprachkampf', 222–6; Anja Kruke, *Demoskopie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Meinungsforschung, Parteien und Medien 1949–1990* (Düsseldorf, 2007), 57–8. At least in public Hans Messelken did not play an important part; nor did his work in empirical linguistics lend itself to sweeping generalizations. See Hans Messelken, *Empirische Sprachdidaktik* (Heidelberg, 1971). For his work within the group framework, see id., 'Fragen eines lesenden Bürgers zur Sprachstrategie der SPD', in Karl Ermert (ed.), *Politische Sprache: Maßstäbe ihrer Bewertung. Tagung vom 9.–11. November 1979*, Loccumer Protokolle 20/1979 (Rehburg-Loccum, 1979), 80–146.

[19] Gerhard Mahler, 'Politik und Sprache', *Sonde*, 9 (1975), 34–8; id., 'Die Sprache des Bundeskanzlers', *Sonde*, 9 (1976), 72–6; Wolfgang Bergsdorf, 'Die sanfte Gewalt: Sprache—Denken—Politik', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 24 (1977), 39–47; id., *Politik und Sprache* (Munich, 1978); id. (ed.), *Wörter als Waffen*, 7–14; id., *Herrschaft und Sprache: Studie zur politischen Terminologie der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Pfullingen, 1983); id., 'Zur Entwicklung der Sprache der amtlichen Politik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland', in Liedtke, Wengeler, and Böke (eds.), *Begriffe besetzen*, 19–43.

ical language of their opponent. Turning their attention to the next general election in 1976, members of the group deliberated on how the CDU should formulate its own political statements in the party programme and organize its semantic counter-offensive. Maier's and Biedenkopf's initial ideas served as a reference point not only for the group but also for a more widespread debate among conservative intellectuals. In fact, between 1974 and 1977 a considerable number of journalists, politicians, and scholars contributed articles to newspapers, journals, and volumes of collected essays on the topic of 'Language and Politics', or as one author called it, 'red semantics'.[20] Most of the earlier articles started from a rather narrow repertoire of ideas which, as the debate went on, were pondered, enlarged, and critically reviewed, and in some respects also adopted by linguistic scholars. Some arguments also found their way into academic publications.[21] Here we see the formation of a scholarly discourse which converged on several important points.

First, one feature of that discourse was a specific narrative of post-war developments in West German (political) language. This narrative basically revolved around the argument that a totalitarian language had successfully been replaced by a democratic one in the Federal Republic. Even trends in ordinary, non-political language had contributed to what could be called a new politics of consensus in post-war West Germany.[22] This included a decline in the use of regional dialects and sociolects in favour of High German, which was interpreted as a sign of an evolution towards

[20] See the volumes edited by Bergsdorf (n. 19). The essays in Kaltenbrunner (ed.), *Sprache und Herrschaft*, some of which are reprints, were widely quoted. Also Heinrich Dietz, 'Rote Semantik', ibid. 20–43. Examples of how this topic was taken up by political education are ibid. 65–74; D. Bauer, 'Begriffe gegen Inhalte: Zur semantischen Akrobatik der CDU', *Neue Gesellschaft*, 7 (1975), 564–6 (critical); Iring Fetscher and Horst Eberhart Richter (eds.), *Worte machen keine Politik: Beiträge zu einem Kampf um politische Begriffe* (Reinbek, 1976); Martin Greiffenhagen (ed.), *Kampf um Wörter? Politische Begriffe im Meinungsstreit* (Munich, 1980); Ermert (ed.), *Politische Sprache*; and id. (ed.), *Wissenschaft, Sprache, Gesellschaft: Über Kommunikationsprobleme zwischen Wissenschaft und Öffentlichkeit und Wege zu deren Überwindung, Tagung vom 18.–20. März 1982*, Loccumer Protokolle 6/1982, (Rehburg-Loccum, 1982).

[21] For academic treatments see esp. Heringer (ed.), *Holzfeuer im hölzernen Ofen*; Hugo Steger, 'Sprache im Wandel', in Wolfgang Benz (ed.), *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 3 vols. (Göttingen, 1983), iii. *Kultur*, 15–46; Stötzel, 'Semantische Kämpfe'; Erich Straßner, *Ideologie —Sprache—Politik: Grundfragen ihres Zusammenhangs* (Tübingen, 1987); Georg Stötzel and Martin Wengeler (eds.), *Kontroverse Begriffe: Geschichte des öffentlichen Sprachgebrauchs in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Berlin, 1995); Klein, 'Kann man "Begriffe besetzen"'.

[22] This differentiation was introduced later by Bergsdorf, *Herrschaft und Sprache*, 63–124; Steger, 'Sprache im Wandel'.

a more egalitarian society.[23] The old language of class society and class conflict, still dominant in the late 1940s and early 1950s, had been transformed into a new language of industrial 'social partnership' and the 'social market economy' which, it was argued, had also been embraced by the Social Democrats and trade unions during the Adenauer era. 'Language as a mirror of social evolution duplicated what had happened in the state, the economy, and society', wrote Biedenkopf, and he went on to assert that in the Adenauer era 'political language was open to alternatives without letting political antagonism become irreconcilable hostility'. This, he continued, was not least an achievement of the CDU, 'which had been acting creatively not just in political matters, but also in its use of language' by advocating, for example, the 'social market economy' and 'European integration'.[24]

The sociologist Helmut Schelsky had already anticipated this line of argument in the 1950s, when he claimed that social homogenization in West Germany had reached a stage which made it possible to describe it as a *nivellierte Mittelstandsgesellschaft*, a society in which class antagonisms had been progressively evened out to the level of a broadening middle class. In the 1970s, Schelsky was an outspoken advocate of the idea of reconquering lost ground in the field of political language. His highly polemical work entitled 'The Work is Done by Others: Class War and the Priesthood of the Intellectuals' (*Die Arbeit tun die anderen: Klassenkampf und Priesterherrschaft der Intellektuellen*, 1975) included a long chapter in which he presented the many ways in which (leftist) intellectuals were believed to have manipulated and politically instrumentalized public language for their sinister purposes. Schelsky juxtaposed this with the political language of the earlier, happier days of the Federal Republic, which he thought had created a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, a community of fate that was based not just on common experiences, but on a common language.[25]

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[23] The replacement of dialects by High German and the revival of dialects in the 1970s is an important social phenomenon that has as yet received little historical treatment. The media played an important part here. See von Polenz, *Deutsche Sprachgeschichte*, iii. *19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ch. 6.12.

[24] Biedenkopf, 'Politik und Sprache', 21; likewise Maier, *Sprache und Politik*, 9–11; see also Steger, 'Sprache im Wandel', 15–16.

[25] The book develops a conservative and pessimistic dystopia that almost turns upside down Daniel Bell's altogether optimistic ideas on the coming post-industrial 'knowledge society', in which language was to play an important role as a 'means of production' of the new information society. Helmut Schelsky, *Die Arbeit tun die anderen: Klassenkampf und*

Hans Maier took much the same line, although he was some-what more critical. He pointed to the numerous 'odd abuses in everyday language' and to the manifold tendencies to 'conceal' (*verschleiern*) social reality in the German language after 1945. But he also saw this tendency to conceal things as having a 'human-izing' effect on the language. The function of language, he claimed, was not just 'analytical exposure'; rather, 'one should keep in mind that human culture began with Adam and Eve's fig leaf and that naked truth, although much-praised nowadays, was—to quote [the Austrian writer Franz] Werfel—"the whore of the barbarian"'.[26] When Maier spoke of 'efforts to conceal' in post-war West Germany, he himself was using coded language, for he did not dare to explain openly what Germans had chiefly attempted to conceal in these years, namely, National Socialism and the Holocaust.[27]

Secondly, from a linguistic point of view the conservative narra-tives about German public language in the 1970s were all built on a more or less simple understanding of language, according to which an unequivocal relationship could be established between (political) terms and the 'real' phenomena they designated. In addi-tion, these authors asserted that terms such as 'liberty', 'democ-racy', 'representation', and the 'social state' were clearly defined by law and in the Federal Republic's constitution, the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*). It was therefore easy, in principle, to find the 'true' meaning of terms. A crude statement of this doctrine would read thus: 'Words exist to name things. They express what is. And if they succeed in this, they tell the truth.'[28] At the 1973 CDU party conference, Biedenkopf expressed this thought when he com-mended the 'clear language' of Chancellor Adenauer (who, by the way, was not renowned as an excellent speaker and certainly no

Priesterherrschaft der Intellektuellen (Cologne, 1975), 237. See also a shortened version entitled 'Macht durch Sprache', *Deutsche Zeitung*, 12 Apr. 1974, reprinted in Kaltenbrunner (ed.), *Sprache und Herrschaft*, 176–8; Bergsdorf (ed.), *Wörter als Waffen*.

[26] Maier, *Sprache und Politik*, 11.

[27] Literature on the 'culture of shame' after 1945: Raphael Gross, 'Relegating Nazism to the Past: Expressions of German Guilt in 1945 and Beyond', *German History*, 25 (2007), 219–38; Heidrun Kämper, *Der Schulddiskurs in der frühen Nachkriegszeit: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des sprachlichen Umbruchs nach 1945* (Berlin, 2005); ead., *Opfer—Täter—Nichttäter: Ein Wörterbuch zum Schulddiskurs 1945–1955* (Berlin, 2007).

[28] Helmut Kuhn, 'Despotie der Wörter: Wie man mit der Sprache die Freiheit über-wältigen kann', in Kaltenbrunner (ed.), *Sprache und Herrschaft*, 11–17, at 11; see also e.g. Heinrich Dietz, 'Rote Semantik'.

slave to High German).[29] Adenauer, the CDU delegates were told, exhibited no need to conceal his intentions behind 'a veil of nice words'; he had nothing to 'hide' and did not need intellectuals as 'administrators of political language'. On the contrary, he upset intellectuals because he made his points without having recourse to them as 'translators'.[30] Thus Biedenkopf's argument again revolved around the ideas of authenticity and disguise—with respect both to language itself and to those who used it.

Thirdly, the crucial rupture in the evolution of post-war German language came, so the conservatives' narrative went on, with the student revolt and the emergence of the New Left in the 1960s. The students and their leftist seducers and emulators, it was claimed, had caused the present-day Babylonian confusion of terms which brought the Adenauer consensus to an end, politically as well as semantically. By 'occupying' political terms and twisting their 'true' meaning, they had dominated and radically transformed public language and, along with it, perceptions of reality. In the essay derived from his speech at the party conference, Biedenkopf directed a side swipe against the media, who, in his view, had also been captured by these 'modern revolutionaries'.[31] This contention was yet another blow levelled by the CDU intellectuals against the media in an escalating conflict which was led most vehemently by, among others, Helmut Schelsky, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, influential director of the Allensbach Institute für Meinungsforschung (an important public opinion research institute), and Karl Steinbuch, a renowned expert in cybernetics and computer sciences who also spoke out against the New Left's 'clever technique of non-violent revolution'.[32] Similarly, the spearhead of German conservatism, Klaus-Gerd Kaltenbrunner, argued that the dissemination of information and

[29] Heinz Kühn, 'Konrad Adenauer und Kurt Schumacher als politische Redner', in Bernd Rebe, Klaus Lompe, and Rudolf von Thadden (eds.), *Idee und Pragmatik in der politischen Entscheidung: Alfred Kubel zum 75. Geburtstag* (Bonn, 1984), 81–93.

[30] CDU, *22. Bundesparteitag*, 62.   [31] Ibid. 22.

[32] Karl Steinbuch, *Kurskorrektur* (Stuttgart-Degerloch, 1973), 82; see also id., *Maßlos informiert: Die Enteignung des Denkens* (Munich, 1978); for the reception of Steinbuch see also Maier, *Sprache und Politik*, 27. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, 'Die Schweigespirale: Über die Entstehung der öffentlichen Meinung', in Ernst Forsthoff and Reinhard Hörstel (eds.), *Standorte im Zeitstrom: Festschrift für Arnold Gehlen zum 70. Geburtstag am 29. Januar 1974* (Frankfurt am Main, 1974), 299–330. She did not publish the much discussed book with the same title until 1980. She follows up on the American debate on the 'silent majority' with the argument that the perception of *Mehrheitsmeinungen*, the opinions of the majority as they are shaped by the mass media, determines the articulation of opinions by the majority of common people.

access to the machinery of public opinion-making had become the means by which highly developed technological societies could be ruled most effectively.[33]

Fourthly, the entire conservative discussion of public language in Germany had a twofold thrust from the start. One was a pragmatic attempt to cope with the apparent success of the Social–Liberal coalition at the expense of the Christian Democrats; the other was a more far-reaching critique of the left in general, one that dramatized personal and ideological contacts between the Social Democrats and the radical left and laid the responsibility for whatever went wrong in Germany on the student movement and youth rebellion of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The second line of reasoning became more pronounced as the left's extreme fringes turned to terrorism. Hints of this kind of reasoning were present in Biedenkopf's articles and speeches, but Hans Maier was far more explicit on this point. Again, he supported his arguments with a few astute linguistic observations. In the public utterances of the left he discovered a mechanism of escalation that started with a 'purist overstretching of terms' resulting in 'disillusion' with existing reality and 'destruction of that which was originally meant by the term'. The next step was to charge the term with a new, 'eschatological' or 'utopian' meaning (as had happened in earlier political religions), whereby the term would hold out great hopes for the future. The final point was reached when paramilitary vocabulary was used to indicate that the time was ripe to realize such hopes—the sooner the better. The polemical twist in Maier's argument, one that was more implicit than explicit, was to associate closely the Social Democrats' language of reform and their belief in the feasibility of progress (*Machbarkeitsglaube*) with the language of New Left Marxism. Its advocates, Maier argued in several different contexts, had learned a great deal in this respect from the self-proclaimed 'revolutionary' right of the Weimar Republic.[34] Other conservative polemicists were more direct in drawing such comparisons: 'in 1933 and 1967 an ideological belief forced its way, and in both cases the revolution in the real world was preceded by a revolution in language.'[35]

[33] Gerd-Klaus Kaltenbrunner, 'Schöpferischer Konservatismus und konservative Aktion heute', in id. (ed.), *Konservatismus International* (Stuttgart, 1973), 255–74, at 261; see also id. (ed.), *Die Macht der Meinungsmacher* (Munich, 1976).

[34] Maier, *Sprache und Politik*, 15, 27.

[35] Kuhn, 'Despotie der Wörter', 17; similarly Dietz, 'Rote Semantik'.

Again, the premise of this argument was that the 'ongoing revolution' de-coupled terms from their 'true meaning' and reality. In Maier's words, it was an 'alienation of political language from the norms and terms of our political order as laid down in constitutions and legal procedures'.[36] Like many other conservatives at the time, Biedenkopf and Maier, in almost identical words, bemoaned the 'triumphal march of an all-encompassing concept of society' ('Siegeszug des total gewordenen Gesellschaftsbegriffs'), regretting that 'society' had replaced 'the state' as the central reference point for political theorizing and practical politics. Similarly, they noted, terms such as 'freedom' and 'democracy' also underwent a fundamental shift in meaning when, for example, 'democracy' in the language of the left was said to have become a 'polemical concept against any attempt to consolidate the status quo by legal and parliamentary means', or when 'concepts designating an existing order' (*Ordnungsbegriffe*) were transformed into 'concepts promising a new state of things' (*Verheißungen*), as had been the case in the late Weimar Republic.[37]

The strange thing in all this reasoning was that Maier, Biedenkopf, Schelsky, and most of their intellectual followers still insisted, despite their at times shrewd dissections of past and present political struggles about the meaning of terms, that at some stage in history these terms had acquired their 'true' meaning and that, somehow, it might be possible to re-establish and re-stabilize these true meanings by strategic linguistic acts. Thus Schelsky argued that in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, public language had kept its 'constant form, that is: a common understanding of meanings and ideas', whereas today this form had been lost (implying that it should and could be regained).[38] His claim that the meanings of terms had remained undisputed right into the middle of the twentieth century (including the National Socialist regime!) was not only somewhat odd, but also incompatible with the narrative of those

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[36] Maier, *Sprache und Politik*, 12–14; Biedenkopf, 'Politik und Sprache', 22. Thus Helmut Kuhn argued that it 'makes a difference whether I say "Third Reich" or "New Society". But in the structure of an ideological profession of faith, both statements have the same value.' Kuhn, 'Despotie der Wörter', 17.

[37] Maier, *Sprache und Politik*, 13; Biedenkopf, 'Politik und Sprache', 22.

[38] Schelsky, *Die Arbeit tun die anderen*, 236. For a classic account of ideologies quite contrary to this view see Karl Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie* (1st edn. 1929; Frankfurt am Main, 1985).

who argued that 'the radicals of today pick up the work of destruction begun by the National Socialists'.[39] Such differences in chronology, however, were less important than the common belief of most critics that the distortions inflicted on political language by the left could, ultimately, be put right and semantic stability restored.

Even at the time, many saw this latter argument as somewhat naive. The philosopher Hermann Lübbe sympathized with the conservative language critics, yet he was very clear-cut and detached in his outlook on what could reasonably be expected of any attempt to recapture terms from one's political opponent. Among the conservative analysts of political language, Lübbe was the only one who accepted straight away that a state of constant struggle about the meaning of terms, not stability, was the normal case in history. Consequently, he told his fellow conservatives, the best result that linguistic strategists of any political party could hope for was a temporary advantage in their power to impress upon the public what they believed were the 'proper' meanings of terms.[40] More neutral academics in the field of linguistics were even more sceptical. In their opinion, the whole idea that terms could be 'occupied' and their true meaning defined was not much more than a badly chosen metaphor, and any attempt to put it into practice was, they believed, doomed to failure.[41]

These theoretical reflections had their own logic; they mattered little in daily political life. Within the intellectual circles around the CDU in the mid-1970s, more pragmatic positions centring on the idea of 'occupying terms' prevailed. Party members had to be committed to a common language; moreover, the persuasiveness of terms and slogans had to be established on a trial-and-error basis. Most of all, success proved the viability of an argument or a strategy, and many looked to advertising and the marketplace for analogies with their own case and that of their opponents. If companies were able to attach certain attractive images (and along with such images: ideas) to their products and thus manipulate

[39] Kuhn, 'Despotie der Wörter', 17.

[40] Hermann Lübbe, 'Das Problem der Sprache', in Hans-Georg Gadamer (ed.), *Das Problem der Sprache* (Munich, 1967), 351–71.

[41] See e.g. Steger, 'Sprache im Wandel'; Erich Straßner, '1968 und die sprachlichen Folgen', in Dieter Emig, Christoph Hüttig, and Lutz Raphael (eds.), *Sprache und Politische Kultur in der Demokratie: Hans Gerd Schumann zum Gedenken* (Frankfurt am Main, 1992), 241–60; Klein, 'Kann man "Begriffe besetzen"'.

customers into buying these products (and the ideas attached to them), should it not be possible to achieve similar results in politics? In the early 1970s, the classic German skin cream Nivea, which had traditionally been marketed in an old-fashioned blue tin, was losing ground to Creme 21 (marketed by Henkel), which was packaged in a bright orange tin and advertised in body-oriented, slightly erotic commercials. Could its success be attributed to the actual nature of the product, or to the images (and ideas) transported by the colour orange, namely, 'modernity'? How was it possible to fabricate the image of a product or to 'capture' an attractive image from another product? Self-confident advertisers boasted of their ability to make consumers buy almost any article.[42] To one of the members of the CDU task force on semantics, the public image of the party was slightly 'greasy' (*pomadig*).[43] An analogy between advertising strategies and politics could thus easily be drawn, even though in the eyes of advocates of principled positions, this was tantamount to a trivialization of politics on both sides of the political fence.

Instead of analogies with peaceful competition in the marketplace, many conservative intellectuals in the mid-1970s still preferred to use metaphors of war when suggesting what should be done. The sociologist Schelsky went as far as to borrow directly from Carl Schmitt's definition of sovereignty. For Carl Schmitt, the sovereign was he (definitely not she) who defined the state of emergency. Schelsky declared: 'Souverän ist, wer den Sachverhalt definiert' (the sovereign is he who defines the facts). As a more practical piece of advice, he added that 'empty formulas' were especially apt for those who wished to dominate: 'Leerformeln sind immer Herrschaftsformeln.'[44] For others, too, there was no alternative but to take the bull by the horns and reduce the problem to a simple question of power. 'Who interprets society?', the philosopher Günter Rohrmoser asked.[45] In the end, this

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[42] For a detailed analysis see Rainer Gries, *Produkte als Medien: Kulturgeschichte der Produktkommunikation in der Bundesrepublik und der DDR* (Leipzig, 2003), 453–560; Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Kritik der Warenästhetik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1971) is important for the contemporary debate.

[43] 'Bestimmte Zeichen', *Der Spiegel*, no. 32, 5 Aug. 1974, 48.

[44] Helmut Schelsky, 'Macht durch Sprache', 176, 177. This article was originally published as 'Macht und Sprache: Wer eine neue Politik durchsetzen will, braucht neue Worte', *Deutsche Zeitung*, 12 Apr. 1974.

[45] Günter Rohrmoser, *Revolution—unser Schicksal?* (Stuttgart, 1974), 48.

advice amounted to nothing other than 'to capture' one's opponents' terms and adopt what appeared to be their methods of 'linguistic warfare'. No doubt this says a great deal about the confrontational political culture of the 1970s, and not only in West Germany.

'Word Theft' and Post-1945 Criticism of German Public Language

One of Biedenkopf's key arguments in the period 1973 to 1975 was that the left was committing 'language robbery' or 'word theft'. The SPD, he maintained, was attempting 'systematically to establish "language barriers" that blocked the CDU's communication with the people'. The exclusion of individuals and groups from the chance to participate in society was a broadly discussed theme at the time; after all, the political, economic, and social inclusion of groups who had formerly been disadvantaged was a favoured topic in the Social Democratic programme.[46] Biedenkopf now turned the accusation of practising exclusion against the SPD itself, albeit with a specific twist. In usurping certain highly valued political key terms for its own exclusive use, the SPD, according to Biedenkopf, not only made the opposing party appear as if it had no positive agenda of its own but, what was more, left it literally 'speechless' because it could no longer express its thoughts without constantly adopting the SPD's vocabulary and the ideas transported with it.[47] As if to illustrate this dilemma faced by the CDU, Biedenkopf demanded 'equal opportunities' (*Chancengleichheit*)—which was precisely one of those highly valued key terms 'occupied' by the SPD. Biedenkopf thus involuntarily demonstrated how difficult it was to introduce alternative terms, such as *Chancengerechtigkeit* ('fair distribution of opportunities'), the term officially recommended by the CDU to replace the more egalitarian-sounding *Chancengleichheit*.[48]

In Germany, the accusation of 'language robbery' and the underlying sentiment of being silenced and shut off from public

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[46] Bernhard Badura, *Sprachbarrieren: Zur Soziologie der Kommunikation* (2nd edn. Stuttgart, 1973).   [47] Biedenkopf, 'Politik und Sprache', 28.
[48] Ibid. 29; for usage of the term 'Chancengerechtigkeit' see e.g. Bernhard Vogel, 'Kurskorrektur für die Schulpolitik', in id. (ed.), *Neue Bildungspolitik*, 91–118, at 96–7; Silke Hahn, 'Zwischen Re-education und zweiter Bildungsreform: Die Sprache der Bildungspolitik in der öffentlichen Diskussion', in Stötzel and Wengeler (eds.), *Kontroverse Begriffe*, 163–209, at 180–1.

debate is part of another, older tradition that goes back at least
to 1945. It is linked to debates which dealt with continuities of
National Socialist language in post-war Germany and were con-
ducted under the general heading of 'language criticism'
(*Sprachkritik*). *Sprachkritik* exhibited many facets in Germany. As in
other countries, it was concerned with grammatically incorrect or
improper usage of language and words. More important than
these aspects, however, was the critique of what later became
known as 'politically incorrect' speech, in particular, the use of
Nazi vocabulary or words and phrases that had acquired specific
'inhumane' meanings during the years of National Socialist rule in
Germany. *Sprachkritik* in this sense was a political act. It was, as
the linguist Jürgen Heringer put it, 'a continuation of politics by
better means'.[49] *Sprachkritik*, in the eyes of its practitioners, played
an essential part in the process of denazification and democrati-
zation after 1945.

Eradicating Nazi language from any public debate was one
point on the agenda; finding and establishing a new public and
more 'civil' language was the other. Immediately after 1945, the
eradication of the old vocabulary and the establishment of a new
one were closely linked to programmes of 'denazification' and 're-
education' in both Western and Eastern occupation zones.[50] In
the months and years immediately following the war, censorship of
language became a highly controversial issue and was subtly
inscribed into German political culture. It is not surprising to see
that sensitivity to the improper use of language was spread
unevenly in post-war society. Those who had been treated as 'out-
siders' by the *Volksgemeinschaft* were more prone to see semantic
continuity than those who had been 'insiders', irrespective of
whether they had been Nazi enthusiasts or hangers-on. American
press officers were shocked to realize that Nazi words, phrases, and
stereotypes had survived military defeat and were still being used,
mechanically and unscrupulously. For example, immediately after

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[49] For an overview of German *Sprachkritik* see Hans Jürgen Heringer, 'Sprachkritik—die
Fortsetzung der Politik mit besseren Mitteln', in id. (ed.), *Holzfeuer im hölzernen Ofen*.

[50] Georg Stötzel, 'Die frühe Nachkriegszeit', in id. and Wengeler (eds.), *Kontroverse Begriffe*,
19–34; id., 'Der Nazi-Komplex', ibid. 355–82; Konrad Ehlich, '"... LTI, LQI, ... ": Von
der Unschuld der Sprache und der Schuld der Sprechenden', in Heidrun Kämper and
Hartmut Schmidt (eds.), *Das 20. Jahrhundert: Sprachgeschichte—Zeitgeschichte* (Berlin, 1998),
275–303, at 280; Jürgen Schiewe, 'Wege der Sprachkritik nach 1945', in Martin Wengeler
(ed.), *Deutsche Sprachgeschichte nach 1945: Diskurs- und kulturgeschichtliche Perspektiven. Beiträge einer
Tagung anlässlich der Emeritierung Georg Stötzels* (Hildesheim, 2003), 125–38.

the war, a city official in Munich declared that the devastation of the Jewish cemetery in that city was a 'problem for which an *Endlösung* (final solution) had to be found'.

The same feeling was shared by many contemporaries. The newly founded political and cultural magazines of the immediate post-war period were full of articles proposing a 'new language' (odd as both the arguments and the language were).[51] It was in this atmosphere that, after 1945, Dolf Sternberger, Gerhard Storz, and Wilhelm Süskind published a series of articles in the journal *Die Wandlung* under the heading 'Wörterbuch des Unmenschen' (Dictionary of the Non-Human). At a glance, they argued, words such as *Auftrag* (mission), *Betreuung* (taking care of), *tragbar/untragbar* (acceptable/unacceptable), or *Raum* (space) seemed altogether harmless. During the Third Reich, however, these words had been stripped of their earlier innocence. They were now tainted and imbued with Nazi ideology to a degree which, in their view, made it impossible to use them as innocent words any longer. When in 1957 the three authors collected their earlier articles in a book, they saw no reason for optimism about the progress made in purifying the German language of such tainted words. On the contrary, they wrote, 'no pure and new, no more decent and flexible, no more friendly language has developed; to the present day the ordinary, nay the dominant way of using our German language still relies on these remnants [of Nazi language]'.[52]

A similar point was made by the famous contemporary observer of the *Lingua Tertii Imperii* (Language of the Third Reich, LTI), Victor Klemperer, a professor of Romance literature who had been chased out of office by the Nazis because of his 'non-Aryan' descent, but survived the regime thanks to his marriage with a Christian woman. 'Words', Klemperer wrote in an often quoted line, are like 'tiny doses of arsenic; they are swallowed inadvertently, they don't appear to have any effect, but after a while, the

[51] Urs Widmer, *1945 oder die 'Neue Sprache': Studien zur Prosa der 'Jungen Generation'* (Düsseldorf, 1966); see also Martin H. Geyer, 'Am Anfang war . . . die Niederlage: Die Anfänge der bundesdeutschen Moderne nach 1945', in Inka Mülder-Bach and Eckhard Schumacher (eds.), *Am Anfang war. . . : Ursprungsfiguren und Anfangskonstruktionen der Moderne* (Munich, 2008), 279–306.

[52] Dolf Sternberger, Gerhard Storz, and Wilhelm E. Süskind (eds.), *Aus dem Wörterbuch des Unmenschen: Neue erweiterte Ausgabe mit Zeugnissen des Streits über die Sprachkritik* (Hamburg, 1957), 10; see also Manfred Gawlina, 'Dolf Sternberger 1907–1989', in Wilhelm Blum and Michael Rupp, *Politische Philosophen* (Munich, 1997), 269–307; Schiewe, *Macht der Sprache*, 227–34.

poisonous effect is indeed there.'[53] Klemperer recorded in great detail the ways in which Nazi language worked its way into everyday social relations during the regime, and how it was perpetuated after the defeat. This continuity, Klemperer noted with dismay, was not only happening in the West, but also in the Eastern occupation zone under its officially 'anti-fascist' rulers. Klemperer, who had become a member of the Communist Party after the war, was struck by the similarities between 'Nazi and Bolshevik language' in East Germany.[54]

Both Sternberger and Klemperer presented a strong case for purging the German language of what they considered Nazi terminology and speech. If this were not done, ran the argument, the National Socialist uses of language—and with it, National Socialism—would be catapulted from the past back into the present. The LTI vocabulary needed to be buried in a 'mass grave', argued Klemperer with the help of rather macabre imagery.[55] Purging the tainted terms from language use was said to be the prerequisite for purging Nazi ideology and *Weltanschauung* from society as a whole. 'The depravity of a language is the depravity of a people,' Sternberger said.[56] Where the argument was pressed to the extreme, it was even suggested that the German language was so badly infested with Nazi terms and phraseology that it could hardly any longer be used in a sensible way. Even those who wished to give the German language a new lease of life after 1945 often fell into the trap of using the very language they criticized.[57]

Klemperer's and Sternberger's calls to purge German vocabulary did not go uncriticized. In the early years after the war, unrepentant German nationalists and conservatives saw such demands as just another aspect of the ill-advised attempts to re-educate, censor, and preach to the defeated German people. More important and intellectually more challenging were the objections raised

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[53] Victor Klemperer, *LTI: Notizbuch eines Philologen* (1st edn. Berlin, 1947; Halle, 1957), 21; Dirk Deissler, 'The Nazis May Almost be Said to have "Invented" a New German Language: Der anglo-amerikanische Diskurs über nationalsozialistischen Sprachgebrauch im Zweiten Weltkrieg und in der Besatzungszeit', in Wengeler (ed.), *Deutsche Sprachgeschichte nach 1945*, 319–37.

[54] Ehlich, 'LTI, LQI', 287–8; Schiewe, *Macht der Sprache*, 209–27.

[55] Klemperer, *LTI.*

[56] Dolf Sternberger, 'Gute Sprache und böse Sprache: Zehn Thesen', *Neue Rundschau* (1963), 403–14, at 412.

[57] Many examples can be found in Widmer, *1945 oder die 'Neue Sprache'.*

against Sternberger (less so against Klemperer) by academic linguists beginning in the early 1960s. Sternberger's style of *Sprachkritik* was denounced by them as mere 'feuilleton', 'a pastime for amateurs', and a type of moralizing. Armed with arguments drawn from modern structuralist linguistics, critics such as the young Peter von Polenz argued that words did not simply reflect reality; rather, the meaning of terms constituted itself and changed continuously while they were being used. According to Polenz, Sternberger's idea that ordinary German words such as *Auftrag*, *Betreuung*, or *Raum* were forever contaminated just because the Nazis had used them in a particular way was erroneous. However, words such as *Untermensch* or *Zinsknechtschaft*, which had been coined by the National Socialists or were so closely associated with their ideology that no one could be mistaken about their meaning, were a different matter.[58] It is interesting that Polenz also emphasized the necessity to defend the 'common folk' against the arrogance of intellectual critics such as the writer and essayist Hans Magnus Enzensberger. Enzensberger had mocked the use of 'inhumane' Nazi language by people 'sitting in German commuter trains' using stock phrases and expressions such as 'bis zur Vergasung etwas tun' ('doing something to the point of being "gassed"', that is, to the utmost).[59] Basing his argument on the findings of linguistic structuralism, Polenz rejected Sternberger's belief that certain 'words necessarily contained' recollections of National Socialism. Therefore it would be wrong to accuse 'ordinary language-users, workers "in commuter trains" of being guilty of failing memories or cynicism'.[60]

Taking the same line, Konrad Ehlich has argued more recently that the authors of the 'Wörterbuch des Unmenschen' had made 'language itself into an actor'. By doing so, he said, they made use of a conception of language that had also informed Goebbels's propaganda; theirs was a conception of language 'that fatally resembled the one which they were about to criticize from good

[58] Hans Jürgen Heringer, 'Der Streit um die Sprachkritik: Dialog mit Peter von Polenz im Februar 1981', in id. (ed.), *Holzfeuer im hölzernen Ofen*, 161–75, at 165; Peter von Polenz, 'Sprachkritik und Sprachwissenschaft', *Neue Rundschau*, 74 (1963), 391–403.

[59] Thus Polenz looking back to the debate in the early 1960s, repeating his own position. Polenz, 'Sprachkritik und Sprachwissenschaft'; Heringer, 'Der Streit um die Sprachkritik', 165–6.

[60] Ibid. One might draw parallels with structuralist interpretations of the Nazi regime such as Nicolas Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker: Erforschung und Erinnerung* (Göttingen, 2003).

motives and the best intentions'. Ehlich maintains that their form
of *Sprachkritik* demonstrates better than anything else what he sus-
pects to be their 'naive' understanding of Nazi ideology, in partic-
ular, their confusion of language with 'reality'.[61] It is noteworthy
that many linguists were critical of the political controversy initi-
ated by the CDU for very similar reasons. For some of them, the
conservative language campaign smacked of old-style *Sprachkritik*;
for others, the CDU critics were wrong because they made a
simple equation between words and the world, and implied that
the latter could be transformed solely by exchanging the former.

From a historical point of view, however, it is hard to overlook
that those authors in the 1950s and 1960s who criticized the con-
tinuation of Nazi language were indeed contributing to *some*
changes in German public language, though perhaps not always
in the way they had intended. The use of language mattered;
recasting the political and cultural life of post-war Germany was
a matter of finding a new language. What might, in any case, be
attributed to the efforts of the practitioners of *Sprachkritik* of what-
ever political persuasion is a growing sensitivity among the
German public to the fact that words can 'do' certain things
(harm other people, for example), even if the speaker does not
intend to do so—in other words, a sensitivity to what nowadays is
called (mostly with negative connotations) 'political correctness'.
To be sure, it is far from easy to demonstrate exactly how
Sprachkritik contributed to linguistic change,[62] especially if we cling
to the somewhat narrow models of linguistic structuralism. Yet it
is impossible to deny that from the early 1960s on almost all
sectors of West German society were far from a consensus on lan-
guage; instead, Germany was immersed in fierce controversies
about the 'proper' or 'improper' use of words and terms to
describe the past, present, and future. West Germany's mod-
ernism thrived on these efforts, as the debates in the fine arts,
music, the aesthetics of everyday life, and various academic fields,
including history, show. More often than not, these controversies
merged with social and political movements that attacked the
proverbial 'stuffiness' of the Adenauer era and engaged in new
forms of political and social expression. Equally important was
the fact that a broad spectrum of intellectuals closely observed

[61] Ehlich, 'LTI, LQI', 287.   [62] Schiewe, 'Wege der Sprachkritik', 134.

the use of language and speech, and expressed their concerns in critical reviews of culture, language, and morality.[63] Linguistic continuities were closely monitored, regardless of where they were found, whether in connection with new debates over 'degenerate art', the so-called *Spiegel* affair of the early 1960s, or German history, to name just a few examples.[64]

Public sensitivity to the use of terms in West Germany increased considerably starting in the late 1950s. In some respects, this sensitivity was stimulated by critical impulses from abroad, but it also had roots in a long-standing German academic discussion on the history of concepts. Sparked by debates on Germany's recent past in the early decades of the Federal Republic, concepts and their meanings became the object of critical revisions whose history can be traced back to the age of the Enlightenment or other, less progressive, traditions.[65] One example is Theodor W. Adorno's polemical work *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit: Zur deutschen Ideologie* (1964), in which he attacked Martin Heidegger's irrational and pseudo-individualistic language of *Erhabenheit* (grandeur) laced with that of existentialism. For Adorno, Heidegger's jargon was prototypical of that of many other post-war German philosophers or would-be philosophers. Adorno claimed that it was not only blind to the realities of war and, worse, to the extermination of the Jews, but was, in its entirety, the successor of Nazi language.[66]

Almost obsessively, all reflection on language began or ended with National Socialism. As Peter von Polenz noted, it reached the point where people were soon unable to distinguish between outright 'Nazi language' and ordinary 'language used in the Third Reich', between the real vocabulary of the 'Dictionary of the Non-Human', and the *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit*, between 'the everyday language of a bureaucratized world' and 'the frozen language'.[67]

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[63] Rainer Wimmer, 'Überlegungen zu den Aufgaben und Methoden einer linguistisch begründeten Sprachkritik', in Heringer (ed.), *Holzfeuer im hölzernen Ofen*, 290–313, at 290; Steger, 'Sprache im Wandel', 17.　　　　[64] Stötzel, 'Der Nazi-Komplex', 358–9.

[65] In my essay 'Im Schatten der NS-Zeit' I suggest that conceptual history was all about redefining national history after the 'catastrophe' of 1945; for the obsession with *Begriffsgeschichte* see also Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Dimensionen und Grenzen der Begriffsgeschichte* (Munich, 2006).

[66] Theodor W. Adorno, *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit: Zur deutschen Ideologie* (1st edn. 1964; 6th edn. Frankfurt am Main, 1971).

[67] Peter von Polenz, 'Sprachkritik und Sprachnormenkritik', in Heringer (ed.), *Holzfeuer im hölzernen Ofen*, 70–93, at 82; in addition to the above-mentioned books by Sternberger and Klemperer, the references pertain to Adorno, *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit*; Karl Korn, *Sprache*

While there was consensus that 'real' Nazi vocabulary and those euphemisms with which they had designated their extermination policies, such as *Sonderbehandlung* (special treatment), should disappear, this consensus ended when critics such as Sternberger or Adorno depicted continuities. If Sternberger was right, and ordinary German words such as *echt* (pure) or *Anliegen* (concern) were tainted with National Socialist ideology, where could the enquiry stop? Was it possible to use the German language? Was there not a long linguistic continuity encompassing all aspects of life, reaching back at least into the nineteenth century, leading to conformism, fascism, and war? If one started to think along these lines, the 'Wörterbuch des Unmenschen' needed to be considerably expanded—thus ran the argument, also of Peter von Polenz. It should then certainly include such terms as 'Ehre, Treue, Pflicht, Opfer und Schicksal' (honour, loyalty, duty, sacrifice, and fate); it should include archaisms such as 'das deutsche Schwert' (the German sword), and collective singular forms such as 'der deutsche Soldat', 'der Deutsche', 'der Jude', and 'der Russe' (*the* German soldier, *the* German, *the* Jew, *the* Russian).[68] It is noteworthy that Polenz wrote this in 1973, the same year in which German conservatives lamented having lost 'their' language and claimed that they did not even dare to use the word 'conservative' anymore.[69]

The almost obsessive treatment of concepts and key terms in the German language can be seen in other areas. There may be no explicit references between these expressions of fear at the imminent loss of German words for everyday use and the academic enterprise of *Begriffsgeschichte* (history of concepts) launched at about the same time by Reinhart Koselleck and his colleagues (the first volume of the dictionary *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* appeared in 1972). Yet this huge academic enterprise by Koselleck and others thrived on the belief of West German historians that it was necessary to clarify the meanings of contested terms. Historicization of German key political and social terms and their meanings was the main purpose of that enterprise, although the focus of the dictionary was, in general, on the period of transition (*Sattelzeit*) between the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth

in einer verwalteten Welt (Freiburg, 1958); and Friedrich Handt, *Deutsch, gefrorene Sprache in einem gefrorenen Land* (Berlin, 1964).

[68] Polenz, 'Sprachkritik und Sprachnormenkritik', 82–3.
[69] Schelsky, *Die Arbeit tun die anderen*, 248.

centuries.[70] Despite this different chronological focus, however, it was certainly no comfort to conservatives, who were looking for some sort of stable world view anchored in traditional concepts, to see that no such concepts existed without an ever-changing and ever-contested history behind them.

The Year 1968, or the Great Delusion of Language

In his polemic against left-wing intellectuals in 1975, Helmut Schelsky identified yet another form of 'word theft'. He claimed that the new academic generation was robbing 'anal speech' from the 'average guy on the street'.[71] With the advent of 'dirty speech', we can discern a characteristic type of spoken language: provocative political slogans mingled with ordinary language and violent imagery directed against objects and people. This kind of 'dirty speech' and, a few years later, 'kaputte Sprachen' (wrecked languages) used by the *Spontis* were disturbing phenomena, regardless of whether they were interpreted as outgrowths of a fundamental shift in values, evidence of the emergence of new youth cultures bereft of bourgeois virtues, or the breeding ground of anarchism and violence.[72] The estrangement from established norms of speech and formalities of writing can be seen as the mere tip of the iceberg, a sign not only of a fundamental estrangement from bourgeois values but also of conventions of speech in the post-war period. The jargons of the various strands of Marxism, including that of the Frankfurt School, psychoanalysis, feminism, environmentalism, and the social sciences in general permeated public

[70] See the introduction to this volume by Willibald Steinmetz; Reinhart Koselleck and Christoph Dipper, 'Reinhart Koselleck im Gespräch mit Christoph Dipper: Begriffsgeschichte, Sozialgeschichte, begriffene Geschichte', *Neue politische Literatur*, 43 (1998), 187–205; Gumbrecht, *Dimensionen und Grenzen*.

[71] Schelsky, *Die Arbeit tun die anderen*, 248.

[72] There are many descriptions of the various ideological strands and characteristics of the language of the left: Wolfgang Kraushaar, 'Denkmodelle der 68er-Bewegung', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 22/3 (2001), 14–27; Siegfried Jäger, 'Linke Wörter: Einige Bemerkungen zur Sprache der APO', *Muttersprache: Vierteljahresschrift für deutsche Sprache*, 80 (1970), 85–106; Andreas von Weiss, *Schlagwörter der Neuen Linken: Die Agitation der Sozialrevolutionäre* (Munich, 1974); Straßner, '1968 und die sprachlichen Folgen'; Matthis Dienstag, 'Provinz aus dem Kopf: Neue Nachrichten über die Metropolen-Spontis', in Peter Brückner and Wolfgang Kraushaar (eds.), *Autonomie oder Getto? Kontroversen über die Alternativbewegung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1978), 148–86; Herbert Stubenrauch, '"Scheiße, irgendwie blick ich da halt nicht mehr so durch . . .": Eine philologische Miniatur über die Sprache der Sponti-Linken', *PÄD.extra*, 3 (1978), 44–7.

happenings and university seminars. This was tantamount to cre-
ating new hybrid forms of language, some of which became prac-
tically incomprehensible to outsiders; it was not just conservatives
who felt shut off from public and academic discourse and rele-
gated to the position of observers. More disconcerting was the fact
that by the mid-1970s a general denunciation of almost everything
was all that was left of the critical questioning of terms that had
helped to drive the student movement a decade earlier. This was
the environment in which the new conservative language critique
originated.

This development took place with almost breathtaking speed,
starting with the emergence of the student movement. The earlier
language criticism became more radical, and some of the earlier
practitioners of *Sprachkritik*, such as Sternberger, were estranged if
not silenced.[73] The student movement was obsessed with the lega-
cies and continuities of Nazism or 'fascism', as it now became
common to say. For the radical critics there was no topic in con-
temporary society that was not related to this past. A seemingly
endless contestation and denunciation of terms occurred in a new
setting that featured a highly performative way of speaking and
writing and, most surprisingly for contemporaries, a *prise de parole*
(M. Certeau) by way of 'sit-ins', 'go-ins', street theatre perform-
ances, and similar events. The fact that the act of speaking is a
form of social and communicative action was certainly not a new
theoretical finding, but it was no accident that this idea attracted
a great deal of attention under these particular circumstances.[74]

The student movement did not speak about language in the
abstract, but criticized individual uses of speech by politicians,

[73] See von Polenz's observation with respect to Sternberger who taught at the
University of Heidelberg; Heringer, 'Der Streit um die Sprachkritik', 164.

[74] Michel de Certeau, *La Prise de parole: Pour une nouvelle culture* (Paris, 1968); Hermann
Lübbe, 'Sein und Heißen: Bedeutungsgeschichte als politisches Sprachhandlungsfeld', in
Reinhart Koselleck (ed.), *Historische Semantik und Begriffsgeschichte* (Stuttgart, 1978), 334–57;
on *Sprechhandlungen* (speech acts), which otherwise play a minor part in *Geschichtliche
Grundbegriffe*, see Reinhart Koselleck, 'Sozialgeschichte und Begriffsgeschichte', in Wolfgang
Schieder and Volker Sellin (eds.), *Sozialgeschichte in Deutschland: Entwicklungen und Perspektiven
im internationalen Zusammenhang*, 4 vols. (Göttingen, 1986–7), i. *Die Sozialgeschichte innerhalb der
Geschichtswissenschaft* (1986), 89–109, at 94; Josef Kopperschmidt, 'Der politische Kampf ums
Heißen', in Oswald Panagl (ed.), *Fahnenwörter der Politik* (Vienna, 1998), 151–68; Josef
Kopperschmidt, '1968 oder "die Lust am Reden": Über die revolutionären Folgen einer
Scheinrevolution', *Muttersprache: Vierteljahresschrift für deutsche Sprache*, 110 (2000), 1–12;
Straßner, '1968 und die sprachlichen Folgen'; Martin Wengeler, '"1968" als sprach-
geschichtliche Zäsur', in Stötzel and Wengeler (eds.), *Kontroverse Begriffe*, 383–404.

industrialists, and professors, past and present. This may be seen, for example, in Wolfgang Fritz Haug's often cited work *Der hilflose Antifaschismus* (1967), which in many respects reformulated ideas found in Adorno's *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit*. In this work Haug, who was also the editor of the leftist journal *Das Argument*, offered a close reading of the language used by German university professors in the mid-1960s when they undertook to lecture on National Socialism, often in response to student demand. Haug's main point was that these academics seemed absolutely 'helpless' when searching for an adequate new language in which to speak on the topic. He ridiculed these professors, who had pursued their careers during the Third Reich and had sometimes been actively involved in the Nazi system, and now tried to come to terms with it using language that strikingly resembled the language they had been using at the celebrations of the Nazi regime itself. For example, when they spoke of the 'Blutzeugen der Weißen Rose' they were using a term which the Nazis had reserved for their own 'martyrs' (*Blutzeuge*) of the Hitler putsch of 1923 in order to express their respect for the sacrifices of the resistance movement Weiße Rose.[75] Another object of Haug's scorn was the jargon of German *Innerlichkeit* (introspection) in general and, in particular, the emotional proximity of tone between expressions of enthusiasm (*for* Nazism) before 1945 and expressions of outrage (*against* Nazism) in the 1960s: 'The contemptuous still have much to learn. Their "no" and their expressions of outrage are still very close to their "yes" to fascism.' And he added a quotation from Eric Voegelin, who was making the same point: '"That is atrocious"—that is what those who then said: "That is wonderful" can say today.'[76]

Adorno and Haug were often emulated by left-wing students who wanted to target Establishment figures by criticizing their language. The man most revered by the students and most abhorred by the conservatives was Herbert Marcuse. The German-American philosopher became a guru of the student movement, perhaps in no small measure because of his role as an outspoken anti-Nazi and ersatz father figure for this generation. His intellectual roots were to be found in the ideological and

[75] Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Der hilflose Antifaschismus: Zur Kritik der Vorlesungsreihen über Wissenschaft und Nationalsozialismus an den deutschen Universitäten* (Frankfurt am Main, 1967), 17–24.   [76] Ibid. 24.

conflictual inter-war period (not unlike those of Carl Schmitt).
Marcuse's biography as a victim of fascism placed him in a posi-
tion to help bridge the gap dividing the American and European
left. For Marcuse, too, language criticism was an essential part of
his general critique of society. Arguing that the 'dominant lan-
guage was but the language of the dominating classes', he main-
tained that language was the most 'subtle form of oppression'. If,
however, language was nothing but the armour of the
Establishment, then this very language had to be challenged;
words needed to be liberated and newly appropriated in an effort
to create a new consciousness: 'When the radical opposition devel-
ops its own language, it is protesting spontaneously and uncon-
sciously against one of the most effective "secret weapons" of
domination and defamation. The ruling language of law and
order, declared valid by the courts and the police, is not only the
voice of oppression, it is also the *act* of oppression. Language not
only defines and condemns the enemy, it creates him as well.'
Therefore revolution, in order to be effective, had to extend to
language by appropriating it and turning it against the ruling
class. It should not come as a surprise that Marcuse's words were
picked up by conservative critics.[77]

Marcuse's ideas fitted well with the rebelling students' belief
that consciousness could be changed and authorities rocked by
unconventional actions and, in particular, verbal attacks. His ideas
were also a good reflection of a much broader contemporary pre-
occupation with questioning everything and everyone in order to
'contribute to the emancipation of our society' or to expose
'manipulation through political speech . . . or through advertis-
ing', a preoccupation that also pervaded linguistics and other
academic disciplines at the time.[78] Even the German Catholic
Church was hit by this unruly attitude of questioning. A group of
'leftist pious' followers attending the 1968 Catholic Convention in
Essen successfully introduced a resolution stating that Catholics

[77] Clemens Albrecht, Günter C. Behrmann, Michael Bock, Harald Homann, and
Friedrich H. Tenbruck, *Die intellektuelle Gründung der Bundesrepublik: Eine Wirkungsgeschichte der
Frankfurter Schule* (Frankfurt, 1999), esp. ch. 11; Herbert Marcuse, *Versuch über die Befreiung*
(Frankfurt, 1969), 22, 110. There are many references to this book; see e.g. Wengeler,
'"1968" als sprachgeschichtliche Zäsur', 387–8; and Bergsdorf, *Politik und Sprache*, 237–8;
for a good analysis also of other texts by Marcuse, see Kopperschmidt, '1968 oder "die
Lust am Reden"', 4–7.

[78] Franz Januscheck, *Sprache als Objekt: 'Sprechhandlungen' in Werbung, Kunst und Linguistik*
(Kronberg im Taunus, 1976), 6–7.

could not accept the 'demand for obedience with regard to the papal decision on the question of methods of contraception' and that the Pope needed to submit his doctrine to 'a fundamental revision'.[79] For the above-mentioned Catholic Hans Maier, these were the kinds of incidents that prompted his observations on the 'purist overstretching' of terms and the destruction of the existing order after the use of such terms.[80]

Another worrying aspect of linguistic change, also noted at the time by observers on the left, was changes in the discourse of violence. Expressions such as 'destroy that which destroys you' ('macht kaputt was Euch kaputt macht') and 'violence against objects' ('Gewalt gegen Sachen') were widely used, thus implying that this was a kind of legitimate violence. By the early 1970s, a mixture of radicalized speech and action could be experienced in many different places: in university classrooms, where it caused frustration and shock among an entire generation of professors; in the house-squatting movement in urban centres, where it caused bitter skirmishes and hostile confrontations with local police; in radical factory cells, where it disconcerted management and conservative unions alike; and, not least, in the embrace of violence by a segment of the protest movement, where it caused increasingly vicious acts of terrorism.[81] The language of violence which accompanied all these actions soon led to splits within the movements of the left,[82] and this was picked up by their conservative critics who, like Maier, were quick to draw parallels between the polemical writings of the terrorist Red Army Faction (Rote Armee Fraktion) and the way in which writers such as Ernst Jünger had praised violence in the years before National Socialism. In a public exchange with the writer Heinrich Böll in 1974, Maier referred not only to the murders committed by the Rote Armee Fraktion, but also to the suicides of some of his

[79] Christoph Kleßmann, *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation: Deutsche Geschichte 1955–1970* (Bonn, 1997), 284.   [80] Maier, *Sprache und Politik*, 20.

[81] For a good survey and different aspects, see the essays in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 44 (2004); Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus*, 2 vols. (Hamburg 2006).

[82] The critical account by the editor of the magazine *konkret* and former husband of Ulrike Meinhof is not necessarily reliable, but very informative: 'Everything that the Baader-Meinhof group translated into blood reality, not shying away from claiming human victims, had already been foreshadowed trivially somewhere in a flyer or underground newspaper produced in a Kreuzberg backyard.' Klaus Rainer Röhl, *Fünf Finger sind keine Faust: Eine Abrechnung* (1st edn. 1974; repr. Munich, 1998), 228; see also Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Die Bombe im Jüdischen Gemeindehaus* (Hamburg, 2005).

friends and colleagues who had been verbally attacked.[83] The marked increase in terrorist violence gave the public debate on language in the mid-1970s its acidity, the more so as 'violence against objects' increasingly turned into 'violence against people'. The climax came in the autumn of 1977 when an anonymous student at Göttingen University, calling himself 'Mescalero', wrote in a leaflet of his 'klammheimliche Freude' (secret joy) at the murder of Attorney General Siegfried Buback that year. Cynically he expressed his regret that 'this face [Buback's] need no longer appear in the small red-and-black album of criminals . . . that we will publish after the revolution'. The author also included a few passages in which he expressed a more critical view of the use of violence ('Our path to socialism or, if you prefer, to anarchy, should not be paved with corpses'), but these passages paled by comparison with the overall cynical tone.[84]

Early on, it was not just conservative observers who noted the delusions of some members of the student movement that stemmed from its own language. As early as 1969, Jürgen Habermas accused radicals of exhibiting signs of 'leftist fascism', and confusing linguistic and symbolic actions with reality. It was a sign of insanity, said Habermas, to interpret the act of occupying a university as a real seizure of power, analogous to the storming of the Bastille, as some student leaders did.[85] Habermas compared the new activism to that of 1848 utopian socialism, and that of Georges Sorel and Benito Mussolini, whose origins both lay in the left. There can be no doubt that the analogy with National Socialism and the linguistic delusions that befell Germans during the Third Reich played an important part, if only implicitly, in these debates and within the left itself. The older generation of the Frankfurt School was quite outspoken in this respect; for Max Horkheimer, the anti-Americanism of the German student movement fulfilled 'more or less the function of anti-Semitism'.[86]

If Habermas and Horkheimer dwelled on the illusions and

[83] This correspondence with Böll is reprinted in Maier, *Sprache und Politik*, 29–43, at 38.

[84] 'Buback: Ein Nachruf', reprinted in Utz Maas, *Sprachpolitik und politische Sprachwissenschaft: Sieben Studien* (Göttingen, 1989), 305–9, at 305, 308.

[85] Jürgen Habermas, 'Die Scheinrevolution und ihre Kinder: Sechs Thesen über Taktik, Ziele und Situationsanalysen der oppositionellen Jugend', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 5 June 1968, reprinted in id. (ed.), *Protestbewegung und Hochschulreform* (Frankfurt am Main, 1969), 188–201.

[86] Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, xiv. 444, quoted in Albrecht, Behrmann, Bock, Homann, and Tenbruck, *Die intellektuelle Gründung*, 324.

delusions of radical language, conservatives were infatuated with the issue of power, much like Marcuse. 'Ist das Reich der Vorstellung erst revolutioniert, so hält die Wirklichkeit nicht mehr stand' (once the realm of imagination has been revolutionized, reality cannot hold out for long): these are the words not of Marcuse, but of Hegel, as quoted by Kurt Biedenkopf.[87] Even more curious (and verging on the tautological) is the invocation of the 'power of language' by Wolfgang Bergsdorf:

The role of key terms in history demonstrates that the power-holders and the power-seekers are equally interested in using language for their own political purposes. Thus language becomes a factor of power because the powerful and those who want to become powerful consider language as a factor of power. The language of politics becomes a language of power. Whoever is powerful tries to prescribe the 'right' usage of words. Only those who have powerful positions are powerful. People who are capable of enforcing the content and the use of words also possess power.[88]

This passage was not meant as a satire on Marcuse; just the opposite. It illustrates yet again how obsessively some conservatives chose to adopt the notion that terms could be 'occupied' and 'reoccupied' from the New Left.[89]

At an academic level, the problem raised by the experience of the 'power of language' in the late 1960s led to more far-reaching theoretical debates, and not just in Germany. 'Symbolic power is the power to create things with words', argued Pierre Bourdieu and, with explicit reference to E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, he added that in order to change the world, all social groups have to attempt to '"make" and remake the world'. Although this sounds like the standard fare of the linguistic turn in the social sciences, Bourdieu also stressed the power of the

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[87] Biedenkopf, 'Politik und Sprache', 23; see also Kopperschmidt, '1968 oder "die Lust am Reden"', 6.

[88] Wolfgang Bergsdorf, 'Einführung', in id. (ed.), *Wörter als Waffen*, 7–14, at 10.

[89] Thus in 1992, the linguist Erich Straßner, not an advocate of the political left, came to the conclusion when looking back at the work of the CDU task force on semantics in the 1970s that it had accepted 'the principle which had already been used by the National Socialists before 1933 against other parties', namely, 'to adopt the catchwords and key-words of the SPD, to twist them semantically and integrate them into the ideological and political context of their own party'. Ironically, in order to make this point, Straßner quoted almost verbatim the earlier accusations directed by Maier and Biedenkopf against the New Left's adoption of National Socialist strategies. See Straßner, '1968 und die sprachlichen Folgen', 250.

'objective world', the construction of which stood in a dialectical relationship with language: 'only if the concepts of a new language are true, that is, conform to things, can the new language create a new description of things.'[90] Yet, who was to define what was 'true' and what not?

The Conservative prise de parole

In 1979, a decade after Jürgen Habermas had accused the rebellious students of 'leftist fascism', he found himself again expressing his incredulity, this time at the conservatives who seemed to share some of the naive ideas on the power of language that had once been harboured by some within the New Left.[91] Again, politicians who wanted to win the next election did not much care about Habermas's theoretical subtleties. Closer to their concerns was Hermann Lübbe's advice that only in 'de-politicized semantic spaces' such as an Oxford college or a university seminar on philosophy was it possible to observe the Aristotelian rule that disputes about words were futile. In the political space, Lübbe said, 'the person who gives in is not always the more intelligent', for he/she 'leaves to the political opponent a monopoly on defining the purposes for which the disputed words become catchwords'.[92] This was more to the taste of Biedenkopf and his followers when they set out to update the CDU's agenda and recapture the political initiative.

In hindsight, it is obvious that they were quite effective in this respect, partly because the Zeitgeist was on their side from the mid-1970s on (but what, after all, is the Zeitgeist if it does not find its expression?). Although the shift in political power and the

[90] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Sozialer Raum und symbolische Macht (1986)', in id., *Rede und Antwort* (Frankfurt am Main, 1992), 135–54, at 152–3. These reflections are part of a larger debate in the social sciences that cannot be dealt with here, see e.g. Jürgen Habermas, *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften: Materialien* (Frankfurt am Main, 1970), esp. 290–308; Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication: A Study in the Political Sociology of Language, Socialization, and Legitimation* (New York, 1973), published in German as *Politik und Kommunikation* (Munich, 1975).

[91] Jürgen Habermas, 'Einleitung', in id. (ed.), *Stichworte zur 'Geistigen Situation der Zeit'*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1979), i. *Nation und Republik*, 7–35, at 21; see also Kopperschmidt, '1968 oder "die Lust am Reden"', 10.

[92] Hermann Lübbe, 'Der Streit um Worte: Sprache und Politik (1967)', in Heringer (ed.), *Holzfeuer im hölzernen Ofen*, 48–69, at 66, 67; a shortened version is reprinted in Kaltenbrunner (ed.), *Sprache und Herrschaft*, 87–112.

'geistig-moralische Wende' (intellectual-moral turn) as proclaimed by Helmut Kohl did not come until 1982, several factors worked in favour of a conservative counterattack. The most notable of these were the aftershocks of the oil crisis, the widespread disillusionment among the left after the downfall of Chancellor Brandt in 1974, the ensuing pragmatic politics of the new chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, and, not to be forgotten, the excesses of terrorism. These events lent plausibility to conservative talk of a *Tendenzwende*, which then became a self-fulfilling prophecy. In retrospect, it is difficult to distinguish between cause and effect when considering, on the one hand, the changing economic parameters that evolved with recession, unemployment, and the ensuing disillusionment with 'reform euphoria', and, on the other, the new conservative discourses on the end of social reform policies and the limits of the achievable in politics generally. This narrative of the course of change, including the critique of 'reform euphoria' and a fading 'belief in achievability' (*Machbarkeitsglaube*), is now firmly established in historical literature.[93]

The conservative *prise de parole* was pursued at many levels. By 1974, confidence had already been restored in the strength and direction of the party because 'equal opportunities in semantics' had been achieved through the 'occupation of key political terms' in important policy fields.[94] By 1977, when Biedenkopf and Helmut Kohl parted ways in a far from cordial manner, the former secretary general could pat himself on the back in the conviction that the party had, after all, 're-conquered the intellectual and political leadership of the country'.[95] Indeed, the years between 1974 and 1977 marked a high point in the acerbic political war over words. Hardly an issue existed for which the CDU did not develop its own alternative term: a New Social Question was invented, implying that the opponent had only an Old Social Question in mind, associated with organized corporate interests

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[93] On Chancellor Willy Brandt's 'utopian vocabulary' that foundered on reality, see Bergsdorf, *Herrschaft und Sprache*, 243–52; for the end of 'reform euphoria' see e.g. Gabriele Metzler, *Konzeptionen politischen Handelns von Adenauer bis Brandt: Politische Planung in der pluralistischen Gesellschaft* (Paderborn, 2005).

[94] Mahler, 'Politik und Sprache', 38; see also Behrens, Dieckmann, and Kehl, 'Politik als Sprachkampf', 229.

[95] Report as secretary general to the 1977 party conference, see Christlich-Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU), *25. Bundesparteitag der Christlich-Demokratischen Union Deutschlands: Niederschrift. Düsseldorf 7.– 9. März 1977* (Bonn, 1977), 57; others had proposed this much earlier see e.g. Mahler, 'Politik und Sprache', 38.

working at the expense of families and the individualized poor.
As already mentioned, the SPD's favourite term *Chancengleichheit*
became *Chancengerechtigkeit* for the CDU. Other high-grade terms,
such as 'liberty', 'solidarity', and 'justice', which the SPD
reaffirmed as their 'basic values' in their 1975 party programme,
were adopted and redefined by the CDU in the context of their
efforts to modernize their own party programme.[96] In the eyes of
the German conservatives, these attempts to redefine political
terms were a means of stabilizing and controlling social change.
They acted in the belief that the polity needed concepts which
were shared by all and expressed a certain order (*Ordnungsbegriffe*)
to establish its identity. The necessity of these shared concepts was
underlined by pointing to the failure of the Weimar Republic,
which had lacked a 'community of democrats' in the face of total-
itarian attacks.[97]

However, it should not be overlooked that an integrative and
consensual strategy had its limits. The war over words required
large war chests—funds to subsidize conferences, magazines,
authors, and books. By the early 1980s, frequent scandals over
illegal contributions to the big parties almost broke many politi-
cians and discredited the lofty rhetoric of many others. In addi-
tion, from 1973 on, the Bavarian minister president and CSU
party leader, Franz-Josef Strauß, heaped scorn on the CDU
reformers. Instead of the slow strategy of 'occupying' key themes
of the Social–Liberal coalition, he advocated outright confronta-
tion.[98] For the 1976 federal election campaign he recommended
the slogan 'freedom or socialism', which was meant not only to
suggest an irreconcilable opposition between liberty and the
SPD's 'democratic socialism', but also identified the SPD's goals
with the policies of the East German Communists. The CDU
reformers reluctantly accepted this slogan, but only after replacing
the word 'or' with 'instead of' in the belief that 'freedom instead
of socialism' sounded less harsh. Many observers still thought the

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[96] For a good overview of the war over words, see esp. Stötzel and Wengeler (eds.),
Kontroverse Begriffe; for a more detailed account of the programmatic debates, see Martin
H. Geyer, 'Rahmenbedingungen: Unsicherheit als Normalität', in id. (ed.), *Geschichte der
Sozialpolitik in Deutschland seit 1945*, vi. *Die Bundesrepublik 1974 bis 1982: Der Sozialstaat im Zeichen
wirtschaftlicher Rezession* (Baden-Baden, 2008), 1–107, at 23–38.

[97] Bergsdorf, *Herrschaft und Sprache*, 15, 266–72.

[98] Geyer, 'Rahmenbedingungen', 39–41; Behrens, Dieckmann, and Kehl, 'Politik als
Sprachkampf', 231–7.

slogan in either version was too crude and polarizing. Helmut Schelsky had already warned at the CSU party conference in 1973 that voters would no longer be duped into identifying the Social Democrats with a planned economy and the nationalization of businesses. Instead, the sociologist proposed that the Social Democrats should be identified with a term taken from the 'Wörterbuch des Unmenschen', namely, *Betreuung*, that is, tutelage not by the Nazi state, but by the modern welfare state, and that the CDU/CSU should choose *Selbständigkeit* (self-reliance, independence) as the opposite term to characterize their own policy.[99]

There can be no doubt, however, that ultimately the slogan 'freedom or/instead of socialism' fitted quite well into the general strategy of 'occupying terms'. Support for the slogan came from the CDU in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, where it had worked well in earlier state elections. The party was also advised to adopt the slogan by an advertising agency contracted to manage its election campaigns. Lastly, it had been recommended by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann. On the basis of surveys conducted by the public opinion research institute she headed, Noelle-Neumann emphasized that there was overwhelming support for the concept of 'liberty' in the population at large, whereas 'socialism', regardless of shade, was widely discredited.[100]

With respect to the ongoing 'war over words', the conservative election slogan of 1976 had another interesting dimension. It had considerable resonance among the right-wing fringes of the CDU and CSU and found even greater favour among the radical right outside the established party system. The well-known leftist publicist Bert Engelmann actually argued that the origins of this slogan were to be found in Josef Goebbels's propaganda campaign 'freedom or Bolshevism', dating from the end of the Second World War. Engelmann also tried to prove the existence of a conspiracy of former SS men and old propagandists who had found

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[99] Helmut Schelsky, 'Die Selbständigen und die Betreuten', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 2 Oct. 1973 and 4 Oct. 1973, quoted in Behrens, Dieckmann, and Kehl, 'Politik als Sprachkampf', 234–5.

[100] See Bergsdorf's summary, based on the institute's polls: Bergsdorf, *Politik und Sprache*, 107–12. There is no doubt that if the conservatives had gained more votes than the Social–Liberal coalition in the election, many would have prided themselves on this victory, not least because of the slogan 'Freiheit oder/statt Sozialismus'. Instead there was much soul-searching as to what went wrong, and why and how this polarizing campaign might have contributed to their failure.

a new political home on the right-wing fringes of the CDU/CSU. These people, he wrote, were preparing the basis for a political change in Bonn at whatever cost.[101] Although evidence for such a conspiracy was extremely thin, there are indications that the general idea of 'occupying terms' found much favour among those who, as young men, had supported the 'conservative revolution' of the early 1930s and were now approaching retirement age.[102]

One biographer and admirer of these men was Armin Mohler, a Swiss German who liked to see himself as the self-styled intellectual of a 'new' political right. Mohler kept in close touch with one of the figureheads of the French New Right, Alain de Benoist, who advocated a 'cultural revolution' which Mohler attempted to make popular in Germany.[103] Benoist was not only an avid reader of German right-wing literature of the inter-war period, but also suggested that the European right should learn from the Italian Marxist Gramsci's concept of 'cultural hegemony'. Language thus rose to a strategic pre-eminence, and by the late 1970s articles were appearing in the German right-wing press ridiculing the German left for having neither read nor understood Gramsci. By and large, this claim was probably true (in fact, Gramsci was not mentioned in the earlier conservative debate), although it is doubtful that many of these authors of the right had themselves read any more than what they picked up in the emerging right-wing discourse. This intellectually armed political right had many axes to grind: socialism, multiculturalism, feminism, universal human rights, détente, the politics of consensus of the established big parties, and the supposed lack of backbone among many conservatives, to name just some of the more important issues.[104] The one that most inflamed Mohler and his kind in Germany was the way historians and politicians handled the Nazi

[101] Bernt Engelmann, *Schwarzbuch: Strauß, Kohl & Co* (Cologne, 1976), 21–38. Engelmann also tried to argue against Biedenkopf who, through his second wife, supposedly had contacts with groups of former SS men. He identified the former CDU Bundestag deputy Artur Mierbach as the inventor of the slogan.

[102] See Claus Leggewie, 'Kulturelle Hegemonie: Gramsci und die Folgen', *Leviathan*, 15 (1987), 285–304; Armin Pfahl-Traughber, *Konservative Revolution und Neue Rechte: Rechtsextremistische Intellektuelle gegen den demokratischen Verfassungsstaat* (Opladen, 1998), 35–8.

[103] Armin Mohler, *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932*, 2 vols. (3rd edn. Darmstadt, 1989); id., *Das Gespräch: Über Linke, Rechte und Langweiler* (Dresden, 2001).

[104] Ibid. 31–6; for similar references to Gramsci by the far right in the United States, see Benedetto Fontana, 'Power and Democracy: Gramsci and Hegemony in America', in Joseph Francese (ed.), *Perspectives on Gramsci: Politics, Culture and Social Theory* (London, 2009), 80–96.

past, summed up in the word *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past), which Mohler used as the title of a book he wrote in 1969 and which was republished with some success in 1980.[105]

Mohler's attack was straightforward. It dealt not only with the supposed misrepresentation of German history by historians who dwelt on the issue of German 'guilt' with respect to the rise of Hitler and particularly the Holocaust—we should remember that the latter was also becoming a new focus in historiography at the time. Wherever these right-wing extremists looked, they saw a self-imposed 'language of guilt' that seemed to dominate the political culture of the Federal Republic. In their opinion, there was a long tradition of 'intellectuals' committing 'language theft' and creating a high moral ground with which to impose their own world view. According to Mohler and his coterie, these intellectuals spoke a language that was foreign to the majority of the population. It was a few more years before a new term, namely 'political correctness', was injected into the German language. This was immediately jumped upon by the New Right, which denounced 'historical correctness' as a specific German version of 'political correctness'.[106]

The 'war over words' was not over when the CDU recaptured power in 1982. More than in the 1970s, however, semantic warfare returned to the question that had originally dominated it in the earlier decades of the Federal Republic: how to deal with the German past. Important landmarks within this ongoing debate were the visit by Chancellor Helmut Kohl and President Ronald Reagan to the military cemetery in Bitburg, the remarkable speech by Federal President Richard von Weizäcker in which he asserted, although with many caveats, that the year 1945 should be viewed as one not of German 'defeat', but of 'liberation', and the *Historikerstreit* of 1987. The leitmotiv of the 1970s war over words, the idea of 'occupying terms', was present in all these struggles. During the *Historikerstreit*, a prominent participant, the historian Michael Stürmer, was reported to have said something which

[105] Armin Mohler, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Krefeld, 1980).

[106] For an overview see Jens Kapitzky, *Sprachkritik und Political Correctness in der Bundesrepublik* (Aachen, 2000); Caroline Mayer, *Öffentlicher Sprachgebrauch und Political Correctness: Eine Analyse sprachreflexiver Argumente im politischen Wortstreit* (Hamburg, 2002). Several authors in this debate were old '68ers' who put their language critique to new political uses.

recalled the words used by Biedenkopf in 1973: 'In a land without
history, the future belongs to those who create memory, define
terms, and interpret the past.'[107]

[107] Michael Stürmer, 'Geschichte in einem geschichtslosen Land', *Frankfurter Allgemeine
Zeitung*, 25 Apr. 1986, quoted in Jürgen Habermas, 'Eine Art Schadensabwicklung: Die
apologetischen Tendenzen in der deutschen Zeitgeschichtsschreibung', in Rudolf Augstein
(ed.), *Historikerstreit: Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen
Judenvernichtung* (Munich, 1987), 62–7, at 62.