Exemplarische Rekonstruktionen: Befragung zweier Generationseinheiten aus der „Jahrhundertgeneration“ (geb. 1900 bis ca. 1912)

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History, Loss, and the Generation of 1914: The Case of the “Freideutsche Kreis”

When I began twenty years ago to investigate the psychological dimension of the past systematically, I, like other so-called “psycho-historians” of that time, analyzed the influence of the psyche on history. We studied the lives of historically significant individuals in order to explain how their attitudes and actions could ultimately be understood as attempts to solve psychological problems that had been posed in childhood. We assumed that the attitudes and actions of such individuals could only be explained through a psychological analysis of their early life. That is to say, I, like other psycho-historians, investigated the influence of the individual psyche on history.

Over the course of the last twenty years, however, I have come to the conclusion that the influence of history on the psyche is as at least as significant as the influence of the psyche on history. Psychoanalysis has demonstrated that we are psychologically constituted through our experience of the environment. That environment, in turn, is to significant extent constituted by history. Therefore history constitutes our psyches. Today I am as interested in the impact of history on the psyche as in the reverse, and I investigate how the experience of a historically-determined environment shapes the self. Nevertheless, I remain a traditional psycho-historian in that I study people not only as the psychological products of history but also as its psychological producers. Indeed, I see it as my task to analyze how the psyche and history mutually shape one another, or, put differently, how history flows through human beings. In order to fulfill this task, the category of “generation” would seem to be particularly helpful.

Writing history from a generational perspective has a special advantage for the psychoanalytically-oriented historian. One of the most difficult problems facing psychohistory is how to move beyond the experience of the individual, which is
generally the purview of psychoanalysis as a clinical discipline. One possibility has been to investigate individuals who seem representative psychologically or who can be understood to have been transference figures (that is, individuals onto whom large numbers of people have projected their needs and wishes, their hopes and fears). Often in the past, psychoanalytically-oriented investigators have treated groups simply as if they were an individual person. Although this latter practice seems generally problematic, it is less so when the group being investigated comprises a generational unit. Since the psyche can be said to be constituted through the experience of a historically-determined environment, a generational group, which has experienced a similar historically-determined environment, will be psychologically similar. In other words, one can legitimately treat people belonging to such a generational group as a psychological collective and can legitimately write a collective psychobiography of them. And precisely such a collective psychobiography is what Jürgen Reulecke and I are currently writing of sixty-two members of the Freideutsche Kreis.

Our generational study explores how history has flowed through the psyches of these 62 human beings. These Germans were all, as adolescents, active in the "bündische youth movement" during the 1920s. They reached maturity in the 1930s and fully experienced the Second World War and the collapse of the Third Reich. Shortly after the war they came together consciously to form a generational community, the so-called Freideutsche Kreis, an organization of former youth movement members. These 62 people are all approximately the same age, born shortly before 1914, come from the same social milieu, the educated middle class, and share the same religion, Protestantism. As a result, they have had similar historically-determined experiences. Because those experiences were psychologically constitutive, they are also psychologically similar. In the interviews that were conducted with these people, they told similar life stories and told them in similar ways. By presenting a part of those stories here, I shall analyze both how history has shaped the psyches of these sixty-two people, as historical forces produced a series of losses for them during the 1920s in adolescence, and how the psyches of these sixty-two people have shaped the course of history, as the solutions they developed to deal with those losses led them first to the youth movement and eventually to National Socialism.

To the extent they recall it, the overwhelming majority of those interviewed remember World War I not as a time of anxiety and hardship but as an idyllic period in their lives. Almost without exception, they describe positive experiences associated with nature, the out-of-doors, and a rural environment. In fact, a surprisingly large number of the interviewees spent the latter portion of the war with grandparents or aunts and uncles in the countryside. Although most of the parents of

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1 This collective biography grows out of the project "Die Freideutschen: Seniorenkreise aus jugendbewegter Wurzel – ein Modell für ein sinnerfülltes Alter", which was conducted from 1993–1996 under the leadership of Professor Dr. Jürgen Reulecke of the University of Siegen and funded by the Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend.
the interviewees lived in cities and belonged to the educated middle and upper-middle classes, many still had family ties to rural Germany – testifying to the relatively rapid and recent urbanization and industrialization of the country in the second half of the nineteenth century. When the allied blockade of Germany and Austria-Hungary, coupled with an especially brutal winter in late-1916, produced widespread hunger and suffering, families sent their children to relatives living in rural areas where food was more plentiful.  

Many of the interviewees associate “childhood” with the idyllic period they spent in the countryside during the war. One woman’s recollection is typical: “also, meine Kindheit, also die beiden Jahre, oder zweieinhalb Jahre, im Bayerischen Wald, das waren also beglückende Jahre, ja”3. They recall this period as a magical time, and their memories evoke what they call “Geborgenheit” and “Nestwärme”4. Thus their memories of wartime convey images that are rustic and nurturing5. They also associate this period with fairytales and folklore and with the artistic, poetry and music, especially singing. Indeed, perhaps because of its association with a romanticized childhood, singing has evoked a sense of security throughout the lives of many of those interviewed6. One paradigmatic memory is of family Christmas celebrations in the countryside, with horse-drawn sleighs, peaceful winter landscapes, carols, presents, and food, at the house of grandparents7. The memories of the interviewees convey the feeling of belonging to and being embraced and protected by an extended family8. The grandparents and, occasionally, the aunts and uncles are presented as idealized figures, offering protection and security9. Generally members of the local gentry, wealthy farmers and professional people, doctors, teachers, and ministers, they are cast literally in a “grand paternal” light, venerated not only by the interviewee but also by the local farmers and villagers10. One woman recalls her wonder and pride when she, as a little girl, accompanied her tall and stately grandfather, the local physician, on his village rounds11.

The memories of this rural idyll often flow into or parallel memories of an idyllic early life with the nuclear family in urban areas. Although not associated with grandparents or life in the countryside, these urban memories convey the same warmth, security, and artistic magic as their rural counterparts12. One woman

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2 Several interviewees were sent to areas that were purely German in the immediate aftermath of the war until territorial questions had been answered and food shortages overcome.
3 Interviewee (B115); also (S107).
4 (B107); (B115).
5 (A117); (S116); (A124); (S110); (B114); (A103); (AB102-B106); (A120).
6 (A103); (S106); (B104); (A105).
7 (A104).
8 (A118).
9 (S104); (S101); (A104).
10 (A117); (A104); (S106); (S101).
11 (B114).
12 (S111); (S108); (AB102-B106); (B104); (B102); (A114); (S120). Even the handful of interviewees (S119), (B115), and (S118), coming from a proletarian background appear to fit this pattern.
remembers, as a little girl, lying under the piano with her teddy bears, enveloped by music performed by her mother and family friends. Others describe, with a nostalgic glow, the games they played with neighborhood children, childhood puppet performances observed by admiring parents, being told fairy stories and sung to before bedtime, and the Christ Child coming on Christmas Eve. And, finally, a number of interviewees recall walks or even hiking expeditions with parents, especially with the father. These are uniformly positive memories, conveying a sense of the parents as self-confident and loving, as protective and supportive, initiating their children into a world containing challenges that were exciting and could nevertheless be mastered, a world that seemed neither prosaic nor boring but still fundamentally secure.

The war is only dimly recalled by the interviewees and is presented as having had little or no impact on them. The one vivid image of the war in the interviews – its outbreak – is generally festive, with troops departing for the front, flowers, and cheering crowds. One woman’s memory of her father’s departure seems more supportive than frightening, as he shortened his walking stick for her to use in his absence. Given the birth date of most of the interviewees, relatively few close relatives fought in the war. During this period, middle-class, educated German men generally married and had children only after they had established themselves professionally. As a result, the fathers of the interviewees were, for the most part, too old for military service; their brothers, for the most part, too young. Of the sixty-two interviewees, apparently only three lost fathers in the war. The fact that the period of the First World War is remembered fondly by the interviewees, that only a handful of fathers were killed in the conflict, and that, indeed, most remained at home throughout the war fails to confirm the thesis, advanced first by the psychoanalyst, Martin Wangh, and later by the historian and psychoanalyst, Peter Loewenberg, that the attraction of National Socialism generally and of Adolf Hitler in particular to younger Germans can be attributed psychologically to the absence during their early lives of the father at the front in World War I.
berg in explaining the psychological susceptibility of this generational cohort to the blandishments of the Nazis and Hitler as emerging in part out of an effort to compensate for the loss of the father – the physical loss of the father for many of those interviewed, the loss of the father as an admired figure for more. It merely assigns the moment of that loss not to the First World War but to the Weimar Republic.

Whereas the interviewees remember the war as a time of tranquility and security, they recall the Weimar Republic as a time of disorder. In contrast to the dimmer and even festive recollections of the war, their memories of defeat and the subsequent revolution in Germany are vivid and disturbing. Frightening, incomprehensible street fighting, putsches on the Right or on the Left, bullets splattering into the living-room wall are often indelible “historical” memories for those interviewed. From the Kapp Putsch in February 1920, through the “party chaos” in the Reichstag, to the street fighting of the early 1930s, their memories of the Weimar Republic are characterized by images of conflict and chaos. And whereas the interviewees remember the war as a time of physical and emotional sustenance, they recall the Weimar Republic as a time of hardship. Their memories of the immediate aftermath of the war are of malnutrition and disease (often influenza), which in many instances led to the disability or even death of a family member. Although the Depression would affect the interviewees directly, they generally recall the economic hardship of the first years of the Republic, culminating in the hyperinflation of 1923, as more devastating, because of its impact on their parents and family.

That the interviewees appear to have been distressed more by the economic crises affecting their parents than by those affecting them directly reflects the fact that in general their experience of wartime and most of the Weimar period was mediated and in significant ways magnified by their parents and other adults. Thus the importance one interviewee attaches to his “first historical memory”, of the declaration of general mobilization in Germany in 1914, derived from his mother’s frightened reaction to the event. Just as the outbreak of the war was experienced through its impact on the parents, so too was its loss. In general, the interviewees’ negative attitudes toward the Weimar Republic appear to have been taken over from parents or older siblings. Although the interviewees present themselves as distressed by the violence and disorder they witnessed, it was more the unease and even fear of the adults that most upset them as children. Similarly, the anxiety, discouragement, and sense of failure with which the parents reacted to

23 (S116); (A118); (B111); (BS121); (A114).
24 (A118); (B110); (BS121); (S104); (S106); (S113).
25 (S114); (AB101); (S116); (S111); (B105); (A101); (A116); (B116).
26 (S122); (A120); (A116); (S115); (S118); (A103); (A104); (BS121); (S116); (A101); (A116).
27 (B104).
28 (B117); (A114); (S107); (A118).
29 (A118); (BS121); (A101).
30 (B105); (B110).
economic hardship rendered it so disturbing to those interviewed. The parents and, through them, the interviewees had a clear sense of “history” as an external force that affected the family adversely and which the parents were unable to control.

Thus, the interviewees recall the Weimar Republic as a time of disorder and hardship, a time when “history” had a profoundly negative effect upon their families and, through its impact on their parents, upon themselves. More specifically, they associate the Weimar period with a series of historically-engendered losses. The first of these remembered losses was of an idyllic childhood. For those who spent the latter half of the war with relatives in the countryside, this loss was abrupt, physical, and traumatic as they returned to the cities after the war to live with their parents. They associate this loss with a sense of alienation in an unfamiliar, impersonal, urban landscape, captured in the fear experienced by one interviewee when he was initially unable to find, first, the apartment building where his family lived and, then, the floor on which the apartment was located. In some instances the rural idyll was lost irretrievably, either because of the death of a grandparent or because the grandparents or parents had lived in a part of the Reich that had been separated from Germany as a result of the Versailles Treaty. A loss accompanying that of an idyllic childhood was the loss of the war, experienced through the depression and disillusionment of parents and teachers. This was followed by the loss of the family as safe haven, a site of stability and security, as the revolutionary violence in the streets literally penetrated the homes of a striking number of interviewees. It seemed that their parents were unable to protect the family from the disorder of Weimar. In contrast to the image of the child listening to music under the piano during the war, the recollections of Weimar contain images of a little girl cowering from flying bullets, of a mother’s narrow escape from death, of a piano covered with broken glass. A more widely experienced loss was economic, as the hyper-inflation of 1923 seriously damaged or even destroyed family prosperity. The impact of the inflation ranged from being unable to afford books and having to check them out of a public library (for members of the educated, upper-middle classes, losing one’s private library and having to share these symbols of cultural status with the general public represented a social shock) to paternal unemployment, accompanied by the loss of the family fortune and home and of the interviewees’ dreams for the future. For some inter-

31 (B102); (BS121); (A116).
32 (B104); (A118); (A116).
33 (S106). The following interviewees also describe a traumatic return to an urban setting at the end of the war: (BS121); (A105); (S107); (S113); and (S112).
34 (S101); (S117); (A104); (S116); (A109).
35 (S106); (A101); (B103); (A104); (A119).
36 (S113); (S114).
37 (B108).
38 (A101).
39 (B102); (S107); (S123); (S122); (S109); (A120); (B115); (S116); (A112); (A118); (A116); (A119).
viewees, economic hardship forced a family move (in some instances the second such traumatic move within a few years), which brought with it the loss of home and neighborhood as well as of play- and schoolmates\textsuperscript{40}. And yet the most psychologically significant loss of the post-war period was, I believe, the loss of the parents as admirable figures, as a result of their loss of self-esteem and self-confidence coupled with clear signs of physical deterioration. The parents apparently felt like failures, the victims of forces and circumstances beyond their control. The title of the novel by Hans Fallada “Kleiner Mann, was nun?”, published in Germany during the Depression, seems to sum up the parents’ experience of themselves throughout much of the 1920s. Upstanding members of the educated, upper-middle classes, the parents felt for the first time in their lives like “little people”.

Thus, for many of the interviewees, the loss of childhood came too soon and too suddenly. In one woman’s memory, the loss of the magical world of childhood is symbolized by the stones her father had glued on the ceiling of the children’s bedroom falling to the floor, one by one. She presents the falling stones as having enchanted her, but in the interview she associates immediately to disturbing childhood feelings of inadequacy and anxiety in a home environment she experienced as dangerous\textsuperscript{41}. Indeed, the fathers are often portrayed as failures in the eyes of the interviewees and, on occasion, in those of the mother\textsuperscript{42}. Given the fact that in patriarchal German society, fathers were expected to be the more responsible, more powerful, and hence more admired of the two parents, the loss of the father as an idealized figure would have been particularly frightening and potentially traumatic. A number of interviewees appear eager to preserve an idealized image of the father in the face of his manifest inadequacies, while contrasting him to the mother who is regarded with more open contempt\textsuperscript{43}. The unreliability of the era, then, manifested itself in a family that no longer felt secure, in parents who suddenly seemed unreliable, with a moody mother or a gambling father\textsuperscript{44}.

In fact some of the memories of “disorder” during the Weimar Republic may represent externalizations of experiences within the family. The chaotic economic and social conditions during the 1920s created chaotic conditions, tension and conflict, within the families of those interviewed. The interviewees were deeply disturbed by those tensions and conflicts, including especially their own angry feelings toward parents and siblings\textsuperscript{45}. In an effort to preserve the family as a place

\textsuperscript{40} (S108), (S101), (A112), (B102).
\textsuperscript{41} (A103).
\textsuperscript{42} (A116); (B108); (BS101); (B107); (BS121); (A118).
\textsuperscript{43} (S104); (B102); (S116).
\textsuperscript{44} (BS121); (A116) and (S104); (S112).
\textsuperscript{45} (S124); (B108); (BS101); (S104); (B102); (S116). According to the psychologist Babett Lobjinger, who has studied these interviews, the families of the interviewees appear never to have developed a “Streitkultur”, the ways and means of handling tensions and disagreements within the family. In fact their own aversion toward conflict and the premium they place upon “tolerance” can be attributed in part to the fact that conflict within the family in childhood seems to have been experienced as extremely threatening. The interviewees’ repression
of safety and stability, a site of harmony and tranquility, and to protect the parents from their disappointment and anger for failing to create a stable family environment, the interviewees may have projected their sense of intra-family disorder and tension out onto society at large. Tensions within the family and their own bad feelings thus could be simultaneously denied and explained away. These disturbing experiences were not inside but outside the family. These disturbing experiences were not the responsibility of the parents but of the Weimar Republic or of impersonal “historical forces” beyond human control.

The loss of the parents as admirable figures was exacerbated by the fact that their health appears to have deteriorated over the course of the 1920s as a result of anxiety and discouragement, economic hardship, and the long-term effects of wartime malnutrition. By contrast, the interviewees were coming into their own. Not only were they physically more robust, but they were better able to adapt to the unsettled conditions of Weimar, which actually created unprecedented opportunities for them. The interviewees’ success emphasized the failure of the parents and gave these adolescents the sense of having surpassed them. And yet the interviewees did not hold their parents in open contempt, despite the parents’ failure, demoralization, and deterioration. Three reasons suggest themselves for the interviewees’ reluctance to criticize their parents: there was doubtless much to admire about them; these adolescents needed their parents and sought to preserve and protect them as admirable figures; and, as we shall see, society at large provided an explanation for the parents’ shortcomings that worked to absolve them of blame. But the psychological and physical frailty of the parents robbed these adolescents of any sense of triumph, leaving them only with the guilty obligation to execute their parents’ legacy. In response to the weakness of the parents, the interviewees made the developmental step toward independence and autonomy prematurely and precipitously, leaving them precocious and hardened, suppressing normal adolescent feelings of uncertainty and dependence.

This series of losses culminated for nearly forty percent of those interviewed in the death of a parent, typically the father, following a period of illness and physical deterioration, generally during the mid-1920s, when the interviewees were in early adolescence, a loss experienced directly and through its impact on the sur-

46 (A116) associates from S.A. violence and street fighting outside her window to tensions in the family involving her sister, tensions that reached a climax with the death of her father in 1930 when she was 16.

47 (B102); (S116); (S104); (S124); (BS101); (A116).

48 Their official characterization of the parents is almost always positive, although specific memories of the parents are often negative: (S116); (B113); (B112); (BS121); (B102); (S110); (S112); (S124); (A124); (A115); (A105); (B114); (A116); (S107); (S104); (A118).

49 (BS121); (A116); (S112); (S104).
It is difficult to know precisely how the death of a parent was experienced, for those interviewed frequently let this information drop without revealing how they felt about it, but my sense is that the loss was psychologically devastating, following as it often did on the heels of the losses described above. Indeed, I want to argue that the loss was so distressing that the interviewees were unable to confront it emotionally, propelling them in the direction not of mourning but of denial and activity, either in the youth movement or, in the case of two interviewees, in a life of adventure in America. For those who experienced it, this greatest loss, then, rendered their break with childhood not merely premature and precipitous but traumatically so. It encouraged the interviewees to suppress feelings, to escape painful reality in idealized fantasy, to substitute activity for introspection, and to value emotional hardness over vulnerability in a culture containing Prussian and Lutheran traditions of stoicism that discouraged the working through of painful feelings and encouraged the denial of loss, disappointment, anger, and conflict.

The losses suffered by the family were inscribed in the losses suffered by the nation. Through the public outcry about the injustices of the Versailles Treaty, the continuing debate and negotiation about the schedule and nature of German reparations payments, and the referenda in various ethnically mixed territories to determine their ultimate national status, these adolescents, like Germans generally, were constantly reminded of Germany's territorial, colonial, and economic losses. The sense of national loss was underscored especially effectively in the schools, which sought to preserve traditional, national-conservative, anti-republican values by harping on the injustices of the Versailles Treaty and Germany's losses and humiliations at the hands of the western democracies and, indeed, of the leaders of the Republic itself. The losses on the national and the personal level were thus interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The lost childhood idyll was

50 In many ways (S122) is a model for this generational cohort in his experience of hardship and loss during the Weimar Republic, with the youth movement playing a crucial role in compensating him for the hardships and losses he had experienced. Following what he describes as “Die Kindheit. Gute Jahre, freie Jahre”, his father died in 1919, probably when the interviewee was twelve. The death of the father coupled with the inflation brought a dramatic change in the family fortunes. Previously the family had had a large house in Frankfurt, with a cook, a housemaid, and a nursemaid. All that was lost in 1923. In 1924, he joined the youth movement. (S110); (A101); (AB101); (S111); (A116); (B102); (A114); (B112); (S123); (S107); (S113); (S101); (S115); (B110); (B117); (S101); (S108); (A103); (S114); (A124); (A112); (B111); (B108); (BS101); (A114); (B117); (A103); (A104).

51 (S107) and (B102) stand out because they openly express their anguish about the loss of their fathers and describe their efforts to compensate for that loss.

52 (A103) worked as a maid; (S104) worked as a migrant laborer.


54 That these issues penetrated the consciousness of the interviewees is revealed by (B115); (S117); (S124); (S115).

55 (A110-A121); (S106); (A119).
linked to the lost national idyll, Germany's former greatness was contrasted to its current humiliation, and the *Kaiserreich* was presented in a nostalgic light as strong, stable, and secure. The notion that the parents were the helpless victims of circumstances found confirmation in the officially promoted version that the nation was the helpless victim of an unjust, externally-dictated peace, perhaps even of a stab in the back. In contrast to the unacknowledged losses within the family, however, Germany's national losses were a public preoccupation. In fact, the focus on loss at the national level may have enabled the interviewees to confront losses too threatening to be faced within the family. At the same time, the parents were protected from the interviewees' disappointment and anger at their shortcomings and failures; for the parents' travails were simply a part of the ordeal of the martyred nation.

Those interviewed dealt with these disappointments, disillusionments, and losses by clinging to the memory of an idealized past and engaging in idealized collective activity in the present. Virtually all the interviewees contend that they had an idyllic childhood. Even the handful of interviewees who describe unpleasant childhood experiences characterize their early life as "happy." It is important to emphasize that these are memories, which do not necessarily reflect the reality of their lives during the First World War. To be sure, people generally idealize childhood. Still, in the case of those interviewed, the idealization seems extreme. These are not simply happy but idyllic memories, which, when set in the context of war and wartime hardship, become even more striking. I contend that the recollection of early life as idyllic represents an attempt on the part of those interviewed to handle the losses they experienced outside and especially inside the family during the 1920s when they were adolescents. It is my view that the interviewees never fully confronted these losses and, instead, condensed them into a pair of acknowledged losses, the loss of a romanticized pre-war and wartime childhood in the countryside on a *personal* level and of romanticized *Kaiserreich* on a national-political level. The conception of an idyllic childhood was a way to convince themselves that, although life was troubled and disappointing now, it had once been happier and more secure, a way to preserve in memory the image of that more sustaining, tranquil time, and, finally, a way to express the hope that what had been lost could be recreated. Idealized collective activity in the German youth movement represented, in part, an attempt at that recreation.

In contrast to the members of the pre-war youth movement, "the Wandervögel," who were in conflict with the parental generation and critical of their society, and to their own children (the rebels of the so-called "1968 Generation"), the interviewees saw their participation in the youth movement as a way to carry on.

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56 (S116); (S113).
57 (B112); (A114); (B115).
58 (S101); (S106); (S118).
59 (S122); (A116); (A101); (S106); (S107); (S113); (B102); (S115); (B110).
parental traditions. Their youth-movement activities built upon positive experiences when their parents, especially the fathers, seemed secure and self-confident. Indeed, the interviewees’ youth-movement activities were generally encouraged by their parents, and a good many were actually initiated into the youth movement by members of the older generation. The fact that so many of those interviewed joined nationalistic youth-movement Bünde also helps to explain their parents’ approval. Thus, rather than rebelling against the older generation, the youth movement of the 1920s seemed a way for the interviewees to stay connected to an admirable aspect of their relationship with their parents and to live out dreams that their parents and other psychologically important adults had been unable to realize.

With its emphasis on nature and music, on folklore and the traditional, and with its rejection of the modern, the material, the technological, and the urban, the youth movement can be understood as a way those interviewed could live out the memory of an idyllic, often rural, childhood, a time remembered as nurturing and secure. The recollection of Christmases celebrated with grandparents in the bosom of an extended family echoes in the descriptions of youth-movement group meetings celebrated around the campfire. In fact, a number of interviewees use the same phrases to describe childhood experiences in the countryside during the war and adolescent experiences in the youth movement during the 1920s. The centrality of music in the youth movement can be connected with interviewees’ positive memories of music and art from early life. Even a grandfather figure was present in Admiral von Trotha, the leader of the Großdeutsche Jugendbund, the nationalistic umbrella organization that included the youth-movement groups to which most of those interviewed belonged.

For these adolescents, the youth movement seemed to recapture what had been lost in the family during the 1920s: “Nestwärme” and “Geborgenheit.” As a national movement, the youth movement restored a sense of agency and power in the face of the passivity and helplessness experienced by the family. It is difficult to over-emphasize the importance of “belonging” and “fitting in” for those interviewed. Responding to the disruptions within the family and without, the youth movement gave these adolescents a sense of place and purpose. In contrast to the disorder and conflict of the Weimar Republic, the youth-movement group pro-
vided a harmonious communal haven. Thus, the function performed by the youth movement for those interviewed appears to have been fundamentally conservative—and not only in a political sense. It looked not forward but back to an idealized past. It sought to preserve the past and restore what had been lost, in themselves, in the family, and in the nation as a whole.

Because it represented an effort to recapture an imaginary childhood idyll and because it served not merely to overcome but also to deny loss, the youth movement had what might be characterized as a “fantastical” dimension for the interviewees. Indeed, the centrality of singing in the youth movement, the activity mentioned again and again in interview after interview as having been its single most important and attractive aspect, can be attributed to the fact that these adolescents sought to recover a lost and idealized feeling state. The group-sing created a “Rausch,” a magical high or heady experience, the feeling that one belonged, that one was connected to supportive others like the self. The individual voice joined, was lost in, swelled the power of the group voice. And yet singing was impractical and ephemeral, and when it was over, there was only silence and the warm afterglow of communal harmony and grandeur. Although it accomplished nothing beyond the momentary experience, the singing symbolized and strengthened the feeling of belonging and to the group. As one interviewee puts it, singing was essentially the foundation upon which our community was built. And, metaphorically, those whose voices did not fit in, did not swell the harmony, were excluded from the community. Other youth-movement activities, particularly the group discussions about politics or philosophy, had the same fantastical character as the singing. These discussions had no practical consequences but existed solely for their own sake, for the “Rausch”, for the high they produced. They allowed the participants to feel sophisticated and important, to idealize themselves as members of an intellectual elite standing outside and above bourgeois society, but, because these discussions did not lead to action, they were essentially risk-free. They never confronted individuals with hard choices, never antagonized or alienated anyone within or without the group. As a result, it was possible to read radical political thinkers and to accommodate different political philosophies without controversy. Had these discussions the potential to

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70 Indeed, the principal difference between the youth movement before and after World War I is that the pre-war Wandervögel were more individualistic whereas the youth movement of the Bünde was more collective. In part because of the experience of the War, the “lyric romanticism” of the Wandervögel was replaced by an emphasis on discipline, hardness, and leadership, all in the service of the national cause. Walter Laqueur, Young Germany: A history of the German Youth Movement (London 1962) 30, 134, and 190.

71 (S107); (AB103).

72 (BS121); (A118); (S107); (A117); (A123); (S122); (S124); (B103); (A116); (B104); (S117); (S110).

73 (S102-A107); (A115).

74 (A105).

75 (S107).

76 (S118); (A115); (A118).
lead to action, they would have threatened the harmony of the group and exposed it to the ominous outside world which the youth movement was designed to escape. By remaining in the realm of fantasy, the youth-movement group could be a haven. Precisely because the group was to be preserved as an idyllic place where those interviewed could experience security and stability in the face of disorder and instability in the family and in German society, conflicts that could disrupt group cohesion and harmony were to be avoided at all cost.77

Group singing and discussions, then, served to create feelings of belonging and power, self-esteem and self-importance, without confronting the underlying losses that had produced the intense need for these experiences. Likewise, a number of important developmental issues were addressed in the youth movement in a way that was simultaneously grandiose and elitist yet safe and unthreatening. Thus, the youth movement allowed these adolescents to express and to avoid sexuality.78 On the one hand, the youth movement enabled these young people to interact with members of the opposite sex in “natural”, tolerant, socially acceptable and regulated ways.79 Although most groups were single-sex, a significant number were not and even single-sex groups came together with the opposite sex at youth-movement conventions.80 This interaction was significant since schools were generally not co-educational.81 For a number of women interviewees, the contact with boys in the youth movement was especially important since they had little interaction with male figures at home (their fathers being dead or emotionally unavailable).82 In addition, there was greater freedom about exhibiting the body, and even homosexuality was acknowledged and to some extent tolerated. Although girls were expected to assume male models of behavior (girls were treated “just like the boys”), there seems to have been a blurring of traditional gender roles in the youth movement: it appealed to girls who might be called Tomboys;83 and a certain feminization of the boys also appears to have occurred.84 The increased sexual freedom of the youth movement reflected the general relaxation of sexual inhibitions and increased contact between the sexes in Weimar Germany. On the other hand, as with the group political discussions, what was not acceptable in the youth movement was sexual activity, either heterosexual or homosexual. Sex and especially the body were elevated to an aesthetic ideal, into a fantastical realm, but sexual feelings were never acknowledged or expressed. As far as sexual activity was concerned, prudery reigned. Nude bathing was encouraged, even celebrated, but woe betide the young person who

77 (A109); (B111).
78 (BS101).
79 (A118).
80 (S106).
81 (A117); (S106).
82 (A109); (A101); (S113); (S116).
83 (A103); (S120).
84 This is the hypothesis of Irmgard Klönne, “Ich spring in diesem Ringe.” Mädchen und Frauen in der deutschen Jugendbewegung (Pfaffenweiler 1988).
showed sexual interest in the bodies of the nude bathers. Boys and girls went on overnight excursions together, but they never touched one another. Just as their politics were apolitical, so too their sexuality was asexual. Those who were sexually active — whether homosexual or heterosexual — were generally levered out of the group, as threatening its harmony and cohesion, as destructive to its pristine magic, as transforming a life lived in fantasy into prosaic or frightening reality. The reaction against sexual activity needs to be understood within the context of the general asceticism of the youth movement. Smoking and drinking were frowned upon as well. This asceticism can be interpreted, perhaps, as a manifestation of the fear of letting oneself go, which in turn might lead to the expression of feelings of frustration, pain, and anger better left suppressed. The need to maintain rigid self-control may also have been a response to the sense of those interviewed that they lived in a disordered world that had escaped human control. As aesthetes, they could at least impose order on and exert control over themselves. And, finally, the youth movement’s attitude toward sexuality and toward relationships with the opposite sex can be understood as an attempt to deal with sexual development outside the family. Clearly all adolescents need peers to help them with these developmental issues, and sexuality propels children away from the family and from feelings of dependency on the parents. Here, the working through of sexual feelings seems to have taken place with much less interaction with admired and emotionally available adults than usual. Consequently, mature, active, adult sexuality was rejected in favor of an adolescent sexuality that was aestheticized and asceticized, kept safely and securely in the realm of the ideal. This independent, adolescent sexuality was purer, better, freer than that of the parents; but it was not in some ways real, and it certainly was not enacted.

In general, these adolescents found in the generational cohort of the youth movement what was missing in the family. Taking on the very experience that had brought their parents low, these adolescents transformed hardship into a virtue. Through their anti-materialism, they denied that the things their parents had lost or had failed to achieve were important in the first place. Indeed, the deprivations that had been forced upon their passive parents they chose to take on
actively. What had rendered their parents weak and disappointing would render them strong and admirable. Here again these adolescents can be understood as attempting both to surpass the parents, by adapting to the chaotic conditions of the 1920s better than their parents, and to carry on the parents' legacy, by succeeding where they had failed. As members of the youth-movement group, they became the idealized figures they wished their parents would be, preserved the ideal in and for themselves, and denied and bridged over the loss of the ideal in the parents. Of course, in separating from mother and father, all adolescents need to de-idealize their parents and to idealize themselves to some extent. Here, instead of coming to a gradual and incremental recognition of the normal human frailties of their parents and gaining in comparison a gradual and incremental confidence in their own strengths and abilities, the process of parental de-idealization and self-idealization tended to occur precipitously rather than gradually and globally. Because they took over the ideal of adulthood more in an act of identification than through a gradual and incremental process of internalization, the ideal was never fully integrated into the self and remained exaggerated and fantastical, fixed, if you will, at an adolescent stage of development. Particularly for the boys, an extreme form of group machismo compensated for the male virtues lost in the defeat of the nation and in the subsequent and related defeat of the father. In the absence of an admired, adult, male figure and in the presence of an admired, adolescent, male cohort, brawling between various youth-movement groups became a way to play out the lost masculine and military virtues and to prove oneself a man. But the model of the man to be emulated was based not upon an actual, admirable, adult male but upon the exaggerated adolescent fantasies of what a man was supposed to be. For boys and for girls, the primary opportunity to prove oneself the tough, resilient, powerful grown up that the actual parents had for the most part failed to be was provided by the youth-movement excursion. The so-called "Großfahrt" represented the highpoint of the year for most youth-movement groups, and considerable time and energy was invested in planning these trips. In contrast to the chaotic conditions of Weimar, which had overwhelmed the parents, the excursion was an exercise in mastery, something to organize and carry through, an opportunity to embrace hardship actively and meet unexpected challenges with initiative and imagination.

Nevertheless, on the excursions, as generally in the youth movement, there was always the risk of humiliation, the possibility that one would not measure up, that one was not tough or hard or resourceful enough to meet the challenge. The various initiation rites in the youth movement both spoke to and regulated that
The self-idealization that those interviewed developed to compensate for de-idealization in the family put pressure on them to live up to the high standards they had set for themselves. Indeed, in reading the interviews, one can at times detect an undercurrent of disappointment either that they have failed individually to live up to the greatness they had ascribed to themselves or that others have failed to appreciate their greatness. The idealization of the self as a member of an idealized group responded to that pressure. The individual did not need to achieve greatness on his or her own; greatness was achieved with the help of and through others. The group was always there to appreciate or mirror back the greatness of the individual member. And the group was always there to amplify the individual, to enhance his or her power through the power of the collective.

Again, all adolescents face these developmental tasks and to some degree depend upon peers to help them establish independence from the family. What distinguished the interviewees from other adolescents was the degree of that dependence. In the wake of a concentrated series of traumatic losses in the family, especially the loss of the security of childhood and of admired parental figures, these young people relied on the generational cohort of the youth-movement group to help them negotiate their way through the transition from childhood to adulthood. But if the youth movement helped the interviewees to grow up and compensated them for what had been lost in the family, some mourning for these premature and precipitous losses was never done. There is an underlying sadness in these people, an experience of loss and loneliness that was and is not acknowledged but covered over by intense activity, militant optimism, and exaggerated independence. Despite the camaraderie of the youth movement, a dream remembered by a man from this period (the only dream he can remember in the whole of his life) of being alone in a star-filled sky conveys both self-idealization and isolation. Indeed, the dependence on collective experiences throughout the lives of the interviewees can be interpreted as an attempt to counteract feelings of loss and loneliness. Although they appear to be reasonably successful, they are less successful than one might have expected given education and social background. More significantly, the interviewees seem emotionally shallow. They lack insight into themselves and access to their feelings. A striking number claim to have no dream life. Their relationships to friends and family appear superficial, and a significant number have problematic or empty relationships with their children, who often seem manifestly disturbed. Although nearing the end of their lives at the time of the interviews, they have no significant thoughts on mortality or on the

100 (AB103); (B104); (S117).
meaning of the lives they have lived. At their psychic core, I believe, a great many of the interviewees are depressed.

The youth movement not only compensated for what had been lost within the family, it also sought to make up for the national losses in which these personal losses were embedded. Consequently, most of the youth-movement Bünde of the 1920s were decidedly nationalistic. As the youth movement sought on a personal level to recapture a lost childhood idyll associated with the countryside and grandparents for the interviewees, so on the political level it sought to restore the lost national idyll by preserving folk traditions that had been lost or were threatened by modern, urban, industrial life. The youth movement also sought to repair the losses suffered by the nation in the war. Exaggeratedly “masculine” activities in some all-male groups sought to compensate not only for the loss of the admirable father but also for the loss of the admirable nation. Various paramilitary games played by youth-movement groups served to enact and prepare for Germany’s war of revenge that would restore the lost national territory and the lost national honor. Although less obviously militaristic and masculine, the excursions to ethnic Germans living in territories “lost” to the Reich as a result of the Versailles Treaty, although relatively risk free, were experienced as daring assertions of German identity that denied and overcame the humiliation of the nation.

 Nonetheless, the youth movement was not wholly conservative. The intense need for collective experiences, the yearning for cohesion and the aversion to conflict, when translated into the national-social context, made traditional class divisions seem problematic to the interviewees during the 1920s and early 1930s. Instead of providing a sense of order and place, class lines had become divisive and confining to these educated, middle-class adolescents. Already before joining the youth movement, many of the interviewees had interacted with children from lower class families, and this interaction was furthered in the youth movement. There was a concerted effort to recruit a certain number of working-class boys and girls and to integrate them into the group.

The youth movement can thus be seen as a precursor of the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft about which so many interviewees would be enthusiastic. Viewed historically, however, the youth movement sought to recreate the sense of community that was present in the national enthusiasm and social unity in Germany at the outbreak of the First World War and then that allegedly prevailed in the trenches,

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102 (S116); (A101); (S119).
103 (A117); (AB103); (S117).
104 (A117); (S117).
105 (BS121); (AB103); (S124); (S116); (AB101); (S117); (S123).
106 (S114); (A103); (B112).
107 This attempt at making working-class children feel included is illustrated most vividly, perhaps, by the ritual of everyone putting the food they had brought from home into a collective pot so that the less fortunate would not feel their deprived status (B104); (AB103); (B104); (AB103); (S106); (A109); (A101); (S119).
an ideal of community transmitted to those interviewed by parents and the society at large\textsuperscript{108}. Similarly, the "Führerprinzip", which would define Hitler as the embodiment of the popular will, also was an ideal of the youth movement\textsuperscript{109}, and yet that ideal looked not forward to the Nazis but backward to the relationship that allegedly existed between front-line officers and their men during the war\textsuperscript{110}.

Although the youth movement sought to overcome class distinctions and to become more socially inclusive than the pre-war "Wandervogel" had been, the bourgeois character of the youth movement of the Bünde was never seriously threatened by the addition of a handful of working-class members\textsuperscript{111}. Indeed, one gets the sense that the presence of children from a proletarian background allowed the middle-class members to experience a simultaneous sense of social generosity and social superiority. In the youth movement of the Weimar Republic, members of the educated middle class set the tone. One of the prime complaints of the interviewees about the Nazi youth movement would be that the demolition of class barriers was carried too far and that the Hitler Jugend (HJ) and the Bund Deutscher Mädel (BDM) no longer were dominated by bourgeois children but had a decidedly proletarian or peasant character. A number of the women remember experiencing the contact with lower-class teenagers in the BDM as something of a shock\textsuperscript{112}. Indeed, what troubled some of those interviewed about the Nazi youth organizations was that, through their populist character, these organizations lost much of their bourgeois elitism. And, along with belonging, elitism was at the heart of the youth movement's appeal to those interviewed\textsuperscript{113}. They had the sense that they had proved themselves superior to the vast majority of their fellow Germans in being able to transcend materialism and bourgeois comforts as well as the social snobbery of their peers and parents\textsuperscript{114}. Indeed, by embracing hardship, they had proved themselves superior to their parents; and yet, because their aim was not to vanquish their parents but to preserve them as admirable figures, ultimately the youth movement was deeply conservative and safely bourgeois\textsuperscript{115}. Carrying on many of the social prejudices and political traditions of their class, the elitism of these adolescents took the form of a lifestyle. They lived a critique of bourgeois society, if one takes them at their word\textsuperscript{116}. And yet even in their rejection of the modern and the urban and in their celebration of the traditional and the natural they remained within a well-established bourgeois tradition\textsuperscript{117}.

\textsuperscript{108} (AB103) (S104).
\textsuperscript{109} (S102-A107); (S117); (S104).
\textsuperscript{110} Ute Daniel, Zweierlei Heimatfronten (s. note 91).
\textsuperscript{111} (B104) (S117).
\textsuperscript{112} (A120).
\textsuperscript{113} (S123) (A120) (S117).
\textsuperscript{114} (A115); (S104); (B104); (S112); (S116); (S119); (S117); (A101); (A106); (S110); (S102-A107).
\textsuperscript{115} (S107).
\textsuperscript{116} (A109); (S112); (A115); (S110); (S119); (A106).
\textsuperscript{117} (A120) provides a model of the youth-movement’s rejection of civilization in her descrip-
Given their association of politics with disorder and their fear of discord in the family or in the group, it was important for the interviewees to maintain that the youth movement was apolitical. One interviewee’s response to the question of whether politics had ever been discussed in his youth-movement group is completely typical: “Ich glaube, das kann ich mit einem hundertprozentigen NEIN beantworten.” Because the nationalism and social openness advocated by the youth movement promised to increase harmony in Germany and because the anti-republican conservatism advocated by their parents promised to end party-political conflict, neither seemed “political” to the interviewees. Instead, they equated “politics” with the Weimar Republic, and rejected the latter along with the former. Defining politics as party politics, those interviewed could look favorably upon National Socialism as an apolitical movement of national regeneration and social unification that followed in the apolitical footsteps of the youth movement. To the extent that theirs was a rebellion, it was a rebellion against the decidedly political Weimar Republic, with its urban character, its social disorder and political strife, its men in dark suits and top hats. And theirs was a completely safe rebellion for it never took a more dangerous form than a song, a discussion, or a hike up a hill. theirs was also a completely safe rebellion since it was not directed against parents and teachers but was generally consistent with traditional conservatism and nationalism. The one rebellion against school authorities described in the interviews was an anti-Semitic rebellion against a progressive school that sought to promote republican ideals.

There is no report of any rebellion against the more typical Weimar school that sought to turn its pupils against the Republic and to instill traditional conservative and nationalistic values in them. For the most part, their rebellion was directed against abstractions, the Republic or the Versailles Treaty, and not against people they knew or institutions they interacted with; it was directed against bourgeois propriety and materialism, not against actual bourgeois Germans. These adolescents had no need to rebel, for, had they wanted to, they could easily have seen themselves as having defeated their parents – and they did not want to see their parents in a defeated light. One interviewee, who in his interview goes to great lengths to deny his disappointment in his father and his sense of having surpassed him, puts it this way:

Es ist öfter die Frage gestellt worden, ob die Jugendbewegung eine Opposition, aus der Opposition zum Elternhaus entstanden war. Das kann ich also für mich nicht behaupten. Ich habe zum Elternhaus keine Opposition gehabt ... Es war natürlich ein bürgerliches Haus!

Indeed, the interviewees' contempt for the Weimar Republic as adolescents can be understood as an effort to protect the parents from their own disappointment in them. The interviewees' criticism of the leaders of Weimar for being unconcerned with the lives of ordinary Germans may have been a displacement of anger at the parents for having neglected them emotionally. Most contemptible about the Republic's leaders, however, was their weakness and ineffectuality, their inability to control the forces of history and prevent disorder, and their failure to uphold German honor. These were precisely the charges they could have laid at their parents' door. Instead, they projected the de-idealized aspects of the parents onto the leaders of Weimar, simultaneously expressing their contempt and protecting their parents and themselves from it. In any event, those interviewed generally adopted the parents' conservative political opinions, accepting their hostility toward the Weimar Republic and their anti-Semitism as well as that of siblings, classmates, teachers, and youth-movement comrades.

Nevertheless, despite its conservatism and fantastical idealism, the youth movement partook of the twentieth-century breakdown of sexual and social barriers, a breakdown facilitated by the chaos of Weimar which forced classes and sexes together in unprecedented and often liberating ways. Although girls were often discouraged and dismissed in school, they were accepted as equals in the youth movement, even if they had to adopt certain male standards to achieve equality. In general, the disorder of Weimar had benefits for this generation, especially for the women, as it did for other formerly disadvantaged groups (like Jews) — although those benefits would ultimately produce a backlash. The contrast between young and old in their ability to adapt to and even enjoy the conditions of Weimar Germany (captured in Thomas Mann's short story "Unordnung und frühes Leid") comes through the interviews, most poignantly, when the much-older sister of one of the interviewees committed suicide because, in the words of her suicide note, "die Alten müssen Platz machen für die Jungen." Despite lost educational opportunities during the 1920s, the hardships compelled and the breakdown of established structures enabled women to take opportunities for work and for pleasure that had only been a dream for their mothers. The liberating dimension of the disorder of the 1920s is perhaps most vividly illustrated by the interviewee who, though devastated by the death of her father and the sui-

124 (S104).
125 (A109); (S114); (A106); (A120); (A109).
126 (A110-A121); (A109); (S106).
127 (A109); (A111); (S113); (S117); (A123); (S117); (A103); (A116).
128 (A115); (A109); (B115); (A101).
129 (A103).
130 (A119); (A104); (B113).
cide of her sister and forced to abandon her dream of university study, was energized by these tragic events into traveling to the United States where she took a job as a housemaid, learned to drive, and had a series of exhilarating experiences that would have been previously unthinkable for someone of her class and sex\textsuperscript{131}. Women became openly interested in politics, a domain previously reserved for males\textsuperscript{132}. According to the interviewees, although mothers and daughters tended to vote as their husbands or fathers did, the right to vote had a positive impact on them\textsuperscript{133}. Thus the women of this generation can be seen as occupying a transitional position: the mothers of the interviewees mainly had dreams; the interviewees realized many of those dreams; their children carried those dreams much, much further\textsuperscript{134}.

The turbulence of the 1920s exacerbated class tensions and it is fitting that the interviewees' memories of Weimar open and close with street fighting. Nonetheless, those clashes also reveal that during the 1920s the social classes came into greater contact with each other\textsuperscript{135}. As if a scene from the Nazi film, "Hitlerjunge Quex", one interviewee's memory of being a boy, dressed in a bourgeois coat, fighting for his life against Communist youth on a Berlin bridge testifies to the breakdown of the social barriers that had kept the classes apart and preserved social order\textsuperscript{136}. And yet, in fighting each other, the social classes were interacting in unprecedented ways. The chaotic conditions of Weimar reduced the physical and psychological distance between the classes, encouraging the interviewees to view class divisions not as inevitable but as permeable. Those conditions created opportunities for the young people of this generation, enabling them to cast off not only traditional gender roles but traditional social roles as well. The economic hardships compelled them to them to be downwardly mobile in ways they experienced as liberating and exciting, like the middle-class boy who dropped out of school to become a locksmith's apprentice and factory worker, like the upper-middle-class boy who became a locomotive driver and then a migrant laborer in the United States, and like the upper-middle-class girl who became a maid servant in the United States\textsuperscript{137}. Although these occupations would have been a social humiliation for their parents, the interviewees recall these experiences as providing them with an opportunity to escape stultifying social conventions, prove themselves, and live a life of adventure\textsuperscript{138}.

Furthermore, the conditions of Weimar awakened a social conscience on the part of the interviewees and encouraged them to become socially active\textsuperscript{139}. Per-
haps the economic hardships experienced by their own families, the loss of security and status, made the lower classes seem less alien, for those interviewed developed a certain empathy for people lower on the social ladder. As in other areas, the social engagement of the interviewees during the 1920s and early 1930s marks a transition between the paternalistic charity of the parental and grandparental generations and the radical social-political activism of the generation of their children. Thus by working in a soup kitchen during the early 1930s, one young woman carried the tradition of her admired grandfather, the stately country doctor, forward into the urban social-welfare setting of a Depression-era work camp. This transitional position is reflected in the fact that the social engagement of the interviewees on the one hand transcended class boundaries and on the other reaffirmed them. By mixing with the lower classes, the interviewees appear to have experienced a sense of liberation and of superiority. A whole new world opened up to the upper-middle-class work-camp cook as she learned about the lives of proletarian young people, and yet their stories allowed her to feel, despite the social and economic deprivations she and her family had suffered, a sense of social elevation. Still, despite the lingering social snobbery, the contact with the poor and unemployed during the 1920s and early 1930s laid the foundation for the social activism of the interviewees during the Third Reich and beyond.

Indeed, part of the appeal of Nazism to those interviewed was that it promised to carry forward many of the positive experiences of the youth movement, specifically, and of the 1920s, generally, without the chaotic and demeaning dimensions of the Weimar Republic. Indeed, the women interviewees would continue to experience life as filled with liberating opportunities and exciting responsibilities through the end of the Second World War. The Nazi Volksgemeinschaft would appeal to the intense need of both men and women for community, their wish to overcome class boundaries, and their desire to experience an elitist yet collectivist emotional high. The community lived out in the youth movement would become a model for society at large. The Nazi appeal to nationalism resonated with those interviewed as well. Nazism seemed apolitical in the same way the youth movement had been. Yet the Nazis would transform adolescent fantasy into national-social reality by putting the lived experience of the youth movement into practice on a grand scale. There was also an age-specific aspect to this move toward Nazism. By 1933, most of the interviewees had left the Gymnasium and outgrown the youth movement – indeed, a significant number had already become National Socialists.

In conclusion, the youth movement responded to the disorder and disintegration that followed the German defeat in World War I. It offered emotional security at a time when the family and other institutions that normally would have

140 (A116); (S124); (S107); (BS121); (A109).
141 (B114).
142 (B114); (A116); (S108); (A120).
143 (BS121); (A120).
144 (S104); (S107).
supported these adolescents had been weakened by defeat, disorder, and hardship. The youth movement was a source of security that tapped into a fantasy of pre-war and wartime rural stability, served as an alternative to the weakened family, and provided a set of communal ideals to restore and replace those that had been lost in the defeat and the events that came in its wake. But by the beginning of the 1930s, having been provided with a "Nest", those interviewed were in their twenties and ready to move beyond the campfire. The Third Reich became for them the youth movement's age-appropriate extension.

Those interviewed greeted the Nazi accession to power in January 1933 with enthusiasm, precisely because they thought that the Third Reich would carry the positive experiences of the youth movement forward, while overcoming some of its limitations. Several interviewees use “Aufbruchsstimmung” to describe the mood at the beginning of the Third Reich, a word that captures the feeling at the outset of a youth-movement excursion.\(^{145}\) Similarly, the Nazi mass rallies created a collectivist high comparable to that experienced at youth-movement group meetings and conventions. As one interviewee put it, she had the sense that "Da war was los!", and did not want to miss out on the adventure.\(^{146}\) Like the interviewees, the Nazis were young and dynamic, and the Third Reich presented a generation ready to take action and assume responsibility with the opportunity to do so. And yet Nazism also appealed to these young adults precisely because there was something adolescent about its fantastical idealism. Indeed, the first real conflict between the interviewees and their parents came in relation to the Third Reich. The parents, with their social snobbery and political conservatism, regarded the Nazis with contempt and the Nazi plan to create a populist community of the people with misgiving. Their children found these views old fashioned, socially narrow, and timid. By contrast, the Nazis were in tune with the needs of youth, possessing the energy and will to restore what had been lost by those interviewed, by their parents, and by the nation at the end of World War I.

The Nazis, it seemed, would make adolescent fantasy a national-social reality by putting the lived experience of the youth movement into practice on a grand scale. The intense collectivism of the youth-movement group would be carried forward and extended in the Nazi community of the people. Defining politics as self-interested and divisive conflict, the interviewees saw the creation of a homogeneous and harmonious Volksgemeinschaft as apolitical in the same way that the youth movement had been. The Nazis offered not words but deeds, not just hikes, games, songs, and discussions but rearmament and the open violation of the Versailles Treaty. They offered not excursions to Germans living abroad but the physical incorporation of them into the Reich. In contrast to the ineffectual speechmaking of the Weimar politicians, the Nazis offered visible achievement. Most obviously they eradicated the disturbing spectacle of the unemployed, an accomplishment due not only to the economic upswing that had already begun before 1933 and to

\(^{145}\) (A111), for example.
\(^{146}\) (AB102-B106).
the Nazi program of rearmament but also to the fact that unemployed people had been put in work camps. The Nazis also eliminated the very visible disorder of the Weimar Republic, to which they had contributed so much themselves. They eliminated the sense that one lived in an anarchic and arbitrary environment, and instituted a regime where danger was placed under human agency, controlled and directed by state, party, and security apparatus. Unpredictable disorder was replaced by Nazi terror, which, if one obeyed and conformed, was a danger that could be negotiated. One interviewee describes the Nazis as having created a system where “unbedeutende Menschen” could flourish. She clearly meant that if one did not challenge but accommodated oneself to the Nazi regime it was possible to live a comfortable life, relatively unaffected by the system. And yet the Nazis valorized “unbedeutende Menschen” not only to insure obedience but to inspire enthusiasm. By making ordinary people into populist heroes, they transformed the sense of being a little man or woman – which in Weimar had been such a humiliation for middle-class Germans – into a source of pride. Another woman recalls meeting Hitler, after having won an occupational competition, her picture being congratulated by the Führer appearing in German newspapers the next day. This “kleine Frau” became for a few moments a national hero through her contact with Hitler, himself a “kleiner Mann”, who had become a demi-god. Like the youth-movement excursion, this sort of competition, along with the proliferation of Nazi projects, programs, and campaigns, served to correct another flaw associated with Weimar by enabling people to experience a sense of mastery. As one woman put it, Hitler “hat gefordert und Aufgaben gestellt”.

Although the Third Reich offered these young people unprecedented opportunities to take responsibility and initiative, it exerted great pressure on them to conform, pressure to which most submitted with alacrity. To be sure, fear, opportunism, and mass hysteria, played a role in their conformity, but it was also crucially important for these Germans to subordinate themselves to the group. The need to belong had defined their experience in the youth movement and it continued to define their experience in the Third Reich. The youth movement group had simply been vastly enlarged and become more socially inclusive, its elitism given a racial cast.

One interviewee recalled her effort to explain her enthusiasm for the Nazis to herself during the 1930s:

Und dann kam ich auf die Idee, kam selbst auf die Idee, daß es doch etwas zu tun hatte mit dem Tode meines Vaters im Krieg, der so bedeutete, daß wir den Krieg verloren hatten, soll umsonst gewesen sein. Es ging ja alles um unser Volk, die [die Nazis] kriegten es ja fertig, uns das Gefühl zu geben, wir sind ein kleines Rädchen, wir werden endlich gebraucht, wir können irgendwo mit machen, wir können unserem Volk helfen. Das haben die fertig gebracht. Das war auch eigentlich mein Hauptgedanke.
Thus, despite the defeat in World War II, the division of Germany, and the crimes against humanity, those interviewed look back upon the Third Reich as a “schöne Zeit” and on the 1930s as a “sorglose” time\textsuperscript{151}. The experience of the youth movement was played out on the national stage. The losses of the past, in the family and in the nation, were overcome. Like Germany itself, this generation was in its prime. It seemed to those interviewed that their time had come.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{151} (A104); (A108); (A109); (A110-A121); (A111); (A112); (A115); (A117); (A118); (A119); (A124); (B103); (B104); (B114); (B115); (S110); (S113); (S120); (S123).}