This bulletin is collaged from fragments of what is, in the author's words, "an account of my intellectual imagination — for want of a better term — since September 2008 … a period during which the synchronicity of coincidence began to seem almost supernatural … I have never checked, but I would be interested to know what was happening astrologically between 15 and 16 September 2008. For it was during these two seemingly magnetized days that Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc. filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection — an event now recognized as the starting whistle for a global economic recession — and Damien Hirst, with near supernatural timing, made a reported £111,576,800 from his auction of 223 new works at Sotheby's, London. I was tenuously connected to the second of these events, having written the introduction to the Hirst sale catalog. I was unable to follow the drama, however, as I was undergoing open-heart surgery. During this operation the patient 'dies,' technically — in the sense that their heart/lung function ceases, and is routed through clever technology, so on one level I have since had the unchanging feeling, however fanciful, that I am living in a kind of afterlife. A few months prior, I had had a very vivid dream …"

This became the basis for a series of essays written for BBC Radio 3 — an aesthetic travelog called "Germany is Your America" that first aired in February 2010. The first part of that series has since been published, along with some related notes and writing, in *The Space Between: Selected Writings on Art*, edited by Doro Globus (London: Ridinghouse, 2012). The same phrase was also used to title an open-ended exhibition, curated together with Anke Kempkes and Nick Mauss, which opened in Fall 2011 at Broadway 1602, New York City. There, the title's provenance was variously explained in an letter of invitation to the artists, an introductory wall text, and various bits of accompanying literature.

Cover image: Lucy McKenzie, *Eno Study for Mural*, 2003. Pencil on paper. 30 x 43 cm (12 x 7 in.) Reproduced with kind permission, and with thanks to Ridinghouse

The Danny Kaye Suite
Hotel-Spa Therme Vals
Switzerland

March 2013

For the attention of
Duncan Minshull
Series Producer, "The Essay"
BBC Radio 3
London W1

Dear Duncan,

It was good to hear from you, as always, and I hope that all is well. I hope, too, that you will forgive me for responding to your request in a letter; it somehow seems easiest and more selfishly suits my mood, which is sluggish and lazy — as distant from sorrow as it is from happiness.

But I was flattered to be asked to suggest some ideas for your radio series — I'm a regular listener. And to write a series of essays, light-hearted, open-handed, inter-related around a particular topic, seems a good way to pass some time. But what might capture a listener's attention? Yesterday afternoon I wrote the following on the back of a menu: *Billy Fury*, *ruins*, *In Defence of Obscurity* (I crossed this one out), *school?*

Not great — and somehow melancholy, like a boxed jigsaw turning brown in the window of a seaside gift shop. I then tried to remember what had held my attention in recent months — whether there was some psychic lightning conductor to which all my emotional or intellectual energies might be harnessed and which might make a good subject. And after a while such a thought did come to mind — as it had first come to me — in the form of a dream.

What follows then is the account of a dream, and some notes, aperçus, field recordings, whatever … Whether you will feel that they might amount to a proposal for a radio series, I can't imagine.

But to set the immediate scene … This high, even this late in the winter, there are still sudden silent days of unrelieved snowfall; and then "the pale winter sun, poor ghost of itself," is merely a far-off disc, remote, sorrowful. The day grows dark as the world whitens beyond the vast windows of *der Blauen Halle*—the modernist alpine *grand salon*, well mannered, orderly, calm and luxurious, which lies at the center of my spa hotel.

Quickly the new snow melts away, exposing tracts of wiry grass and narrow gray paths; the dry days follow with equal suddenness, warmer, almost mild. Beneath my balcony, last year's leaves are blown in ones and twos, skittering in circles about the white hemisphere of the deserted terrace, where the sunshades remain sheathed in their winter livery of cement colored canvas. Shortly before dusk, a bird sings ceaselessly —two brief, husky notes, the first slightly higher than the second; and with it comes a presentiment of spring, of softer air and the light beginning to linger at the end of the afternoon—of a pause at the end of winter, still dreaming, yet somehow now alert …

To this routine of life in an alpine spa, there is a touch of *Der Zauberberg*. They rise early and bathe in the outdoor pool of the Therme, the snow settling on bare shoulders; they inhale eucalyptus-scented steam in a series of tomb-like black rooms, each hotter than the one before. They breakfast heavily; and then coffee, and the prospect of what translated too literally from Swiss German is titled a "health vitality walk," beside the river that is now swollen with melt water, following its urgent course along the valley, through groves of tall, thin trees that creak and snap like the masts of an old ship in the chill morning wind.

Such is the therapeutic nature of this decadence; which brings a thought to mind—reflexively, associatively: "We looked to Germany as a cure for our personal problems," wrote Stephen Spender in his 1951 autobiography, *World Within World*. (He was describing his meeting with Christopher Isherwood in Berlin in the late 1920s; their diet of black coffee and horse lung soup. On all sides, disaster loomed; these young literary tourists were carousing in the eye of what Sir Stephen later termed "the *Weimardämmerung*.")

"… For our personal problems." But exactly … For my subject would be

Germany, or more accurately an *idée reçue* of Germany as a personal and cultural metaphor: a phantasm of what that country might represent, in its fragmented and refracted form, as it reaches me, an Englishman in middle age, vacationing in the Alps to ponder life's mysteries. And say what you like, here, safe in Switzerland, I bring such thoughts of Germany to mind as Spender had — reactions both intensely personal, and pertaining to some manner of cultural abstraction, or allegory — and also entirely quotidian, if not dull … In fact, it is the point where these two opposing qualities meet, that interests me: the moment of hybridization, when the ordinary begins to assume the hue and form of the extraordinary. (The same applies, I think, to the relationship between the natural world and the supernatural.)

Just as, dining the other evening in Zurich, beside the lake, in a dark and oddly ornate restaurant, watching heavy young Englishmen dressed in blazers, sage green chinos and luxuriantly thick, open-necked shirts, their hair watered down in a blandly self-satisfied manner — brought immediately T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" to mind … Or something about modernism and disaster that reaches from a century back, and provides, as it were, a muffled but insistent overture to my response to your request … As I say, it was a reflexive impression.

So by way of introduction, here is E.M. Forster from *Howards End* (a little more than a century back), describing the Schlegel sisters, proto-Bloomsbury in outlook:

A word on their origin. They were not "English to the backbone," as their aunt had piously asserted. But, on the other band, they were not "Germans of the dreadful sort." Their father had belonged to a type that was more prominent in Germany fifty years ago than now. He was not the aggressive German, so dear to the English journalist, nor the domestic German, so dear to the English wit. If one classed him at all it would be as the countryman of Hegel and Kant, as the idealist, inclined to be dreamy, whose Imperialism was the Imperialism of the air …

Then there was a moment — and it keeps coming back to me — when Dick Diver from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* put his finger on what happened next, towards the end of our overture heard through

a wall … It occurred in one of the Great War cemeteries, not far from Waterloo:

This kind of battle was invented by Lewis Carroll and Jules Verne and whoever wrote *Undine*, and country deacons bowling and marraines in Marseilles and girls seduced in the back lanes of Wurtemberg and Westphalia. Why, this was a love battle — there was a century of middle-class love spent here. This was the last love battle … All my beautiful lovely safe world blew itself up here with a great gust of high explosive love," Dick mourned persistently. "Isn't that true Rosemary?"

"I don't know," she answered, with a grave face, "You know everything."

It seems to me, as I watch the blonde Austrian woman across the salon pouring out her *lindenbluten* tea, that Dick Diver did indeed know everything — at least everything about the edifice of near unimaginable import with which the subject of modern Germany is backed. A whole civilization — bourgeois, cultivated, inventive, complex, inquiring — transformed in just a few years … Think of Visconti's *The Damned* and Sartre's *D'Altona* — of everything that happened in Germany before and up to the 1950s, and the queasy palliative of the *Heimatfilm* … And then think of Richter and Beuys and Kraftwerk …

All of this resides in a blur in the back of my mind — a phantasm of pan-European Germania, a style code and an aesthetic movement, giving way first to apocalypse and then to a new modernity — of concrete and straight lines and neon, out of which we have built another idea of Germany as "a cure for our personal problems."

Another notion slips easily into place, which is the perhaps unsurprising observation that in recent years — less than a decade — a new generation have become aware of the iconic power of Germany as a re-invented symbol; and more, of the multi-faceted nature of that symbol, its play of stridency and ambiguity, its shifting weight and shuttling between modern past and modern present, its games with its own shadow. The British artists Gilbert & George observe that of all the cities around the world where they have exhibited their art, it is only in Berlin where fans always ask them to add the name of the city beneath their signatures — as

though the very word — Berlin — were now a flourish and a statement, undeniable, inviolable, the card that cannot be trumped …

Perhaps this is something to do with a reversal of American glamor and European intellectualism. The conversion of trauma, neurasthenia, menace, personal problems into a potent form of cool … I was thinking of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, or Bauhaus jazz bands and student theatre, such as Xanti Schawinsky's *Spectodrama* … From the cool of the Bauhaus derives the fusion of warm erotic romanticism and coldly linear technology, which is then exported to America in the more simple formula of sex and mass production: the template of pop.

With this in mind: during the summer of 1929, in Hamburg, Spender — then a young student — attends a party that anticipated with uncanny premonition the style and milieu of Andy Warhol during the first half of the 1960s. Spender later recounted the episode in his memoir *World Within World*, published in 1951. At one point during the evening a film of the previous week's party was projected, depicting the activities in the same room of the same youthful party-goers: "bronze skinned and dressed with a simplicity which suggested leaves and summer. The boys seemed girlish while the girls seemed masculine … ." Shortly before this film was shown, Spender danced with an androgynous and beguiling girl called Irmi, whose attitudes were modern bohemian. ("The questions which would have arisen before me at Oxford," Sir Stephen confessed, "did not arise … .") So, Spender to play:

I seemed to be moving in a trance of sensuous freedom where everything was possible and plausible and easy … A film was shown of another party just like the one at which I was now present and with some of the same people … Now on the screen there was a party here in this very room and people dancing. The camera passed through moving figures, surveying the room, occasionally pausing as it were to examine someone's dress or figure. Boys and girls were lying on the ground embracing and then rolling away from one another to turn their faces towards the camera's lens …

These young people regarded themselves, however informally, as devotees of a cult of modernism — which in Germany at that time, Spender states, was "a popular mass movement." As well as having a

cultural meaning, this was a term also claimed as a state of mind and a code of behavior — a lifestyle choice, in contemporary terms. For the informal "stars" of the filmed party (of which they were both subject and audience), modernism most resembled the later sub-cultural labels like mod or punk. To be a modernist on these terms, and as celebrated at this party, was not just to appreciate and demand the modernist style in all things, but to live for a modernist cult of fresh air, sunshine, romance, newness, swimming, sun-bathing, and ozone.

Of the host, Spender writes:

He liked beautiful things, but he preferred "living" to having things. Living was bathing, friendship, travelling, lying in the sun … He had given up drawing. He did, however, take photographs, and giving me a handful from a shelf under the Finnish table, he strolled off… About the appearance of them all and about the very technique of the photography, there was the same glaze and gleam of the "modern" as in the room itself and the people in it …

. . .

A break here —

The mountains, in which, unusually, I have been taking long walks, do make one feel like Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer* — the immense snow-capped peaks, empyrean above the dusty green of the forests that rise in ordered ranks above the snow line. And so the sublime, and the existential void, and the great "what now?" that makes one feel as a twitch upon a thread.

And so, I'm not trying to say I had a vision or anything, but …

With the greatest respect to Dr. Freud, I have never put much store by the interpretation of dreams. But then one night about five years ago, I had a dream that would have a direct and profound effect on my travels and interests, despite the somewhat prosaic fact that its single and concise message was concerned with nothing more or less than my relationship to modern Germany.

And this was straight out of the blue; I had had no particular awareness that I had been thinking about Germany in particular; and moreover, at that point, it was a country I had never even visited.

As I slid peacefully towards sleep, it seemed as though a corner of the bedroom was beginning to glow — shimmer is perhaps a better word — with what I can only describe as a curiously scientific kind of light. Its luminescence was at first metallic and silvery, giving way to brilliant whiteness. It was a rather comforting glow — the ambassadorial aura of a kindly, philosopher scientist.

I should probably have not been too surprised therefore, when who should emerge from the center of this coolly dazzling radiance than Brian Eno — the legendary musician, artist, producer and ideologue, who has not without good cause been variously described as "the cleverest man in the world" and "the Einstein of pop."

But it was still a shock; and I pulled the duvet up to my chin as Eno, suited in charcoal gray and attended by ribbon like wisps of white light — mischievous outriders to the central glow — advanced towards me with a friendly smile. He looked me fixedly in the eye, and levelled a finger straight at me. And then he made the following pronouncement, clear and direct, as though he were a venerable wizard entrusting me with a quest.

"Germany," he said, "is your America."

And then he was gone.

I don't often remember my dreams, but this one stayed with me, in part because it had been so vivid, but also because the more I thought about it, and about my feelings towards Germany — which remember at this point I had yet to visit — the more that it seemed Eno was right. Germany was my America — and the reasoning went something like this:

To a certain generation in Britain, those opening their eyes to the twilight of Austerity towards the end of the 1950s, there would be a curious sense of being out of step with the developing trends of youth culture.

For instance, we were too young to really experience or remember the Teddy Boys — the very mention of whom could still, in the early 1960s, cause knuckles to whiten around the handles of suddenly trembling teacups. Likewise, we were also too young to join the caravan of free love, bare feet, long skirts and patchouli oil that was setting off by way of the London School of Economics and the Isle of Wight to seek out the Utopia of Freak Power in various largely rain swept free festivals up and down the length of England.

No, for those of us who were, say, approaching our twenties in 1977, our big pop experience would be punk — a vertiginous cyclone of energy, imaginative creativity and aggressive profanity, the edges of which seemed to crackle and spit with equal parts nihilism and intellectual inquiry. And somewhere in the middle of punk was the idea — fanciful, no doubt, and swollen with youthful egoism — that we were growing to adulthood in the ruins of history. In every racing, snarling, sneering punk record was the message that modernity itself had accelerated to a point of critical mass — and what was left was a tribe of disaffected urban youth, who dressed as though Dickensian urchins had time traveled to the 23rd century.

However seriously or otherwise one might want to consider the punk movement, 30 years on, there was for those who went through it an intense, accompanying romanticism. We were reinventing the gothic; and it flattered our sense of ourselves to make believe that we were living in the midst of a new decadence — of melancholy urban ruins, dark, covert little bars and febrile night clubs; a place re-running the louche café culture of the Weimar Republic, where young men and women of ambiguous sexuality and nervous temper spent their days and nights in a cocoon of unreality, the better to shut out a premonition of disaster. That was one half of the equation, at any rate.

On the other hand, we were drawn to the notion of a cold, stark modernity: a science fiction place of monolithic concrete blocks, steel wire and vast, blank windows. A night landscape dotted with violet and scarlet pulsars of light, where around every corner one might find a deserted lot, an empty, blue-lit thoroughfare, or the black, gaping maw of an urban underpass. This, to the accompaniment of portentous, angular, and

serenely impersonal electronic music, was the heady, intoxicating, imaginary world inhabited by young people of a certain punkish disposition towards the end of the 1970s.

And the more you thought about it, broke down its influences, icons, and inspirations, the more you realized that this imaginary world was in fact a Dream Germany. Not the real Germany, of people shopping and working and going about their business — for the most part in a largely and cheerfully conservative kind of way; but a fantasy of febrile decadence and alienated modernism, the tenets of which tended to find their common denominator in films, books, music and ideas that had either originated in, or been inspired by, an over-romantic projection onto specifically German history and culture.

The cultural components — the machine parts, as it were — of this Dream Germany were indeed a seductive selection. And for this particular generation, the Germanophile tendency had been inculcated to a large degree by David Bowie's move to Berlin in 1976, and his espousal of a new European lifestyle that could easily seem like a pop re-run of Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye To Berlin*. With Eno himself and the semi-crazy Iggy Pop from Detroit, Bowie would make in Germany a series of records which were as haunting and eerie as they were cascading, fractured and neurotic.

But it wasn't just pop, this new German tendency: it was time travel. Arnold Schoenberg's dream-like, twilit, anxious tone poems, "Verklachte Nacht" and "Pierrot Lunaire," brought to the modern listener the recent history of what we might call musical angularity — a nervous, psychologically poised excursion into a shadowy, richly romantic aesthetic.

And with eyes the size of beer mats we sat transfixed by Joel Grey and Liza Minelli as they acted out the roles of a failed vamp and a diabolic Master of Ceremonies in Bob Fosse's film musical *Cabaret* — a masterclass in charisma, rivaled only by Helmut Berger's portrayal of "Mad" King Ludwig II in Luchino Visconti's retina enlarging film masterpiece *Ludwig* — in which marble, gold and crimson velvet were to Berger's tormented Bavarian monarch what dry Martini and the Aston Martin were to Sean Connery's James Bond. Turning in the moonlight,

his face caught in profile, Berger's doomed King Ludwig announced, "I am an enigma!" — and that seemed like the banner of a generation; the way we let our freak flag fly …

I could go on — the terrified and terrifying studies of physical trauma, human disorder and moral decay in the paintings of George Grosz and Otto Dix; the breathless suspense of Peter Lorre's depiction of a child murderer in Fritz Lang's film, *M* — as much a film about city streets, empty corridors and shadows as it was about a diseased mind in a crumbling society. These were our *Last Picture Show* … As though F. Scott Fitzgerald's all-seeing eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleberg, staring out over the valley of ashes on the edge of New York, had been replaced by the eyes of *Caligari*'s Conrad Veidt, meeting our gaze across some rain-slicked hinterland in the former GDR.

And in the cultural exchange of Germany for America, it was the electronic music quartet from Dusseldorf, Kraftwerk — purveyors of what they termed "everyday activity music" from their top secret Kling Klang studio — who were our Andy Warhol, revealing the essence of modern life beneath a chilled, impersonal high gloss surface. Kraftwerk! The doo-wop of the Economic Miracle, as suave and as thrilling as Bogart and Bacall …

So for those of us who in 1978 were as weighed down by our Isherwood-schoolboy-style fringes and heavily-belted, secondhand raincoats, as by our Penguin Classics and leaflets from the ICA, there was absolutely no doubt that Eno was right. What Route 66 had been for the Beat generation, and Yasgur's farm for the flower children of Woodstock — symbolically loaded sites of an entire ideology, predicated on notions of liberation and revolution — so the autobahn, the Kit-Kat club and the Berlin Wall were venues redolent of equivalent glamor. Germany WAS our America — our dream frontier, in pursuit of which we would find ourselves, our generation, and our moral consequences finally and clearly reflected.

That was the dream, anyway. And at 30 years' distance I remain struck by the artistic power of its cultural components. These were books and films, music and paintings which seemed to grow with you, rather than fall away with age, revealed in time to be little more than melodrama and

emotional kitsch. What was strange — or perhaps not, because romantics always prefer the dream to the reality — was that in a quarter century of European travel, between 1978 and 2003, I had never actually got around to visiting to Germany. I had watched Notre Dame cast a long lonely shadow, felt wistful in Brussels, excitable in Madrid and irritable in Rome. But Germany remained unknown, untested, in a state of romantic elevation — tinged, just here and there, with the faint, barely admitted apprehension that I might, in fact, find the real place something of a let down. Added to which I was a vegetarian — which would hardly be fun, or even possible, in the land — the very Versailles — of the sausage. The romantic within me had recoiled perhaps, at a tiny bat squeak of warning.

Which must have been why Brian Eno had paid me a visit on the astral plane, and summarized so clearly the journeys that lay ahead. For within three weeks of that dream — Eno, message delivered, receding back through the portal of white light that was a fissure in my slumbering consciousness — I would find myself summoned to the country that was to be my America. The frontier had called, and I hastened to answer. My feet would first touch German soil in Cologne, by the Rhine; and no aesthete bound for Venice, first class and for the first time, could have felt as enlivened as I by the prospect.

. . .

So! Life is disappointing? Forget it! Leave your troubles outside! Here, life is beautiful. The girls are beautiful. Even the orchestra — is beautiful…

Alexandra Harris, in her book *Romantic Moderns*, has an interesting chapter on exile — literary exile in particular. She describes how there are few writers who describe their sense of home or nationhood with such heartfelt insight and longing as those who are writing from (usually self-imposed) exile. Thinking of this brought to mind the scene in John Schlesinger's film, *An Englishman Abroad*, in which we see the defected British agent Guy Burgess, dressed like the quintessential English City gent, as he strides with military bearing through the streets of Moscow.

But what if this sense of exile is both interior, and a vital part of some greater creative chemistry? For I also remember how, after a birthday

dinner held in London, someone commented on the odd and somewhat prickly nature of the guests. For the most part they had sat — all eight of them — intent and unsmiling, eating and drinking with steady, impassive concentration, seldom looking up from their plates. What they had in common, yet another person present later asserted, and what had driven them into such retreat (their faces as closed and blank as the windows of those anonymously institutional buildings in the backstreets of Westminster) was their identity, now, as exiles in their own country — as resident aliens within a city whose glamor and mystery and fathomless ocean-like depths they had once embodied. Strange celebrators.

Reflexively, I now think of Germany as the first port of call for exiles-in-training — the place where the sense of exile, once engaged, might be sampled, test-driven, absorbed in small homeopathic doses, to discover its effect upon the system. And so what follow are some further notes as to how I might approach this subject — What is it that the loathsome critic in Fellini's film *Otto e Mezzo* remarks? "A series of disconnected scenes, amusing even in their ambiguous realism …" :

I.

The Dream: introduction: "Germany is your America" (see above): a highly romantic idea of Germany filtered through post-punk as daydream: *Cabaret*, Otto Dix, Kraftwerk, Fritz Lang, Kurt Weill, Arnold Schoenberg, King Ludwig II, and David Bowie. This fantasy of Germany in the late 1970s prior to having actually visited the country. Romantic idea of Germany as "decadence" — a culture in extremis: edgy, neurasthenic, urban, modernist. But what of the reality?

II.

Wilkommen, Bienvenue, Welcome. The Reality: Self as Christopher Isherwood: Cologne, 2003: first trip to Germany. Arrive in a heat wave — 44 ° C on touchdown. Taxi into central Cologne, seeing Rhine in a heat haze, caloric waves over railway station. The Gothic. Staying in a water tower refurbished as a boutique hotel; Warhol portraits of Beethoven in the lobby. There to see exhibition by Richard Hamilton, at Museum Ludwig, Cologne. Quotidian impressions of Cologne as a modern

city: department stores and shopping malls. Department store top floor buffet restaurant — articulate of national temperament? Realization that rather than a country of extreme behavior, this is now a place where moderation and courtesy — a plateau of orderly middle class routine — appears to be the norm. Hooray. Sense that where the UK has become a culture of excess, in everything from drinking habits to house prices, Germany seems to be calm. But also boring? Probably. Germans in exile in New York who turn white when their home town somewhere along the Rhine valley is mentioned. If *Twin Peaks* was German? Scary.

My sister living in Wiesbaden, telling me that German people can become uneasy if they cannot place one socio-economically. Return to Cologne that autumn with Bryan Ferry; going to see Roxy Music play an outside concert in Bonn to 10,000 middle-aged and middle class people. Heaven? Then taxi driver immediately asking my opinion of epidemic of teenage suicides: "How is the problem in your country?" *Sorrows of Young Werther* meets Kurt Cobain. Visit to Bonn Museum of Contemporary Art. Impact of big sculptures by Anselm Kiefer. Realize sheer momentum and drive of German Romanticism, from Goethe to Kraftwerk. Trying to find vegetarian food in central Bonn on a wet Saturday afternoon. Early morning drive to Cologne airport — still dark, coming on dawn; view of super-neat tennis courts in the middle of nowhere. One huge province and therefore claustrophobic, hinting at something darker? Surface only scratched.

Me: "What are you doing?" German woman: "Is it not obvious? I am wearing my leisure clothes."

III.

Dream Kings and *Mensch Maschine*. Munich, 2005 and 2006. Arrival in Munich to visit Kunstverein München, set in cloisters around formal gardens. Staying in a hotel housed in neo-gothic mansion — size and scale of a small castle. German friend remarks that it can be glimpsed in Leni Riefenstahl's propaganda film *Triumph of The Will*. Breakfast in atmospherically faded grandeur of hotel café, nicotine stains on the stained glass, seated on silk cushions under portrait of King Ludwig II. Ruminations on Ludwig and Visconti's peerless 1972 film biography of same, starring

Helmut Berger and Romy Schneider. Also notice vast German gothic mirror: black frame comprised of antlers and owls. Wagner and the German sublime.

Munich however a city of new wealth, much deriving from media and technology, also BMW (see World Cup stadium as one drives into central Munich — illuminated at night in pearl pink). City of elegance and tradition, with its own highly developed idea of "society" — opera, exquisite cakes and Schumann's bar. Perhaps the best bar in the world? Owner is also a male model. Likes artists. Set against: Saturday afternoon in central Munich — lots of jolly audience participation games; also big swing band concert. This is how the trouble started. Reference *Swing Kids* as anti-fascist teenage gangs in Germany during the rise of Nazism.

Return to Munich, summer 2007, with Gilbert & George to see their *Major Exhibition* installed at Nazi-designed Haus der Kunst, just across the park from Kunstverein. Impressions of Haus der Kunst. Height of doorways, width of doors. Chilling photographic display of Nazi exhibition of "decadent" art. Now stillness — sunbeams slanting through windows. Quietude. Heightens impact of G&G's vast, intense, cosmographical pictures.

Me (encouragingly): "I am sure that your stepfather did not want to join the Hitler youth. He probably had no choice. Everyone was made to join the Hitler youth." German woman: "Yes. But not to sit in the front row."

Memory of seeing exhibition of *Black Paintings* — Rothko, Reinhardt, etc. Meditational. Murals in café. Lunch with G&G on outside terrace, looking at the fast flowing river in the English Gardens. Gilbert recalling first hearing Elvis in Munich. Walk around English Gardens past naturist section of park to beer garden. How to buy beer. Problem if not beer drinker, like self. Curiously infectious power of German brass band music — systems and layers. Further Bavarian beer hall with G&G in evening. Further problems of trying to find vegetarian food. Street life. Sex shops.

Interviewing Ralf Hutter of Kraftwerk. How do you interview a man machine? His account of seeing G&G perform their "Singing Sculpture" in Dusseldorf in 1970. His account of Germany in the 1960s as a country

with no cultural center. Rather a configuration of cities with different and distinct cultural scenes. Kraftwerk as "everyday" music — hymning newness of modern functionalism. Simultaneously machine-like and re-inventing spirit of German Romanticism. Opposition to Nuclear power — Germany and the Cult of Nature. Self-parodic Germanism? Kling Klang experiments with voice simulators and singing typewriters. Disney meets *Metropolis*. Haniel-Garage in Dusseldorf designed by Kraftwerk co-founder Florian Schneider's father in 1949 — multi-story carpark made out of glass, very beautiful. German friends who have met Florian — intensely private man. Quite right, too.

IV.

Berlin: Flight to Schoenefeld, winter 2007— airport in old East Berlin. Sudden awareness of bootprint of history. Former Communist housing blocks — glimpsing the Wall. Preservation of section with painting of Lou Reed: "In Berlin, by the wall …," 1973. The Dream transposed to reality. Reflections on the idea of Berlin as modern city — bohemianism, network of underground sub-cultures; Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire* giving impression of Berlin in the 1980s, pre-Unification: cold, sombre, sprawling, poor.

Now the arrival of boutique regeneration — Mitte district — galleries, cafés and elegant shops. But still a faint air of unease, despite the arrival of what might be called Art Money. Honey-colored winter light and sleet. Cafés with low red shaded lamps. Air thick with cigarette smoke. Sudden winter sunshine. Neue Galerie and Alte Galerie — Bauhaus and neoclassical architecture. Tracing history of 19th century German Romanticism through painting up to the contemporary. The destination of all that sublimity and romance — "A generation of depressed dreamers and irrationalists unleashed the Third Reich as a tyranny of mediocrity …" Horror of Otto Dix and George Grosz; Josef Beuys and political mysticism; Polke, Richter, Kippenberger. Post-modern Germany: a place at odds with itself philosophically, part *Alice In Wonderland*, part America. Schiller and the concept of Spieltrieb — "play-drive," the "serious jest."

Art opening in Berlin — private gallery in ground floor mansion flat once owned by Germany's equivalent of Max Bygraves. Blue light in courtyard

marking low doorway into HQ of Berlin's "Magic Circle." Party held in semi-derelict mental hospital: bloody typical: Vietnamese food delivered by courier. Intense young people — descendants of the post-punk dream of Germany — playing heavy techno and Stockhausen on laptops. Near total darkness. Candles. Beer. Outside, modern buildings in freezing cold, pale blue light, sky still honey-colored. Berlin somehow remains a place of portent, if caught in a certain light.

. . .

Making my way through the busy, uproarious streets, where the buildings looked like a Californian vision of medieval Europe and were festooned with hanging baskets overflowing with bright geraniums, I tried to work out how long it had been since I had eaten. This was in Munich, in the city's Old Town, and the summer was getting underway on a weekend of blousy skies and gentle breeze.

Through the mullioned windows of café after café, all that could be seen were crowds of laughing diners, seated at long wooden tables, surrounded by vast bowls of boiled sausages, glistening, ivory-colored sauerkraut and fried potatoes — all washed down by enormous steins of pale, pinkish, foaming beer. These feasts might be reached through low doorways, which always seemed located in the hollowed out buttresses of a vast castle.

I couldn't work out whether these castles were real, or 19th-century copies of medieval buildings; but once inside, all was forge-like, hearty and filled with an air of smoking open fires, crossed broad swords, low timbered ceilings, escutcheons, axes, guttering torches, antlers, crests, cast-iron chandeliers and the wall mounted heads of unfortunate beasts. To a child from, say, suburban Atlanta, the nearest comparison would be a set from *Lord of The Rings* …

Later, walking through the sunny groves of the aptly named *Englischer Garten*, it was interesting to come across a traditional Bavarian band, playing slowly clumping tunes of infernal catchiness to table after table of happily beer drinking Germans. As a scene, it could not have been more racially stereotypical — like watching a group of Texans roping a steer, or languid Englishmen playing cricket.

The band sat in what resembled a kind of Alpine pagoda, and the swaying rhythm and steady beat of each tune was, to my ears, utterly indistinguishable from one to the next. Rather, the music merged, like an esoteric eastern drone, into a single, all-enfolding tone; only, where an eastern drone might have become cosmically meditational, this Bavarian version was lulling and amniotic. It kept pace with a gentle, placid drunkenness —a lulling, supportive calm. And as I sat in the sun, listening to the band, a solitary white wine drinker amongst all that beer, I began to join in with the smiling, drowsy spell of it all. Here we all are, I thought—you could say we're a team … And one could do worse than simply sit here for a while, and watch the sunlight through the leaves, and listen to the band and just hope nothing goes wrong. Thinking about New York in Salon Schmidt. I know nothing.

And you know, Germany never did cure my personal problems. But as long as there's you, as long as there's me—

Let me know. Until soon,

Ever,

M

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