

A PUBLIC IN PROCESS: THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL, THE ALLENSBACH
INSTITUTE, AND THE PURSUIT OF "PUBLIC OPINION" IN 1950S WEST
GERMANY

By

Sonja G. Ostrow

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Professor Helmut Walser Smith

Professor Sarah Igo

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I. INTRODUCTION

In 1947, an ambitious young social scientist named Elisabeth Noelle (later Noelle-Neumann) founded the Institut für Demoskopie at Allensbach, soon to become the most influential opinion research institute in the Federal Republic of Germany. Less than two years later, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Friedrich Pollock returned to their homeland in the hopes of re-establishing the Institut für Sozialforschung at Frankfurt at the forefront of German social scientific research after several years in exile in the United States. All four were eager to participate in the process of rebuilding and re-imagining the German nation that had been initiated by occupying forces upon Germany's defeat in World War II. At first, the "denazification" projects of the western Allies focused on "re-educating" German citizens through post-war trials and the screening of films about Nazi war crimes.¹ Equally important, however, was the attempt to gauge the mindset and attitudes of the occupied population through opinion polls. In a few short years, therefore, the West German people became one of the most surveyed groups in history. Although American and British forces initially led the surveying efforts, the published fruits of social scientific knowledge quickly commanded domestic German attention, and often

¹ For a general overview of the goals of, and problems plaguing, denazification efforts in Germany with a focus on the American occupation zones, see Richard L. Merritt, *Democracy Imposed: U.S. Occupation Policy and the German Public, 1945-1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) and Thomas Schwartz, *America's Germany: John J. McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), especially pp. 45-56. On re-education through film, see Jennifer Fay, *Theaters of Occupation: Hollywood and the Reeducation of Postwar Germany* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). For a discussion of the relationship between Americanization and German conservative reintegration, see Diethelm Prowe, "The 'Miracle' of the Political-Culture Shift," in Hanna Schissler, ed., *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 454-55.

criticism, as well. German-led innovations in the social sciences received additional scholarly and political support in the context of the Cold War as the United States sought to mold its chief Central European ally into a bulwark against communism. As researchers like Noelle-Neumann, Pollock, and Adorno attempted to use American-influenced social scientific techniques to address Germany's past while also influencing its present and future, their high-profile research projects and publications stimulated further discussion about the face of the German public and its opinions. How reliable was the resulting knowledge, observers wondered, and how accurate was the portrait of the German public that it seemed to depict? What methodologies were most appropriate for bringing such information into the open? What were the perils of its publication and use by interested parties? These concerns were not unique to West Germany, but they took on a special cast there in light of the country's troubled history. Noelle's Institut für Demoskopie in Allensbach (also known simply as the Allensbach Institute) and Horkheimer's Institut für Sozialforschung (commonly referred to as the Frankfurt School) were equally invested in determining the answers to such questions, but took different approaches to the process.

On one extreme, many leftist intellectuals, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Pollock among them, were skeptical of the optimistic results of early Allied polls, which were deployed by the American and British forces in part to prove that Germans were ready for self-government and capable of building a democratic society. Moreover, they questioned the efficacy of the polling methods themselves in assessing the nature of a given "public." The members of the reconstituted Frankfurt School thus resolved to conduct their own study of German "public opinion," one that would penetrate the depths

of the German psyche and allow them to develop a fuller understanding of the dynamics of opinion formation and the nature of the German public itself. The result was a study consisting of 137 focus groups conducted among diverse subsets of West German society in the winter of 1950-51, a quantitative and qualitative analysis of which was finally published in 1955 as *Gruppenexperiment: Ein Studienbericht*. In its very structure, the *Gruppenexperiment* study revealed an interest not only in examining what the authors perceived as latent anti-democratic attitudes lurking within post-war German society, but in rethinking German national identity and the ideal dynamics of a future German public. The authors were not ready to dismiss all aspects of their German heritage in favor of American ways of being, knowing, and acting in the world. Instead, they sought to retain what they considered useful from their past, while challenging their fellow Germans – social scientific experts as well as ordinary citizens – to address openly the remnants of Nazi-era thought processes.

But the Frankfurt School study of 1950-51 was only one attempt among many by (West) Germans to articulate and quantify the nature of the post-war German “public.” Noelle-Neumann’s Allensbach Institute, in particular, led the charge in market as well as political research, and eventually became known for its annual publication on “the state of the German soul,” the *Jahrbuch der Öffentlichen Meinung*, in addition to its predictive political polls and consumer market research contracts. The Allensbach pollsters adhered closely to the model of opinion research pioneered by George Gallup and Elmo Roper in the United States. At the same time, Noelle-Neumann positioned the *Jahrbuch* and the methods of her institute in terms of specifically German concerns and also sought to

develop polling questions and techniques that illuminated the essence of the German public in any given moment.

Despite the recent surge of interest, led by scholars loosely affiliated with the interdisciplinary cluster of Science Studies, in the impact of surveys, opinion polls, and other social scientific techniques on populations and ideas, few historians have analyzed either the research project described in *Gruppenexperiment* or the output of the early Allensbach Institute, and no historian has attempted to compare their founding assumptions, purposes, and methodologies in detail. This is a serious oversight, because the empirical work of both social scientific institutes explored issues and articulated concepts that would become crucial to the ways in which German citizens and politicians thought about themselves and their history. In the pages that follow, I bring the histories of the *Gruppenexperiment* and the Allensbach Institute's early *Jahrbücher der Öffentlichen Meinung* together in order to uncover the ways in which high-profile social scientists and pollsters sought to analyze and shape their field and the public that they described. To do so, I first sketch the contours of the state of opinion research in the western occupation zones of Germany immediately following World War II. I then explore in detail the theoretical and empirical underpinnings and conclusions of the Frankfurt School's *Gruppenexperiment* and the Allensbach Institute's early *Jahrbücher*, as well as some representative reactions to the claims of both within the German media and social scientific community. Finally, I explicitly compare the attempts of the two institutes to capture empirically and then narrate the relationships between public and private opinion, between silence and publicity, and between individuals and communities that they believed characterized postwar West German society. This analysis reveals that

both sets of researchers shared many concerns and assumptions, including a belief in the fundamentally social and collectively-produced nature of public opinion. At the same time, they proposed profoundly different visions of the relationship of social scientific study and public opinion formation to Germany's past, present, and future, even as both helped to consolidate the concept of "public opinion" as a necessary source of scholarly investigation and broader public interest.

II. "VIRGIN SOIL": SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IN POSTWAR GERMANY

The *Gruppenexperiment* and the *Jahrbücher der Öffentlichen Meinung* must be situated within the broader history of social scientific research institutions and techniques in Germany after 1945, a topic to which historians and historical sociologists have paid varying levels of attention. Scholars have obviously analyzed the oeuvre of Adorno and Horkheimer in great detail, although the empirical work of the Frankfurt School has not been subjected to the same level of scrutiny as, for example, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* and the later works of cultural and political theory produced by affiliates of the school. Institutional histories of the Frankfurt School help to illuminate the research and publication process of *Gruppenexperiment* but do not offer detailed interpretations nor comparisons with other contemporary projects.² Such studies complement surveys of the German-speaking social scientific community, which reveals the importance of transnational institutional connections and sponsorship for research

² Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination* remains the most compelling intellectual history of the Frankfurt School. Jay emphasizes the struggles by its members to join a critical and theoretically-grounded intellectual stance to political activism; however, Jay ends his narrative before Adorno and Horkheimer's return to Germany after World War II. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973). Rolf Wiggershaus's *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance* is an excellent and detailed institutional history that demonstrates the importance of exile in the United States during the war to the School's subsequent activities. It also contains the most detailed treatment by a historian of the publication of *Gruppenexperiment* that I have found. Although this account is less interpretive than procedural, it offers important insights into the compromises made by Adorno and his colleagues in the process of publication. Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance*, trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995).

projects before and during the war but generally do not broach the question of *how* exactly these scientists conceived of their object of study in the wake of World War II.³

Only a handful of scholars in the United States and Germany have engaged in detailed analysis of the *Gruppenexperiment* and the opinion research conducted and published by the Allensbach Institute. In the last few years, two sociologists, Andrew Perrin and Jeffrey Olick, have published translations of portions of the Frankfurt School study and several articles placing the insights produced through the *Gruppenexperiment* within the context of memory studies and historical attempts to theorize public opinion. The analyses of Olick and Perrin generally are less focused on the historical context of the study and its relationship to German rebuilding efforts after World War II than on Adorno et al.'s early exploration of the ontological bases of public opinion itself. They thus evaluate the methodological and theoretical claims of the group study as potential models for contemporary sociological investigations, rightly noting that the observations of Adorno et al. anticipate many more recent critiques of opinion research. The *Gruppenexperiment*, according to Perrin and Olick, also provides the "missing link" in histories of the theorization of publics, connecting earlier discussions of the European masses to Habermas's influential treatise on the development and decline of the Enlightenment public sphere.⁴

Although it is more well known than the Frankfurt School's post-WWII empirical projects, the work of the Allensbach Institute is in some respects even more under-

³ The most ambitious such survey, or "collective biography" of German-speaking social scientists, is Christian Fleck, *A Transatlantic History of the Social Sciences: Robber Barons, the Third Reich and the Invention of Empirical Social Research* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

⁴ Jeffrey K. Olick and Andrew J. Perrin, "Non-Public Opinion: Adorno and the Frankfurt School's *Group Experiment*," in *The Hedgehog Review*, Fall 2010, pp. 79-88, 86.

researched. Scholars have frequently mined the Allensbach Institute's *Jahrbücher* as sources of data for studies on other topics in postwar German history, but only in the last fifteen years have historians begun to treat such data as itself constructed within a specific cultural and political context. Specifically, a few historians have begun to illuminate the links between the mass media, political parties, and public opinion formation, showing how the methods, language, and published results of opinion polling organizations like the Allensbach Institute contributed to the very structure of Germany's political culture after 1945.⁵ Although these works add immeasurably to the larger scholarship on modern German political history, their emphasis on the link between opinion research and electoral politics has also led to a neglect of the ways in which the

⁵ Anja Kruke and Benjamin Ziemann have led the scholarly charge in this direction. Kruke's *Demoskopie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Meinungsforschung, Parteien und Medien 1949-1990* shows how closely opinion polling institutes in the Federal Republic of Germany aligned themselves to, and evolved with, specific media outlets and political parties. Yet Kruke does not read the polls and their creation as artifacts in themselves worthy of analysis. Anja Kruke, *Demoskopie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Meinungsforschung, Parteien und Medien 1949-1990* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2007). In a more specialized study, Ziemann has examined the use of social scientific methods, including opinion polls, by the West German Catholic Church after World War II. He argues that Church leaders after 1968 recognized the potential usefulness of such techniques in responding to their lay audience, but debated the appropriate extent of their implementation. Benjamin Ziemann, "Opinion Polls and the Dynamics of the Public Sphere: The Catholic Church in the Federal Republic after 1968," in *German History* Vol. 24 No. 4 (1996), pp. 562-86. Both Kruke's and Ziemann's analyses are part of a larger collaborative project, titled "Public Opinion Polling in a Democracy: The Rise of Survey Research and Its Effects on Political Parties and the Political Mass Market 1945/49-1990." This project explores responsiveness to public opinion polling with reference to "politics, polity, and policy" in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. Anja Kruke and Benjamin Ziemann, "Meinungsumfragen in der Konkurrenzdemokratie. Auswirkungen der Demoskopie auf die Volksparteien und den politischen Massenmarkt 1945/9-1990," in *Historical Research/Historische Sozialforschung* Vol. 26 (2001), pp. 171-9. In a similar vein, Mark Spicka has explored the consolidation of the idea of the West German "economic miracle" of the 1950s through a study of the use of various forms of propaganda and public relations techniques, including market research and opinion polls, by the CDU/CSU. See Mark E. Spicka, *Selling the Economic Miracle: Economic Reconstruction and Politics in West Germany, 1949-1957* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).

language of, and debates within, the postwar social sciences penetrated German culture more broadly and structured postwar discourse around publicness, identity, and history.

Noelle-Neumann, Horkheimer, and other famous postwar German intellectuals conceived the purpose and value of their respective research institutes partly in response to the demands of Anglo-American social scientists and politicians, and to the oft-repeated claim that the development of the social sciences was especially important to the future of Germany and in need of attention because of the decay of the discipline under National Socialism. This claim already set up a paradigm that classified social science, and opinion research in particular, as democratic, while its neglect was coded as fascistic. In a 1950 evaluation of the state of the social sciences in Germany, funded by the U.S. Library of Congress, the editors claimed that the German consultant for the project, Dolf Sternberger, “had to break virgin soil as ... Social Sciences, in our concept of organization, do not exist in Germany and have never existed ... The Nazi regime, war measures, postwar difficulties, have hit this branch of intellectual life harder than the rest.”⁶ The implication was that the German social sciences were woefully inadequate to deal with the demands of the post-war world. Like Sternberger’s editors, George Katona found the social sciences in Germany to be relatively undeveloped. In an article published in winter 1953, Katona identified only two German social science institutions worth mentioning in his assessment: the Institut für Sozialforschung and the Allensbach Institut für Demoskopie. The discipline merited greater attention, he wrote, because the social scientific study of Germany was important to American strategic interests: “Having an army of occupation in Germany and having spent much money and effort in Germany –

⁶ Unattributed introduction to Dolf Sternberger, *The Social Sciences in Western Germany: A Postwar Survey by Dolf Sternberger, Foreign Consultant to the Library of Congress* (Library of Congress, European Affairs Division, 1950).

the largest industrial country bordering on the Iron Curtain – the United States Government and the American public need to know how German opinions and attitudes change toward such crucial issues as democracy, communism, nazism, and rearmament.”

⁷ At the same time, he suggested, “Empirical orientation of the social sciences may help strengthen political democracy in Germany.”⁸

In some respects, these accounts simply validated what the U.S. occupation government itself had been doing since it first arrived in Germany. Already in October 1945, an Opinion Research Survey Section under the Office of Military Government in Germany (OMGUS) had begun carrying out surveys of individual Germans. By spring 1947, OMGUS officials had enumerated and categorized nearly every resident of the American zones, allowing for what one visiting social scientist called a “sampler’s paradise.”⁹ With the restoration of partial sovereignty to West Germany in September 1949, the U.S. government continued until 1955 to carry out regular opinion polls, now under the auspices of the Reactions Analysis Staff, Office of Public Affairs, Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany (HICOG). During that ten-year period, questions included in the opinion surveys retained an orientation toward specific policy problems faced by the U.S. occupation government but also were designed to gauge the level of democratic vs. anti-democratic sentiments among the West German populace. To this effect, Leo Crespi, a research advisor in the U.S. High Commissioner’s office, remembered in his foreword to the 1980 publication of the HICOG surveys that the

⁷ George Katona, “Survey Research in Germany,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 17 No. 4 (Winter, 1953-1954), pp. 471-480, 471.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Elmo C. Wilson, quoted in Anna J. Merritt and Richard L. Merritt, eds., *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany: The OMGUS Surveys, 1945-1949* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 5.

earliest American forays into public opinion research in Germany were always guided by the dual aims of informing American policy decisions and encouraging the development of democratic political institutions in Germany.¹⁰ The idea was not only to monitor progress toward the ultimate goal of widespread American-style democratic sentiment, but to encourage the *idea* of the effectiveness of political participation by demonstrating the openness of government officials to the opinions of average Germans.

¹⁰ Leo P. Crespi, "Foreword," in *Public Opinion in Semisovereign Germany: The HICOG Surveys, 1949-1955*, Anna J. Merritt and Richard L. Merritt, eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

III. THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL AND THE GRUPPENEXPERIMENT

The occupation forces were, as Katona emphasized, keen to encourage German-led social scientific endeavors, and the members of the reconstituted Frankfurt School were equally anxious to resume their research on the effects of mass society and the existence of authoritarian tendencies within Germany itself. In the winter of 1950-51, HICOG contracted Horkheimer's Institut für Sozialforschung to carry out a study of German political awareness. Horkheimer, Adorno, and Pollock were eager to produce an empirical showpiece through which to demonstrate the Institute's expertise and so obtain further research contracts. They also hoped to extend their earlier research on antisemitism and fascistic tendencies, produced largely during their wartime exile in the United States, to the German case. Because of this deeper interest, the study was focused much more on uncovering antisemitism and lingering nostalgia for an authoritarian regime than its vague categorization as a study of "political awareness" implied.

The Frankfurt School scholars also viewed the project as an opportunity to challenge the theoretical bases of the type of public opinion research pioneered by George Gallup and Elmo Roper. In the 1955 publication of the findings of the study, *Gruppenexperiment*, they challenged the assumptions behind Gallup's methods. They agreed with Crespi and his HICOG associates that opinion polls could exert a formative influence on the German population. However, they saw the nature of this influence as in part dependent on the techniques used. In an introductory section of *Gruppenexperiment* dealing with methodology, Pollock, et al. argued that "The democratic potential of the new methods is not so unquestionable, as is so gladly assumed particularly in Germany

after the suppression of public opinion by the Hitler regime. It is not incidental that modern ‘opinion research’ grew out of market and consumer research ... It tacitly insinuates the universe of the consumer as that of man. As a result, the diverse tendencies to social control and manipulation that can be observed to derive from modern empirical sociology in the realm of consumer analysis or ‘human relations’ are not merely incidental to the method itself.”¹¹ Questionnaires, they contended, assumed that each respondent possessed a clear and singular opinion about all issues. They therefore offered interviewees a limited set of potential responses and simply took those responses at face value without investigating the deeper economic, cultural, and social structures which underlay them. Further, this process potentially ignored darker and more complex currents of attitude and opinion that often ran alongside more socially acceptable responses.

This sense of a more opaque current of opinion increasingly pervaded analyses of the surveys undertaken under the auspices of OMGUS and HICOG between 1945 and 1955. Although the surveys aimed, in effect, to show that Germans were making progress toward democracy, their results pointed toward a more complicated reality. The polls suggested that confidence in the Bonn government was on the rise throughout the 1950s,

¹¹ “Das demokratische Potential der neuen methoden is darum nicht so fraglos, wie es gerade in Deutschland, nach der Knebelung der öffentlichen Meinung durch das Hitlerregime, so gern angenommen wird. Nicht umsonst ist die modern “Meinungsforschung” aus der Markt- und Konsum-forschung entstanden. Stillschweigend unterstellt sie das Universum der Kundschaft als das der Menschen. Darum sind die vielfältigen Tendenzen zur sozialen Kontrolle and Manipulation, die im Gefolge der modernen empirischen Soziologie etwa im Umkreis der Konsum-Analyse oder der “human” relations” sich beobachten lassen, der Methode selbst nichth äußerlich.” Friedrich Pollock, et al., *Gruppenexperiment: Ein Studienbericht, Bearbeitet von Friedrich Pollock* (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1955), 16-17. One note on further citations from *Gruppenexperiment*: with the exception of the prologue, written by Franz Bohm, and the long analytical essay written by Adorno, it is difficult to determine authorship of individual portions of the study; Pollock and Adorno were the primary editors and authors, but they worked with a large team of research assistants and fellow contributors.

and that “West Germans generally felt that democracy had taken root in German soil.”¹² But this optimistic assessment of the German aptitude for democracy rested uneasily with poll results that indicated a somewhat nostalgic, or at least ambivalent, relationship with the Nazi past. As Anna and Richard Merritt wrote in their synthetic overview of the HICOG surveys, the collected data “suggest that by the mid-1950s West Germans had come to terms with their Nazi history, at least as far as their publicly expressed perspectives are concerned ... West Germans deplored these crimes [of Nazi leaders and party functionaries] but felt little sense of personal or collective responsibility for them. What Germans thought about as they lay in bed trying to go to sleep, or what they discussed in the family circle or over a glass of beer at the local pub, cannot be determined through public opinion analysis.”¹³ It was precisely this discomfiting space between publicly expressed opinion and private thought, and the process by which public opinion was formed and expressed through their interaction, that members of the reconstituted Frankfurt School attempted to explore in the winter of 1950-51.

Pollock et al.’s proposed corrective to the approach borne of “consumer analysis” was the group discussion (*Gruppendiskussion*), based on their belief that individual, much less public, opinions are not constituted in isolation, but in the context of society as a whole and often only through dialogue with other individuals. Such small-group discussions would be modeled on the social space of the train car, in which, they observed, strangers brought together by chance often struck up surprisingly candid and personal conversations.¹⁴ In addition, they suggested that only group discussion as

¹² Anna J. Merritt and Richard L. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Semisovereign Germany: The HICOG Surveys, 1949-1955* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 13.

¹³ Merritt and Merritt (1980), 9-10.

¹⁴ Pollock et al. 35.

prompted by an emotionally-charged stimulus, and moderated by an experienced outsider, could allow researchers to move past the resistances and rationalizations that characterized many individuals' initial reactions to opinion surveys.¹⁵ It was not just American social scientists that promoted the merits of such techniques, however. Pollock, et al. cited Elisabeth Noelle as among those claiming a positive democratizing influence for modern polling and survey methods. Already by 1955 she and her Institut für Demoskopie in Allensbach were considered exemplars of a certain type of opinion research in Germany. At this point, then, the members of the Institute were not simply carving out a position for themselves in opposition to American approaches, but also subtly stating a claim to mastery in the *German* social scientific sphere. Indeed, as Anja Kruke has shown, this sense of competitiveness pervaded the incipient arena of social science research in post-war Germany.¹⁶

However, Horkheimer, Pollock, and Adorno realized that they were not wholly reinventing the methodological wheel. While they were responding to what they saw as the negative aspects of “administrative research” and opinion research based primarily on compilations of individual interviews and survey responses, they were well aware of reflections such as those of Mark Abrams, who carefully analyzed both the beneficial and deleterious aspects of the group interview technique in a 1949 issue of *Public Opinion Quarterly*.¹⁷ In addition, they actively sought to incorporate quantitative techniques pioneered by American researchers (or by Austrian and German exiles, such as Paul Lazarsfeld) into their work; indeed, this was one of their key claims in self-promotional

¹⁵ Ibid., 33.

¹⁶ Kruke 47.

¹⁷ Mark Abrams, “Possibilities and Problems of Group Interviewing,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol 13, No. 3 (Autumn 1949), pp 502-6.

materials. In the preface to *Gruppenexperiment*, the authors stated that the goal of the Institute upon its return to Germany in early 1950 was to bind the great German theoretical tradition to the new empirical techniques being developed in America, France, and England in order to formulate an innovative method appropriate to Germany's current condition and needs.¹⁸ In the introduction to the volume, they explained their position in greater detail: "We could not, and did not want to, appeal to well-established procedures. Furthermore, we had to contend with deeper difficulties not just because of the situation of sociology in postwar Germany but because of the topic itself ... After the calamity, for which Germany's despotic decrees from on high and a style of thinking unconcerned with concrete facts were especially responsible, it goes without saying that empirical methods had to be used far more emphatically than this country had become accustomed to. In particular it was necessary to master the polished American techniques of social research."¹⁹ They were not, however, proposing thoughtless mimicry of American methods: "On the other hand, however, it was imperative that we not stop at simply imitating these techniques, which is also a specifically German danger. We had to advocate for critical themes, which arose from the tradition of German social science, against one-sided social research based on the model of mathematical natural sciences ...

¹⁸ Pollock et al., v.

¹⁹ "Sie konnte und wollte sich nicht eingespielter Prozeduren bedienen. Aber darüber hinaus war mit tieferen Schwierigkeiten zu kämpfen, die nicht aus der Situation der Soziologie im Nachkriegsdeutschland sich erklären, sondern aus der Sache selbst ... nach dem Unheil, an dem willkürlich dekretierendes und um die widerspenstigen Fakten unbekümmertes Denken gerade in Deutschland mitschuldig war, die empirischen Methoden weit nachdrücklicher zu benutzen waren, als man es hierzulande gewohnt ist, verstand sich von selbst. Insbesondere galt es, die geschliffen amerikanischen Techniken der Sozialforschung beherrschen zu lernen." Pollock et al., 4.

and on immediate practical applicability. Empirical work should reflect on itself, its boundaries, and its intellectual preconditions.”²⁰

In their attempt to forge a balance between polished empiricism and reflective theory, the Institute members could draw on their own experiences with earlier empirical research projects. The purpose and method of the study of German political opinion were inspired most directly by the findings of, and techniques used during the research for, Adorno and Horkheimer’s 1950 publication *The Authoritarian Personality*, in which the authors developed their famous “F-scale,” supposedly a measure of fascistic tendencies. This book was based on surveys and interviews conducted in Berkeley, California between 1944 and 1946 and funded by the American Jewish Committee.²¹ However, the blend of qualitative and quantitative techniques used in this study was actually developed in earlier research endeavors, especially Pollock’s “Project on Anti-Semitism and Labor.” For this project, Pollock and a group of research assistants trained workers in cities across the United States to conduct interviews designed to determine the attitudes of their fellow workers towards Jews and their propensity for antisemitism in everyday life. In their explanation for this particular method, Pollock, et al. commented, “We want to know what working people honestly are thinking about the whole ‘Jewish question’ and why they feel that way. Polls will not tell us. Interviews won’t either. Friendly conversations

²⁰ “Andererseits aber durfte es nicht – und auch das ist eine spezifisch deutsche Gefahr – bei der bloßen Nachahmung jener Techniken bleiben. Die kritischen Motive waren zu ihrem Recht zu bringen, die sich aus der Tradition der deutschen Gesellschaftswissenschaft erhoben gegen eine Modell der mathematischen Naturwissenschaften ... und der unmittelbar praktischen Verwendbarkeit einseitig orientierten Sozialforschung. Empirische Arbeit sollte auf sich selbst, ihre Grenzen und geistigen Voraussetzungen reflektieren.” Pollock et al., 4.

²¹ For detailed analyses of the genesis and tumultuous history of the project that became *The Authoritarian Personality*, see Fleck 227-63 and Wiggershaus 350-80 and 408-30.

will.”²² This remark foreshadowed the researchers’ acknowledgement of the existence of a second strand of opinion that flowed beneath the responses more easily summoned and codified as “public opinion” through Gallup-inspired methods.

In a memorandum for the Project on Anti-Semitism and Labor, Adorno expressed many of the methodological and theoretical positions that would guide his perspective in the *Gruppenexperiment*. First, he emphasized that the quantitative and qualitative results of social science research must be combined with theoretical concerns: “Antisemitism in particular cannot simply be treated in terms of ‘unbiased’ social research but only through particular reference to a theory of society.”²³ Second, he suggested that the “results,” in the sense of responses or “data,” should not be seen as complete and self-explanatory but rather should be subjected to “incessant critique and interpretation.”²⁴ In addition, Adorno acknowledged the researchers’ struggle to meet the expectations of the larger social scientific community by addressing the generalizability of a given set of findings, and to balance the demand for quantitative analysis with what Adorno saw as the more useful background and qualitative analysis sections. After only a short stay in the United States he was already aware that “everything concerned with statistics, heaps of statisticians, facts and figures automatically tends to assume a certain weight of its own, often quite disproportionate to the scientific validity, and value, of the results obtained.”²⁵ Scholarly norms as well as particular aspects of social problems often required a quantitative approach, but numbers and graphs did not an analysis make. As he

²² Quoted in Wiggershaus 367.

²³ Theodor Adorno, Labor Project Memorandum re: Write-up of final report, Dec. 1, 1944. Reprinted in Theodor W. Adorno und Max Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel 1927-1969, Band II: 1938-1944*, ed. Christoph GÖdde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 610.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 611.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 617.

would argue in a later reflection on his experiences working on a research project in New Jersey under the direction of Paul Lazarsfeld, “empirical investigations are not only legitimate but essential ... But one must not confer autonomy upon them or regard them as a universal key. Above all, they must themselves terminate in theoretical knowledge.”²⁶ All of these concerns would be echoed later in the design and analysis of the Frankfurt scholars’ 1950-51 study of West German political awareness.

The study itself was a massive undertaking, and produced far more material than a single research team could reasonably hope to analyze in full. In total, the study encompassed 137 groups composed of approximately 1,800 participants, recruited from the districts of Hamburg, Frankfurt, Munich, and Augsburg. The participants themselves, though not a statistically representative sample, were culled from diverse subsets of society: workers, professors, war veterans, students, and DPs, to name just a few of the participant categories recruited by the Institute. In order to facilitate a sense of safety and familiarity (or, at the very least, neutrality), the discussions were held in traditional group gathering places, including bars, hostels, refugee camps, and factories. At the beginning of each group, the moderator played a tape recording of the stimulus (*Grundreiz*), a letter (referred to as “the Colburn letter,” after its alleged author) supposedly written by an American or British soldier (depending on the occupation zone in which the discussion took place) reflecting on his experiences with Germans during his time in the occupation army. In the letter, Colburn claimed that Germans were unenthusiastic about democracy

²⁶ Theodor Adorno, trans. Donald Fleming, “Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America,” in Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn, eds. *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930-1960* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 353. Several prominent American sociologists agreed with this assessment, including C. Wright Mills. Mills decried the “abstracted empiricism” prevailing among American social scientists in *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

and the influence of the American and British occupiers. More disturbing, he stated, was the fact that “in general one finds very few Germans who unambiguously renounce what happened” or admit to being partially guilty for the murder of European Jews under Nazi rule.²⁷ After a given period of free discussion among the participants in response to this stimulus, the moderator inserted a number of pre-formulated statements or questions into the discussion in order to probe attitudes about democracy, German identity, and memory of Nazi rule and the Holocaust more deeply. A team of research assistants recorded and transcribed the discussions; an even larger team coded the responses in an attempt to make them more amenable to interpretation. Quantitative analysis of the discussion entailed dividing the discussion transcripts into twelve general content areas: Form of Government, Bonn Government, War Guilt, Concentration Camps, Antisemitism, the U.S. Occupation, the USA, England, France, Eastern Bloc Countries, Remilitarization, and German Self-Judgment. Research assistants then coded responses related to these subjects as expressing either “acceptance,” “conditional acceptance,” or “rejection.”²⁸

After much debate about its contents and repeated bureaucratic delays, *Gruppenexperiment* finally was published in 1955 as the second volume of the “Frankfurt Contributions to Sociology” series. Weighing in at over 500 pages, the book included a section describing the goal and methodology of the project, and the theoretical explanations for both; detailed descriptions of the participants; a quantitative analysis of the group discussions, complete with myriad charts and graphs bringing the information contained in the analysis to visual life; Adorno’s interpretive essay, titled “Guilt and Defense” (“*Schuld und Abwehr*”), one of eleven qualitative analyses originally written

²⁷ “... man findet doch heute in der Mehrheit nur wenige, die sich unzweideutig vom Geschehenen lossagen.” Pollock et al., 502.

²⁸ Ibid., 97, 120.

based on the study; a section on the “Integration Phenomena” in discussion groups; and, finally, an afterword in which Pollock, et al. frankly catalogued the various problems inherent in the design and analysis of the study (the most salient of which was the high number of “silent participants,” a number noted as relevant throughout the preceding portions of the study, although its implications were never fully addressed).

The published results confirmed the initial fears of the Institute members and cast doubt upon the optimistic claims of HICOG officials and German politicians. When engaged in discussion with their peers in comfortable locations (as opposed to the superficial rapport of one-on-one public opinion polls), many of the participants indeed expressed antisemitic attitudes, discontent with the American occupation, and an unwillingness to acknowledge collective guilt for the Holocaust. Though few openly ardent fascists emerged during the discussions, these findings led Adorno to believe that the prospect of a transmuted, and still dangerous, form of fascism might yet re-emerge from the dispersed deposits of such sentiment: “It is the tendency of fascism,” he wrote in his analysis, “not somehow to arise again in the old form but to hibernate by ingratiating itself to whoever is currently strongest, especially by exploiting the conflict between West and East, and to await the hour for which the exponents of dictatorship are hoping.”²⁹ In fact, the aforementioned silence of many of the participants supported this possibility: by not speaking up to counter antidemocratic or antisemitic arguments, such participants appeared to express assent. The broader implication of these findings, for Adorno and his colleagues, was that “public opinion” and its source, the “German public,” were vastly more complex entities than the occupation pollsters – and the

²⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, “Guilt and Defense,” trans. Jeffrey Olick and Andrew Perrin. Reprinted in Olick and Perrin, *Guilt and Defense: On the Legacies of National Socialism in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 157-8.

American experts who had developed their methods – had assumed. Indeed, analysis of the dynamics of the discussions illustrated the degree to which individual and public opinions were malleable and unstable, constantly in formation and shifting in response to questions and context. Accordingly, Adorno noted that the goal of the 1950-51 study had not been to “provide a definitive answer to the question of what the Germans still are or once were. Putting it like this would presuppose a consistent identity, an explicitness and a stability of meaning that hardly exists in present reality. One probably comes closest to the truth by characterizing how particular complexes are processed intellectually and psychologically and drawing conclusions on that basis about certain potentialities.”³⁰ Negative attitudes towards Jews, DPs, and the U.S. occupation, Adorno suggested, were not “results” to be calculated, commented upon, and then forgotten as new “issues” emerged. Instead, they demonstrated a central, structural thread of the “webs of meaning” buttressing West German political culture and fostering the potential for certain behaviors and inclinations.³¹ Only by interrogating the dynamics of such attitudes could a “public” be identified and, indeed, formed.

Not surprisingly, some German reviewers contested the existence of such potentialities and dynamics, and their significance for an understanding of public opinion as a whole. Peter R. Hofstätter, a Professor of Psychology at the College of Social Science in Wilhelmshaven, delivered the most high-profile and devastating critique of the pessimistic analysis contained in *Gruppenexperiment*. In a review published in the respected *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Hofstätter argued that since, as the authors themselves acknowledged, roughly 60 percent of the group

³⁰ Ibid., 52.

³¹ Ibid., 56.

participants did not speak during the discussion of each topic, the findings of the study could hardly be indicative of the German psyche or anything approaching public opinion. Hofstätter also continually criticized the selective examples used by Adorno in his analysis and suggested that the study report was deeply flawed because of the authors' penchant for psychoanalytic methods. In addition, Hofstätter questioned the effectiveness and ethics of the group method as a whole for such complex issues: "Would it not have been more appropriate scientifically and humanely," he asked, "to deal with the question of guilt in exhaustive individual interviews?"³² His critique thus focused on two interwoven issues: the methodology, which he found insufficiently rigorous and inappropriate for the subject, and the topic, which he deemed too sensitive for social scientific study, much less emotionally-charged debate such as that which took place during the 1950-51 discussion groups.

Adorno was given an opportunity to respond to Hofstätter's remarks in the same issue of the *Kölner Zeitschrift*. In his response, Adorno noted that "the effort to understand individual and collective opinions *in statu nascendi*, instead of producing them in an ossified form that may never have existed in the consciousness of the individuals, was more important than the substantive findings, which were never claimed to have been proven conclusively."³³ Rather, the study was designed to "call forth real social behavior that simultaneously reflects and produces 'public opinion.' Its medium is the conversation and the interaction between those who are talking with each other."³⁴ Because the nature of the difficult – yet important – issues under investigation were as

³² Peter R. Hofstätter, "On *Group Experiment* by F. Pollock: A Critical Appraisal," trans. Jeffrey Olick and Andrew Perrin. Reprinted in Olick and Perrin (2010), 196.

³³ Theodor W. Adorno, "Reply to Peter R. Hofstätter's Critique of *Group Experiment*," trans. Jeffrey Olick and Andrew Perrin. Reprinted in Olick and Perrin (2010), 198.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

sensitive as Hofstätter admitted, the researchers combined traditional and experimental methods guided by psychological and sociological insights. Hofstätter's pleading for the researchers to, in effect, ignore the deep-seated prejudices that continued to plague Germans struck Adorno as another example of the typically German denial of guilt and complicity that emerged during the discussion groups themselves. In Hofstätter's remarks, according to Adorno's rebuttal, "The method is declared useless so that the existence of the phenomenon that emerges can be denied."³⁵

Clearly, this exchange was part of an ongoing battle over national guilt and memory, and the experience of the 1950-51 study contributed to Adorno's later reflections on "the meaning of working through the past," as Olick and Perrin show in their analysis of Adorno's interpretive essay.³⁶ But it also hints at disagreement over the role of the social sciences in postwar Germany. Conducting research using modern, but specifically German, social scientific methods, Adorno and his colleagues seemed to suggest, inescapably led through the past and pointed to the existence and relevance of a subterranean strand of "public opinion," more accessible to researchers through group discussion methods and psychoanalytic analysis than through American-influenced survey techniques.

³⁵ Ibid., 208.

³⁶ See their introduction to *Guilt and Defense: On the Legacies of National Socialism in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

IV: THE EARLY ALLENSBACH INSTITUTE

In some respects, the purpose and methodological approach of Noelle-Neumann's Allensbach Institute could not have been more different from that of the Frankfurt School; and yet, upon closer inspection, much of its research was actually animated by a similar desire to illuminate the contours of a German public defined by its private activities and preferences as much as by its political opinions. Now known for its close collaboration with the Christian Democratic Party (CDU), the Allensbach Institute, as noted earlier, initially worked on a variety of political, and later market research, projects.³⁷ In her memoirs, Noelle-Neumann recounts pleading with various American and British survey teams to be allowed to carry out interviews herself, until an American colonel finally gave her an opportunity to apply Gallup's methods to the German population. The institute's inaugural project in the spring of 1947 involved investigating political attitudes among German youth and so determining the potential for a future German democracy.³⁸ In only a few years, the Allensbach Institute quickly carved out a niche for itself in the area of opinion research among radio listeners and newspaper readers, self-publishing a number of syntheses of its findings about the relationship between Europeans and mass media outlets. Noelle-Neumann later leveraged her experience as the head of the Institut für Demoskopie into a successful career as an expert and adviser on mass communication and the relationship between media and public opinion. Her theory of the *Schweigespirale*, or "spiral of science," has been particularly

³⁷ On the use of Allensbach Institute polls by the CDU/CSU, see the recent political histories of Kruke, *Demoskopie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Meinungsforschung, Parteien und Medien 1949-1990* and Spicka, *Selling the Economic Miracle: Economic Reconstruction and Politics in West Germany, 1949-1957*, referenced in n. 5 above.

³⁸ Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, *Die Erinnerungen* (Munich: Herbig, 2006), 152.

influential among students of social communication, although it has not gone unchallenged in the decades since its publication in the early 1980s. In this work, Noelle-Neumann argues that most people are intensely fearful of social isolation, and are therefore likely to conform or, at the most, remain silent in the face of majority opinion: “To run with the pack is a relatively happy state of affairs; but if you can’t, because you won’t share publicly in what seems to be a universally acclaimed conviction, you can at least remain silent, as a second choice, so that others can put up with you.”³⁹ Drawing on Ferdinand Tönnies’ distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, she further defines “public opinion” as a collectively-produced “social skin” that manifests itself in “the approval and disapproval of public observable positions and behavior.”⁴⁰ The implication is that “public opinion” reveals but also reproduces the norms of a given society, and can potentially lead to a “spiral of silence” in which no one will speak up against statements or actions with which they disagree. Noelle-Neumann developed her theory, she claims, based on her polling experiences in the 1970s, and makes no reference to opinion research in the 1950s or to the German experience under Nazi rule. However, it is difficult not to see the affinity of this theory with Adorno, et al.’s equation of silence with assent in *Gruppenexperiment*.

Although her own political views remain open to debate, there can be no doubt that Noelle-Neumann’s aptitudes as a pollster and theorist of public opinion were shaped both directly and indirectly through the opportunities she availed herself of in Nazi

³⁹ Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion – Our Social Skin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

Germany.⁴¹ Noelle-Neumann spent 1938 at the University of Missouri on a scholarship funded by the Goebbels ministry, studying journalism and the evolving field of U.S. public opinion research. Her dissertation synthesized this knowledge and also addressed the state of U.S. public opinion with respect to Germany. She later honed her personal interviewing techniques as a journalist for *Das Reich*, a newspaper loyal to the Nazi Party line; one scholar has suggested that these techniques were themselves influenced by the Nazi *Sicherheitsdienst*'s practice of sending interviewers on train trips across the Reich to "meet, befriend, and discreetly debrief ordinary Germans" in an attempt to determine public opinion.⁴² Indeed, in *The Spiral of Silence* Noelle-Neumann speaks of "the train test," the small-group environment facilitated by a train compartment, as a model for opinion research.⁴³

Of course, this is precisely the analogy that the members of the Frankfurt School used in their description of the supposedly innovative method to be employed for the 1950-51 study of German political awareness. Although it is certainly possible that they and Noelle-Neumann all could have arrived independently at this model for opinion research, the small size of the circle of post-war German social scientists brought the two and their respective institutes into contact at several intervals, providing opportunities for

⁴¹ Noelle-Neumann's rise to international prominence was accompanied by intense scrutiny of her collaboration with the National Socialist regime. Christopher Simpson has written the most thorough investigation of these activities and their influence on Noelle-Neumann's later theories and practices. Through an analysis of Noelle-Neumann's later theoretical writings in comparison with her work as a member of various National Socialist organizations and as a writer for Nazi Party publications, Simpson charges that Noelle-Neumann's work consistently "privileges the interests of the strong in society over those of the weak." See Christopher Simpson, "Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's 'Spiral of Silence' and the Historical Context of Communication Theory," in *Journal of Communication* 46 (3), Summer 1996: pp.149-73,162. Simpson's investigation was itself inspired by an earlier article by Leo Bogart, which accused Noelle-Neumann of not being sufficiently candid or apologetic about her past. See Leo Bogart, "The Pollster and the Nazis," in *Commentary* 92 (2), August 1991, pp. 47-50.

⁴² Simpson 155.

⁴³ See Noelle-Neumann (1984), 16-18.

the exchange of methodological insights. In her memoirs, Noelle-Neumann, with explicit disgust, recounts one such encounter. Shortly after Horkheimer and Adorno had returned to Germany following their exile in the United States, they visited Noelle-Neumann in Allensbach.⁴⁴ Later, Noelle-Neumann claimed, they attempted to convince her to join the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt as a professor, but she refused, in part because, as she admitted in her memoirs, she detested Adorno and his “ice-cold eyes.”⁴⁵ In addition to these informal meetings, the first Conference on German Opinion Research in December 1951, organized by the Frankfurt Institute for the Promotion of Civil Affairs at Weinheim an der Bergstrasse and attended by Erich Neumann, Adorno, and other social scientific luminaries from across Europe, gave Horkheimer and Adorno an additional opportunity to learn about Noelle-Neumann’s theory and methods in person.⁴⁶

The difference was that Adorno, et al. actually attempted to put the “train compartment” method into practice in the 1950-51 study of German political awareness, while Noelle-Neumann’s institute generally employed the questionnaire-structured, one-on-one interviewing techniques pioneered by Gallup. The results of this method that were deemed most interesting and constitutive of the German public were published in the first volume of the *Jahrbuch der Öffentlichen Meinung*, covering the years 1947-1955 and containing the questions and answers for 2176 of the thousands of questions posed to a “statistically representative sample” of west Germans (and west Berliners) by the Institute in that span. In this first volume, which they described as a reference work, the Allensbach pollsters appealed to the power of numbers to emphasize the scientific,

⁴⁴ Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, *Die Erinnerungen* (Munich: Herbig, 2006), 194-5.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Rolf Wiggershaus provides further detail about the organization and proceedings of this conference, at which Theodor Adorno gave the introductory lecture. See Wiggershaus 450-52.

expert-vetted nature of the Institute's research. The *Jahrbuch*, they wrote, "is written in an unobliging, rough language: the language of numbers, or to be more precise, the language of percentages ... however, the percentage is a razor-sharp instrument with which to make majorities and minorities clear."⁴⁷ This language, they implied, was not easily accessible to the uneducated masses; its translation into a useful reference for those in search of a portrait of the German people required a high level of expertise, which the Allensbach pollsters had developed and refined.

The "razor-sharp instrument" of modern opinion research, in the hands of Noelle-Neumann's institute, possessed a surprising range. To be sure, many of the questions and responses published in the *Jahrbuch* had to do with political attitudes toward the Bonn government and various international actors, especially the United States, and clearly were a product of the political awareness and preference polls around which modern polling techniques had been calibrated. In addition, however, there were many questions related to values more broadly defined, allowing the Allensbach pollsters to trace cultural change over time. In her 2006 autobiography, Noelle-Neumann expressed pride in the fact that the Allensbach Institute and its *Jahrbücher* were the primary documenters of the generational shift that had rocked German society in the late 1960s, and stated her belief that the chief merit in the polling results lay in their ability to reveal the mentality of a people and make this mentality legible for present and future analysts.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ "Es ist in einer ungefälligen, spröden Sprach geschrieben: in der Sprache der Zahlen, oder, genauer noch, in der Sprache des Prozentzahlen ... Indessen, die Prozentzahl ist ein messerscharfes Instrument, Mehrheiten und Minderheiten anschaulich zu machen." Elisabeth Noelle and Erich Peter Neumann, *Jahrbuch der Öffentlichen Meinung 1947-1955* (Allensbach: Verlag für Demoskopie, 1956), v.

⁴⁸ Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (2006), 186.

The first *Jahrbuch der Öffentlichen Meinung* contained five main sections. First, the authors presented the basic methodology of the Institute and a sample questionnaire; both elements were meant as guides for readers in deciphering the “rough language” of percentages used in the volume, and as a basic introduction to the techniques for formulating questionnaires, interviewing representative samples, and analyzing the resulting data. This methodological section was followed by results culled from thousands of opinion polls, loosely organized under four main section headings. These sections were “The Germans;” “The Federal Republic;” “German Problems;” and “Germany and the World.” Each section was then further broken down into two to fifteen sub-categories. Given Noelle-Neumann’s later emphasis on her contribution to the creation of the portrait of a historically-situated German public, it was fitting that the section on “The Germans” took pride of place in the volume. This section contained questions and answers (divided by gender, education level, social class, and size of the town in which respondents lived) related to seven general topics: “Personalia,” “Information,” “Education and Knowledge,” “Taste,” “Mentality,” and “History.” In the “Personalia” subsection, the editors included a motley collection of poll results from questions on everything from preferred vacation destinations to smoking habits to political party membership. The “Information” section presented questions and responses related to media habits. All of the questions in these sections were formulated verbally in straightforward fashion. But in the “Education/Knowledge” and “Taste” sections, the Institute demonstrated the variety of methods that it used to develop a portrait of the German public. Many questions in these sections were presented alongside visual materials – cartoons and caricatures that the respondents had been asked to explain,

images of furnished rooms which the respondents had been instructed to rank according to their tastes, even a set of leaf patterns that respondents had been asked to identify. Not content to rely on dry verbal questionnaires as Adorno, et al. accused, the Institute employed such tactics to elicit more visceral responses and so create a more well-rounded portrait of the German public. Indeed, the authors of the *Jahrbuch* were at pains to emphasize that the formulation of the questionnaires used for opinion polling required the command of “experience, art, imagination and scientific rules.”⁴⁹ This first *Jahrbuch*, then, was a tool for the professionalization of opinion research as well as a reference work.

It also offered Germans one way of thinking about the legacy of National Socialism. Certainly the Allensbach Institute never placed the question of collective guilt or of anti-Semitism at the very forefront of its investigations, as Adorno and his colleagues had in the design and analysis of their 1950-51 study of West German political attitudes. Still, in the “History” sub-section under the larger section on “The Germans,” the editors included a number of questions and responses related to the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party and to the course of World War II. The nonchalant inclusion of these topics nearly one-quarter of the way through the *Jahrbuch* suggested that the history and memory of the period between 1933 and 1945 was best seen as a source of information and questions like any other featured in the volume. The rubric of “public opinion” could serve as a method for neutralizing, but nevertheless analyzing, the German past.

The Institute published the next *Jahrbuch* only one year later. In the introduction to the *Jahrbuch der Öffentlichen Meinung 1957*, the editors advanced the theme that

⁴⁹ “Erfahrung und Kunst, Imagination und wissenschaftliche Regeln.” Noelle and Neumann (1956), xii.

Noelle-Neumann would repeat so frequently during reflections on the lasting value of the institute's work. "We believe," they wrote in 1957, "that our public polling inquiries have meaning not only for the analysis of contemporary events, but also for future history-writing. They shed light on facts and connections that otherwise would have been misinterpreted or remained unintelligible."⁵⁰ The *Jahrbuch* series was thus a guide to the future as well as the past; the leaders of the Institute saw themselves not simply as serving the needs of politicians and marketers, but as actively shaping the face, and therefore the future memory, of the German public.

The Allensbach Institute eventually also published English-language compilations of its findings. Noelle-Neumann and her husband introduced the 1967 English publication of *The Germans: Public Opinion Polls 1947-1966* with the observation that "This is not a portrayal of the Germans based on second or third hand reports; it is the nation's own description of itself."⁵¹ The Neumanns described this self-assessment of the German people as a useful corrective to the assumptions of foreign nations. "The editors feel ... that the most fruitful attribute of this publication is the fact that it disproves, or at least casts doubt on, stereotype judgments of a nation by its neighbors. The Germans, on account of their role in world politics over the past century, have at times been exposed to collective repudiation, more than any other nation, with the inevitable consequence that the entire population was identified with small ruling groups ... only the self-portrayal of

⁵⁰ "Wir glauben nämlich, daß die demoskopischen Untersuchungen nicht nur für die Analyse des Zeitgeschehens, sondern auch für die künftige Geschichtsschreiben Bedeutung haben. Sie erhellen Tatbestände und Zusammenhänge, die sonst mißdeutet werden oder unverständlich bleiben würden." Elisabeth Noelle and Erich Peter Neumann, eds., *Jahrbuch der Öffentlichen Meinung 1957* (Allensbach: Verlag für Demoskopie, 1957), vii.

⁵¹ Elisabeth Noelle and Erich Peter Neumann, eds., *The Germans: Public Opinion Polls 1947-1966*, trans. Gerard Finan (Allensbach: Verlag für Demoskopie, 1967), vii.

groups in the form of poll results can project a picture that is comparatively objective.”⁵² Here group dynamics took the form of “self-portrayal”; the authors presented opinion research as the means by which Germans actively clarified their identities to themselves and to international observers. The duo also reiterated the common refrain of the close link between public opinion research and democratic freedoms: “the method of survey research, if it is to work properly, presupposes freedom of expression, and the awareness of that freedom, not only in journalists, artists and politicians, but in every individual.”⁵³ This can be seen as a subtle rebuttal of the claim of Adorno, Pollock, and their colleagues in the pages of *Gruppenexperiment* that a clear fascist potential still lingered in the German people; according to the Neumanns, their research simply would not be possible if this were the case. *The Germans* was thus a multi-leveled vindication of the postwar German public, and a clear attempt to sever that public from any continued association with National Socialism.

Not everyone was convinced by the claims of Noelle-Neumann and the Allensbach Institute. It was not only individual polling results that critics called into question, but the very structure and purpose of public opinion polling itself. In a 1956 review of the first *Jahrbuch*, the magazine *Der Spiegel* described the achievement of the Institute in much less benevolent terms than the Neumanns had. The magazine made no mention of the potentially democratizing effects of public opinion data or of its use for future historians. Instead, the review suggested that the results presented in the *Jahrbuch* showed “the average German, with whom the politicians will have to deal if they want to

⁵² Ibid., ix.

⁵³ Ibid., vii.

prepare themselves in the next year for the federal elections.”⁵⁴ The implicit message was that the *Jahrbuch*, despite its populist claims, was in the end simply a tool with which politicians and other elites could better understand and manipulate voters. The reviewer also wondered if the very structure of opinion polls might hinder their ability to paint an accurate and sufficiently multi-dimensional portrait of a people, noting that “complex issues can’t always be reduced to the formula of a short question.”⁵⁵

Despite their subtle critique of her methods, the editors of *Der Spiegel* could not deny that Noelle-Neumann was a force to be reckoned with in German politics and culture. Accordingly, Noelle-Neumann graced the cover of *Der Spiegel* in October 1953 and again in August 1957, shortly after the publication of the second *Jahrbuch* and before the September 15 federal elections. The 1953 article educated readers about the statistical foundations of the Gallup-developed opinion polling methods, especially representative sampling techniques, suggesting that at this point, average Germans still found the “language of percentages” hawked by the Allensbach Institute to be unfamiliar as well as potentially useful. The title of the article posed the question “Glauben Sie an Gott?” (“Do you believe in God?”), suggesting that the reach of such techniques reached beyond the determination of political preferences and penetrated the most fundamental beliefs of ordinary citizens.⁵⁶ The degree to which *Der Spiegel* reporters and their audience had become accustomed to, but also somewhat skeptical of, the methods and claims of the Institute was evident in the 1957 *Der Spiegel* interview with Noelle-Neumann, titled

⁵⁴ “So rundet sich dal Bild des Durchschnitts-Deutschen, mit dem die Politiker es zu tun haben, wenn sie sich im nächsten Jahr zur Kampagne für die Bundestageswahlen rüsten.” “Gruppenbild des Volkes,” *Der Spiegel*, 25 July 1956, 37.

⁵⁵ “... sich komplizierte Sachverhalte nicht immer auf die Formel einer kurzen Fragen reduzieren lassen.” “Gruppenbild des Volkes,” 37.

⁵⁶ “Glauben Sie an Gott?” *Der Spiegel*, 28 October 1953.

“Probewahl am Küchentisch.” The title of the article itself alluded to the beneficial linkage between the political process and the home that public opinion polling supposedly accomplished, as well as to the personal interviews that brought pollsters into German homes for one-on-one interviews. Noelle-Neumann herself referred to her personal experiences “in Wohnkuchen und Wohnzimmern” to buttress her more theoretical arguments about public opinion.⁵⁷

But the reporters from *Der Spiegel* also asked penetrating and critical questions and were clearly well-versed in many theoretical and methodological objections to the idea of “public opinion” and its obtainability by researchers like Noelle-Neumann. The interviewers cleverly used the findings of science – namely, Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle – to call the claims of Noelle-Neumann and her institute into question, suggesting that certain aspects of the Institute’s methods potentially biased the results of opinion polls and therefore subsequent statements about the content of “public opinion.” Queried the reporters, “Now couldn’t one think ... through the formulation of the questions posed to a certain circle of people, an answer in this or that manner could be prescribed or prejudiced [by the question itself]. In such a manner, couldn’t a picture of a so-called ‘public opinion’ be produced, that is actually put forth by the questioners themselves?”⁵⁸ Not only could the questions be designed to provoke a certain type of response, but the surveyors could inadvertently influence responses, the reporters contended. For example, they suggested, if an attractive woman interviewed a man,

⁵⁷ “Probewahl am Küchentisch: Ein *Spiegel* Gespräch mit der Leiterin des ‘Instituts für Demoskopie’ in Allensbach, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann,” *Der Spiegel*, 21 August 1957, 20.

⁵⁸ “Nun könnte man sich ja denken, daß durch die Umfragen nicht nur der Mitläufereffekt erzielt wird, sondern daß auch durch die Formulierung der Frage, die einem bestimmten Personenkreis gestellt ist, eine Antwort in dieser oder jener Weise vorgeschrieben oder doch präjudiziert wird. Könnte nicht auf solche Weise ein Bild einer sogenannten Öffentlichen Meinung entstehen, das überhaupt durch die Frager erst hergestellt wird?” “Probewahl am Küchentisch,” 19.

would he not attempt to seek her approval by answering her questions in the way he thought she would like? Noelle-Neumann responded that the potential danger actually lay in the reverse issue: “The interviewers undertake the risk of only hearing from the responses what they themselves expect. For us this was a very unexpected but enlightening discovery, that the interviewer himself may act as a type of sieve, through which only comes what he had already expected. For that reason one spreads the interviews over a great number of employees; with seven to eight interviews per employee they can’t form an expected schematic.”⁵⁹ Because of the potentially sieve-like capacity of interviewers, Noelle-Neumann observed, she preferred female interviewers in the field, as they were more naturally inclined to listen to others without feeling the need to impose their own opinions. In addition, the Institute put potential interviewers through a series of test-interviews and training sessions in order to soften those interviewers with “hardened ears.”⁶⁰ This recognition of potential problems in the interpersonal nature of opinion polling reveals a very different picture than that painted by Adorno and his colleagues in their explanation of the theoretical underpinnings of *Gruppenexperiment*. In this particular aspect of the process, Noelle-Neumann demonstrated that the methodological considerations for public opinion polling were hardly a reduction to cold, scientific principles. Instead, they were imbued at their foundations with concerns about human interaction itself. The “razor-sharp instrument” of opinion research was, after all, a scalpel wielded by men and women.

⁵⁹ “Die Interviewer unterliegen der Gefahr, daß sie nur das von der Antwort hören, was sie selber erwarten. Es war eine für uns höchst unerwartete, aber dann sehr einleuchtende Feststellung, daß der Interviewer selbst wie eine Art Sieb wirkt, durch das nur herauskommt, was er schon irgendwie erwartet hatte. Darum verteilt man auch die Interviews auf eine so große Zahl von Mitarbeitern; in sieben bis acht Interviews pro Mitarbeiter können sich keine Erwartungsschemata bilden.” “Probewahl am Küchentisch,” 20.

⁶⁰ “verhärteten Ohren.” “Probewahl am Küchentisch,” 20.

Noelle-Neumann's responses to repeated questions about the potential biases built into questions themselves also stressed the complexity of poll-construction and analysis. Noelle-Neumann noted that one must always be careful when dealing with a single question or results from a single poll question. "The questioning technique, the development of the correct series of questions – we never speak of single questions. If one sets worth on dependable results, it always takes a whole battery of questions, and this whole development is incredibly complex."⁶¹ She therefore cautioned against making assumption about "public opinion" from one question or set of questions; it was through the synthesis of all of the questions asked by the Institute, as demonstrated in the *Jahrbuch*, that pollsters were able to produce a portrait of a public and its opinions.

Accompanying the interview were a number of cartoons which captured in visual form German fears about how potentially destabilizing modern opinion polling could be. One striking cartoon featured a glass mason jar containing two men with the bodies of monkeys crawling up and down ladders. The caption read: "The demoscopic weathermen." The cartoon thus depicted opinion research as a science, conducted with a classic tool of naturalistic observation and akin to the discipline of reading weather patterns in order to predict the future. But the cartoon also suggested that when under observation by pollsters like those at the Institut für Demoskopie, men lose an essential part of their humanity and are reduced to lab animals, stripped down to bare, statistically-relevant characteristics and behavior patterns. Of course, this effect was only possible because of the way in which opinion polling appeared to render human nature and

⁶¹ "Die Befragungs-technik, die Entwicklung der richtigen Frageserien – wir sprechen nie von einzelnen Fragen, es handelt sich immer, wenn man auf zuverlässige Ergebnisse Wert legt, um ganze Batterien von Fragen – diese ganze Entwicklung ist unendlich kompliziert." "Probewahl am Küchentisch," 21.

individual selves visible. Contrary to the claims of Adorno and his colleagues, this cartoon suggested, the knife of opinion research and its toolbox of percentages and representative samples was all too capable of slicing through the tissues of a people who had formerly been capable of maintaining a sharp distinction between public presentation and private selves.

Noelle-Neumann's optimistic claims about the power of public opinion polling to produce an accurate picture of the German public thus were challenged continually during the course of the 1950s and beyond, even as the Allensbach Institute's assertions about this public gained increasing credence among politicians and media outlets. It is difficult to gauge the ways in which the Institute's publications and claims affected ordinary Germans and shaped how this "public" thought of itself. What is clear, however, is that the language and methods used by the Institute and other pollsters, as well as the information they published, quickly flowed into everyday life in the 1950s, gaining public prominence through the Institute's *Jahrbuch* series. Uncertainty about the effects of the knowledge produced was then reflected in the media, as in the articles and cartoons published in *Der Spiegel* described above.

V. THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF PUBLIC OPINION

The Frankfurt School researchers and the Allensbach Institute pollsters were motivated by a shared desire to illuminate and make available for analysis the contours of an ever-evolving (West) German public. Both took advantage of cutting-edge quantitative techniques but also attempted to modify such techniques in the hopes of responding to the specific historical context of postwar Germany. As indicated earlier, in the case of the “train car” group discussion method there is even evidence that Adorno, Horkheimer, and Noelle-Neumann exchanged ideas and theories about the most effective methods for unearthing public opinion. And central to these methods, and to their respective publications (*Gruppenexperiment* and the *Jahrbücher*), was the idea that the publicness of public opinion was fostered through social behavior. Adorno et al. clearly took this idea to one extreme by arguing that group conversation and debate was an essential mechanism for bringing the depths of “public” opinion to light. But Noelle-Neumann, in her advocacy of a method by which individual interviewers spoke with representative respondents “am Küchentisch,” and her acknowledgement of the personal qualities necessary for an effective interview, also confirmed the social and conversational basis for the revelation of public opinion. Further, it was only by bringing discrete bits of information culled from various polls and several thousand respondents that the Allensbach Institute’s *Jahrbücher* claimed to depict public opinion. Later, Noelle-Neumann’s theory of the “spiral of silence” would emphasize the need for expressing opinions in the open, among peers, lest these opinions fall into oblivion. Without public discussion and publication, opinions quickly could become invisible.

And yet the portraits of public opinion, and therefore the vision of social interplay, that these social scientists offered to the international social scientific community and to Germans themselves were profoundly different. The architects of the group discussion method used in the 1950-51 Frankfurt School study of “political awareness” chose to forego the “objective” lines of questionnaires in favor of provoking respondents with the “Colburn letter” and its insinuation that Germans were only play-acting at democracy and contrition. This “stimulus” itself hinted at the potentially multiple nature of public opinion, its crossing of public and private boundaries, and its responsiveness to conditions and contexts. Depth psychology and interpretive analysis were thus required to uncover and decipher the meaning behind the silences and shadow opinions and attitudes that lurked behind favorable answers to traditional opinion polls. Indeed, the authors of *Gruppenexperiment* stated that Adorno’s meditation on “guilt and defense” was selected for publication from the eleven qualitative analyses originally written for the project because it fixated on this doubleness of opinion: Adorno’s essay “allows us to make concrete that the group method triggers affect-laden statements from the deeper layers of the respondents, which the traditional questioning methods do not reach.”⁶²

The authors of *Gruppenexperiment* hinted at the existence of a subterranean second reservoir of public attitudes and opinions in other portions of the study as well. A pivotal finding of their study, they contended, was the existence of a second language that emerged through the discussion of emotionally charged topics:

⁶² “Für die Monographie *Schuld und Abwehr* haben wir uns entschieden, weil sie erlaubt zu konkretisieren, dass die Gruppenmethode affektbesetzte, aus tieferen Schichten der Befragten stammende Äußerungen auslöst, an welche die traditionellen Fragemethoden nicht heranreichen.” Pollock et al., 276.

“One of the most striking phenomena that invariably revealed itself in all of the groups ... is that people virtually speak two languages ... In the language of their profession and of daily contact, they are able to express themselves rationally and somewhat clearly ... When they are confronted with highly emotionally charged problems, however, this language fails them, and they are forced to resort to a second one, which has in common with language only the use of words ... The conflict situation appears to destroy language; it reduces the ability for meaningful, intelligible expression. By doing just that, however, it unearths the real psychological layer. The irrational, whose expression the speaker unconsciously tries to prevent, emerges in the structure of the second language. Its seeming senselessness turns out to be absolutely meaningful at closer inspection, since it provides insight into the latent psychological mechanism effective in the speaker.”⁶³

By illuminating the structure and mechanics of this second language, Adorno et al. believed they were contributing to the self-reflection of the German social body as a whole. This body, in their account, was defined as much by latent thoughts and hidden motivations as by voting records and consumption patterns.

Noelle-Neumann, on the other hand, recognized the importance and fallibility of human interviewers as mediators of public opinion, but appealed to scientific rigour in defense of the methods used by the Allensbach Institute. The *Jahrbuch* also referred to a “second language,” though this one, the language of numbers and percentages, was

⁶³ “Eines der auffälligsten Phänomene, das sich ausnahmslos in allen Gruppen zeigt ... ist, dass die Menschen gleichsam zwei Sprache sprechen. In der einen, der ihres Berufs, des täglichen Umgangs, vermögen sie es, sich rational und einigermaßen klar auszudrücken. Sie zeigt zwar gewisse objektiv bedingte Verfallserscheinungen, doch gelingt es in ihr den Sprechenden, kohärent und sinnvoll auf alle ihnen gestellten Probleme zu reagieren. Werden sie dagegen mit stark affektbesetzten Problemen konfrontiert, dann versagt ihnen die Sprache den Dienst und sie sind gezwungen, sich jener zweiten zu bedienen, die mit der Sprache nur noch Gebrauch von Worten gemein hat ... Die Konfliktsituation zerstört gleichsam die Sprache, d.h. sie setzt die Fähigkeit zu sinnvollem, verständlichem Ausdruck herab. Gerade dadurch jedoch legt sie den Zugang zu den eigentlich psychologischen Schichten frei. Das Irrationale, dessen Ausdruck der Sprecher unbewußt zu verhindern sucht, wird in der Struktur der zweiten Sprache offenbar. Deren scheinbare Sinnlosigkeit erweist sich bei näherem Zusehen als durchaus sinnvoll, da sie genaue Aufschlüsse über die latenten, im Sprecher wirksamen psychologischen Mechanismen liefert.” Pollock et al., 59.

wielded by researchers instead of respondents and promised to deliver clarity and certainty rather than reveal emotion and irrationality. Though Noelle-Neumann acknowledged, like Adorno, that “the public” was constantly shifting and evolving, she still perceived the results of Allensbach Institute polls as “information,” precisely-rendered snapshots of a particular moment, which together added up to an archive which would one day reveal to historians the face of the German public. Accordingly, the editors’ introduction to the 1957 *Jahrbuch* claimed that the volume contained empirically proven facts that would put to rest any lingering debates or doubts about the truth or falsity of the German population’s position on many issues. Opinion research, in this account, was a “thermometer,” a scientific instrument that trumped personal experiences and unsubstantiated hopes and revealed the simple social truth, however transitory.⁶⁴ Despite the misgivings of many Germans, as evidenced by the 1957 *Der Spiegel* interview with Noelle-Neumann and by the methodological defenses provided in the early *Jahrbücher*, this promise of clarity and certainty proved seductive. It was precisely its perceived ability to craft a sorted, calculated depiction of the contours of German society that made modern opinion research techniques seem so powerful and progressive. The tables contained within each *Jahrbuch* testified to the diverse and changing nature of German society, but also to the ability of modern science – and, more troubling to many, modern political parties – to harness it. They also rendered German history a source of information – of opinions – rather than of shame.

Despite these differing approaches, the broader effect of *Gruppenexperiment* and the *Jahrbücher der Öffentlichen Meinung* was to frame “public opinion” and its creation within German society as a salient problem, or at least a puzzle, social scientists and lay

⁶⁴ Noelle and Neumann (1956), vii, xvi.

observers needed to solve. By the late 1950s, “public opinion” was something which politicians and marketers, but also average Germans, had come to believe was an important subject of research and media attention. It was not simply a tool for political parties, as other historians have argued. It was a way of understanding society and its constitutive forces – and of judging the effectiveness of these forces. Thus although both the Frankfurt School and the Allensbach Institute claimed to offer descriptions of a German public-in-process, both ultimately provided normative evaluations of the state of this public and a condemnation of the silences that threatened to render it illegible. As the series of *Der Spiegel* articles relating to Noelle-Neumann and her institute reveal, Germans could question the accuracy or neutrality of the findings presented in the *Jahrbücher*. But the concept of “public opinion” and its midwives, the social scientific researchers, was quickly becoming indispensable to any attempt to address the past, present, and future of the German nation. It was a category of information and knowledge capable of subsuming political and consumption preferences as well as German identity and history.

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