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A Sense of Place
New Directions in German History

by

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Fourteen years ago, delivering the GHIL annual lecture, James Joll referred to a little-known book called *The History of England mostly in Words of one Syllable*. He recommended it to colleagues, if only on stylistic grounds.[1] I have followed his advice in choosing my main title today. But even words of one syllable can seem Delphic, so let me try to explain what I mean by a sense of place.

'Consult the genius of the place in all', wrote Alexander Pope.[2] His advice to Lord Burlington is something historians would do well to bear in mind. Time is our dimension. But history occurs in space as well as time. It may be an unconscious acknowledgement of this fact that, from the beginnings of the modern discipline of history, its practitioners have used terms drawn from geography and the natural world. History as a river was a central image in the writing of Leopold von Ranke. History 'flowed' - *strömte;* just as you could never step twice in the same stream, so history did not repeat itself; the historian was part of the 'irresistible' current, but sought to 'master' it, and so on.[3] Similar linguistic habits persist; indeed, one has the impression that they are becoming more widespread. In 1997 I took part in a conference at the sister institution of this one in Washington, where we gathered to consider 'Remapping the German Past'.[4] The journal *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* recently published a special issue devoted to 'The Landscape of Theory'.[5] One of the most celebrated of modern French historians collected his essays under the title *The Territory of the Historian*.[6] And, from territory, it follows as the night the day that mention be made of frontiers – the disciplinary borders that Young Turks urge us to cross and Old Fogies to defend, whether against social scientists (the older version of the cry to arms), or against wandering hordes of deconstructionists in the more recent version. (I should add, since I am no generational

determinist, that sometimes the Young Turks are actually quite advanced in years, and the Old Fogies distressingly young).

The problem here is not that these are metaphors – even the most austere historical writing is metaphorical – but that they are dead metaphors, figures of speech we take completely for granted. And it seems to me that historians have also taken too much for granted the importance of a sense of place. In his book *The Power of Maps*, Denis Wood suggests that in cartography, time is a hidden dimension.[7] I am suggesting, conversely, that space is too often a hidden dimension in history. Let me immediately qualify that bold assertion. There are a number of different ways in which recent historians have explored the importance of place. Some of their ideas are new, others rest on older approaches. I shall be talking about them later. But nobody seems to have considered them together; there has been no general discussion of the sense of place in history, as there has been, say, of the 'linguistic turn', or the 'revival of narrative'. That is what I want to attempt here.

Let me start by indicating what I do not mean by 'a sense of place'. First, I am not referring to one very specific and – to my mind – not terribly helpful way in which, over the last twenty years, some German historians have asked us to address the sense of place. I refer to the revival of geopolitics, the view that German policy unfolded in response to geographical constraints. In the rather melodramatic words of Michael Stürmer, Prussia was 'burdened with the curse of its geography'.[8] He and others have revisited the idea that it was Germany's fate to be 'wedged in the middle of Europe'. The return of the geopolitical perspective has its own history. It was one element of a larger backlash against those who emphasized the so-called 'primacy of domestic policy'. And it

had a political context, too, as part of the intellectual shift – the *Tendenzwende* – of the early 1980s.

I called this a *revival* because geopolitical explanations are as old as the century, associated with figures such as Halford Mackinder in Britain, Friedrich Ratzel in Germany, Admiral Alfred Mahan in the USA and Rudolf Kjellén in Sweden, the person who coined the term geopolitics in 1900. Their ideas were vulgarized, popularized and politicized in interwar Germany, most notoriously by Karl Haushofer, who began his *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* in 1924.[9] Now, it should be emphasized that modern scholars of geopolitics do not share the same view of the world, although that background is certainly one reason why they have attracted critics. Let me say, for the first but not the last time here, that I believe we should have the intellectual courage not to reject ideas wholesale because of their dubious provenance or misuse. In this case, the argument against geopolitics is not that it is hopelessly contaminated by past associations, but that it is so limited. It is a rigid, geographically determinist way of viewing the world that understates the scope of human agents in shaping history and overstates the naturalness of geographical features such as 'natural borders'.[10] In short, geopolitics denies the plasticity of history – German history more than most. For surely the shifting political forms of Central Europe, from the Holy Roman Empire, through the Confederation of the Rhine and the German Confederation, through Lesser German Empire, Republic and Third Reich, through two world wars with their territorial gains and losses, through division and reunification – surely all of this demonstrates as vividly as anything in modern history how polities and policies change while the geography remains the same. Two hundred years ago Goethe and Schiller posed a famous question: 'Germany? But where is it? I don't know how to

find such a country'.[11] The advocates of geopolitics, alas, know all too well; but what they find is always the same country, always 'trapped' in the middle of Europe.

Nor am I primarily concerned here with the countless dissertations and monographs cast in the form of a local case study. Taken together, these probably make up the largest single category of current works on 'German history', as on 'British' or 'French' history. And for obvious reasons. As historical study has expanded and grown more professionalized, as the number of PhDs has increased even faster than new sub-disciplines have been created, so the case study has come into its own. It is manageable, and offers the chance to make an original contribution to knowledge. And so, whether it is politics in the Palatinate or sexuality in Saxony, the genre thrives. It is easy to satirize. Whatever our period, we are all familiar with the work that advertises itself as being about 'Politics, Society and Culture in Germany', and turns out to be concerned entirely with the history of Lippe-Detmold.

The case study tends at the margin towards one of two types. In an academic setting where there is a dominant professor or 'school' – and this does not apply only in Germany – we find the case study that resembles a slice carved from a larger joint: one that, after exhaustive effort, ends up confirming a larger thesis. Conversely – and this is encountered more often within Anglo-American scholarship – we have the case study conceived as spanner in the works. Its mantra is: 'Yes, yes, interesting theory, but it was all much more *complicated* than that'. And it was more complicated, of course. Who would doubt that much of what interests us in German history played out very differently, say, east and west of the Elbe, or north and south of the Main. But the pursuit of rich diversity should be a critical tool, not a smug way of life.

I am often reminded here of the English humorist Stephen Potter, the author of books on *Gamesmanship*, *Lifemanship* and *One-Upmanship*. He suggested that the phrase 'Yes, but not in the South' served well as a response to almost any argument.[12] And it certainly might have been adopted as their motto by many historians of Germany. (I should add, in the interest of full disclosure, that my own first book dealt with the Centre Party in Württemberg). Most local case studies, it is true, are neither slavishly conformist nor smugly contrary, but provide a valuable means of testing a general argument or even suggesting a new angle of approach. We could not do without them. But they are not what I have in mind in my title. For in most case studies, the place being studied is chosen pragmatically. It is the unit of study, but not the focus. The sense of place is, at best, secondary.

What I am concerned with may sound superficially similar, but is not. Here, the sense of place is primary. Let me offer some examples of what I mean. Take the history of crime. There was a time when historians wrote about this in the aggregate; these days they are more likely to deal with a particular incident in a particular place – a riot or charivari here, a case of infanticide or murder there.[13] And the point is that it matters to the account that the event happened in this place, not any place. In the same way, we find historians of religion emphasizing the local topography of popular devotional or pilgrimage sites, historians of social policy whose focus is an individual workhouse and its internal workings, and urban historians who write about the place occupied by the barracks in garrison towns – this historical genre, *Garnisonsgeschichtsforschung*, is one of those emerging sub-disciplines I mentioned earlier.[14] A similar shift is at work across the board. We gain a good sense of it from a book published a few years ago, *Orte des Alltags* or 'everyday places', with its

chapters devoted to the mill, the counting-house, the kitchen, the pulpit, the prison, and two dozen more places, from the nursery to the cemetery.[15]

Among the places that have attracted particular attention are those in which knowledge is produced, classified, and disseminated. An age that has become sceptical of disinterested knowledge and universals, an age for which the word 'situated' in the context of intellectual discourse has acquired an almost magical potency, wants to know where all those contingent truths come from. And, just as historians of science have fastened their attention on the laboratory, so historians have looked more closely at the places where disciplines were forged, where canons were constructed, where dictionaries were compiled.[16] This has affected the way we perceive familiar landmarks so that, for example, the history of the Enlightenment in Germany (as in France) has increasingly become a history located in the academy, the reading circle, the coffee house, the salon, the masonic lodge and the spa town.[17]

Perhaps the most striking instance of this trend is the boom in historical work on museums and their precursors, the *Wunderkammer.* This has paralleled fierce debates about contemporary museums (German history museums, Holocaust museums), and it has a common source.[18] The link is the current preoccupation – obsession even – with memory. (The present cult of the autobiography is another sign of the same thing – a cult to which historians are not immune, judging by how many of them are choosing to stroll down memory lane.) Memory as a serious historical concern is intimately linked to a sense of place. I need only mention Maurice Halbwachs's pioneering analysis of 'collective memory'. Not for nothing was 'topography' the key term in his last book.[19] Memory is anchored in place. And probably the best-known mod-

ern historical work on the subject underlines that fact, the work edited by Pierre Nora under the title *Lieux de Mémoire* – places of memory.[20]

What – or where – are these places of memory? They include not only the archive and museum, those modern memory-palaces, but commemorative statuary and monuments, war memorials and cemeteries, anniversary celebrations and festivities. The point that Nora and his colleagues make – they were mainly concerned with commemoration of the French revolution – is that these places of memory provide no direct access to living, unbroken traditions. They are residues, fragments that at best merely evoke what they must once have meant. More than that: statues and memorials represent the past in ways that are highly self-conscious, even contrived. For the control of memory, and with it a sense of identity, was – is – an eminently political issue. The angle of approach here is similar to the one taken by the authors of a work published just one year earlier than the first volume of *Lieux de Mémoire*. Its title – *The Invention of Tradition* – became the phrase that launched a thousand books.[21]

Work along these lines has had a demonstrable impact on the writing of German history. Not that historians of Germany only began to think about places of memory in 1984. There was work on the subject before that: on the nineteenth-century completion of Cologne cathedral, on the Hermann memorial, on those physical monuments to the Iron Chancellor, the Bismarck columns and towers.[22] But what once seemed novel is now ubiquitous. The article dealing with a war memorial has become to the 1990s what the article about social mobility was to an earlier, more innocently materialist age. Examining the 'imaginary places' of constructed memory has the great virtue of cutting against determinism of various kinds – geographical determinism, the economic determinism of

class formation, or the political determinism that assumes the nation-state to be a natural outcome of modern history. The emphasis, instead, is on the indeterminate: the multiplicity of identities, the shifting memories, that attach to a place.

The idea of 'places of memory' has much to offer historians of Germany. Let me give some examples. Rather than dwelling on 'natural' German borders, we can turn our attention to the cultural construction of borders, in the form of Rhine Romanticism, say, or the academic enterprise that goes by the name of *Ostforschung*.[23] This emphasis on mental geographies offers an equally valuable way of looking at the interplay of national, state and local identities within German-speaking Europe – how people combined their attachments to the smaller and larger *Heimat*, in ways described, for example, in Celia Applegate's study of the modern Palatinate.[24] Indeed, given the frequency with which new territorial entities have been planted on German soil in the modern era, from the 'Rhine Province' and 'Upper Swabia' of the post-Napoleonic era to the hyphenated post-war *Bundesländer*, German historians have more opportunities than most – and more reason – to address this issue, just as they have good reason to examine how these mental geographies were so often bound up with a sense of being Protestant or Catholic.[25] To take a final example, it is a matter of interest not only to economic historians that German industrialization helped to make possible the creation of places that had not previously existed. That last formulation is convoluted but necessary; for regions such as the *Saarland* and the *Ruhrgebiet* already possessed a marked degree of homogeneity by the last third of the nineteenth century, yet the name and sense of common identity was established only in the course of the twentieth. It was the severing of the Saar region from Germany after the First

World War that was instrumental in its construction as a region, while the process that turned Rhinelanders and Westphalians into *Ruhrgebietler* came later still. We should be aware of the contingent elements in these two regional histories, as each of them came to acquire its own places of memory, an emotional topography of attachment that has become even more visible (and may well be stronger) in a post-industrial era.[26]

Common to all of my examples is the importance of landscape – landscape as cultural image. There is probably no need to belabour the importance of this motif within recent scholarship. Landscape is another of those contemporary buzzwords. My own modest shelves contain the following books: *Landscape and Memory*, *The Iconography of Landscape*, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, and *Political Landscape*.[27] Some of you may think of this as a particularly Anglo-Saxon concern. But the last-named work, by the Hamburg art historian Martin Warnke, may stand proxy for what has actually become a substantial German scholarly literature on the subject. It includes work on everything from the princely landscape garden to the carefully landscaped *Autobahnen* of the Third Reich, which Fritz Todt and Hitler both viewed as 'national art monuments'.[28] The common denominator in these and many other cases is the symbolic representation of power in the landscape.

I have ranged so far over a number of places – everyday places, the sites where knowledge is produced, places of memory, the mental topography of landscape. Let me stand back for a moment, and offer some general observations on these different ways in which a sense of place has worked its way into the writing of German history.

First, it seems to me that these new departures have common origins. Like the closely-related flowering of *Alltagsgeschichte* and micro-history, they reflect a discom-

fort with universals, a scepticism about what we have come to call 'grand narrative', especially narratives of progress. A generation ago, in the heyday of the confident new social history, things were different. The classic work then concerned itself with generalized social processes and structures. Even the book titles – all that 'making' and 'shaping' – have a certain period charm. In those distant days, historians borrowed from the social sciences, discovered the joys of quantification, and championed comparative history (some even practising what they preached). The concept of 'modernization' drove much of this work.[29] It was an ambitious endeavour, captured in the title of a book by Charles Tilly: *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*.[30] One of its greatest achievements was to help break down parochial national historiographies by providing a common vocabulary. That was very important in the old Federal Republic. Social science history of 1970s vintage was like the international style in architecture – for better and worse.

For, just as modernization has lost some of its allure in our culture, so this kind of approach has fallen out of favour. It gave us new ways of looking at the past, but left a lot out – the human dimension, for one thing, the fact that societies consist of women as well as men, for another, and – not least – a sense of place, or what (quoting Clifford Geertz) we might call 'local knowledge'.[31] In short, what I have been talking about so far forms part of a larger shift of attention from structures to meanings, from aggregates to specific cases. It illustrates very well the growing use by historians of conceptual tools taken from anthropology and the humanities rather than the hard social sciences. For these seemed to offer more help in decoding the realms of lived experience, mentalities and everyday culture; at the very least they suggest new ways of interrogating the usual Weberian suspects: class,

status, power. What I have called the 'sense of place' is, then, a common thread – perhaps *the* common thread – in a larger historical shift.

Something similar has occurred in other disciplines. Sociologists embraced micro-linguistics to study localized human encounters; archaeologists questioned the 'systems'-driven New Archaeology of the 1970s; human geographers reacted against the abstract locational analysis of the New Geography; animal behaviourists moved away from logging the repetitive movements made by thousands of lab rats to study interactions among small groups of animals in their own habitats.[32] Small is beautiful? It would appear so. And the sense of place is a key element in each of these new departures.

This shift has not gone unchallenged. Historians have criticized work in this idiom for a playfulness that borders on arbitrariness, for slighting causality, for retreating from large questions and fostering the fragmentation of the discipline. I can see the point of all these strictures, yet I find them overdrawn. Like all new directions, this one has its share of less persuasive practitioners. But we are dealing here neither with a threat to our integrity, nor with a fad, but with a series of approaches that extend the scope of history. And, at a time of unprecedented pluralism in our discipline, the tendencies I have described already represent a new international style (although not *the* international style) in history. Their spread within German history-writing should be viewed as further evidence of the admirable openness of German historiography.

The sense of place fostered by the new cultural history is very welcome. But it is only half of the story I want to tell here. I have been dealing so far with what might be called geographies of the mind.[33] But what about *real* geographies – if you will pardon that provocative adjec-

tive? The physical world, the natural world, plays a rather small role, if any, in most of the works I have been discussing. And this is one characteristic they share, interestingly enough, with social history of 1970s vintage. To take an obvious example: the several thousand magisterial pages of Hans-Ulrich Wehler's *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte* demonstrate a highly developed sense of class and power and economic conjuncture, but betray absolutely no sense of place. This is a German society without coastline or rivers, mountains or plains.[34] Does this matter? I believe it does. I want to argue that these elements, properly understood, are an essential part of history – and then to suggest how they are properly understood.

The idea that physical descriptions of place form part of history can be traced back to Thucidydes and Herodotus; and Peter Heylyn observed nearly four centuries ago that 'Historie without Geographie like a dead carkasse hath neither life nor motion at all'.[35] Some of the most celebrated historians of the nineteenth century would have agreed passionately. Think of Macaulay. Or think of Michelet, who wrote in his *History of France*: 'Without a geographical basis, the people, the makers of history, seem to be walking on air, as in those Chinese pictures where the ground is wanting'.[36] In Germany, too, home to the great pioneers of the geographical discipline – Kant, Humboldt, Ritter – we find the same impulse. The work of the Ancient historian Ernst Curtius is an eminent example. Treitschke's pages contain more description of place than those who have not read him – or read him only for the plot – imagine. Yet, this was not the direction in which an increasingly professionalized history was moving in the second half of the last century. In Germany, but not only there, academic history became more focused on politics and the state, and more narrowly document-based. One result was that topography and the sense of

physical place became the preserve of outsiders – in the German case, of local antiquarians, or popularizers like Gustav Freytag.

That was the background to what can only be described as a revolution in professional history earlier this century. One of the most important challenges to positivistic political history came from scholars who insisted that the physical environment was more than just an empty stage on which humankind performed. Every one of you will be familiar with the French variant of this revolt: the *Annales* school, which owed so much to the human geographer Vidal de la Blache. From the founding fathers through to Fernand Braudel, the *Annalistes* were committed to studying human interaction with the environment, believing that this approach was one way to broaden and emancipate the discipline.[37] Their impact was long-lasting. Just as the greatest of them, Marc Bloch, taught that human history was to be found 'behind the features of landscape', so the much younger Georges Duby could still refer in his 1991 autobiography to 'a document ... open to the sunlight and to life itself, namely, the landscape'.[38] This new departure (or return to an older perspective) was not just a Gallic affair. It had its counterparts in the USA and in Britain, like that pioneer of landscape history, W. G. Hoskins.[39] Indeed, the belief that every historian should possess a pair of stout walking shoes was something that united such otherwise very different scholars of the interwar years as Collingwood, Tawney and Trevelyan.

But what of Germany? Well, do you want the good news or the bad news? The good news is that Germany had its Vidal de la Blache, a man who developed the concept of the 'historical landscape' (*historische Landschaft*). The bad news is that he was Friedrich Ratzel, the man who put the term *Lebensraum* into circulation.[40] The good

news is that Germany produced an abundantly talented historian who promised, as early as the 1890s, to anticipate the work of the *Annales*. The bad news is that he was Karl Lamprecht, who turned out to be as sloppy as he was arrogant – and a Pan-German into the bargain.[41]

Now it is true that Lamprecht and Ratzel helped to stimulate some truly innovative historical scholarship in interwar Germany. In recent years there has been growing acknowledgement of the work produced by the new *Landesgeschichte* of the 1920s and 1930s, especially in Bonn and Leipzig under the aegis of Hermann Aubin and Rudolf Kötzschke. The parallels with the *Annales* are striking. Like their French counterparts, these German scholars emphasized the study of regions in order to write a broader, more comprehensive kind of history. They wanted to get beyond a state-centred approach and address the history of collectivities, by looking at the human interaction with the physical landscape, settlement and trade patterns, the history of place names and material culture. That programme committed the new *Landesgeschichte*, again like *Annales*, to interdisciplinary cooperation between historians, geographers, cartographers, archaeologists, ethnologists, linguists and art historians – although not sociologists.[42]

Current scholarly opinion is sharply divided on the achievements of *Landesgeschichte* compared to those of *Annales*. As far as I am able to judge, for all its innovations, it did not match what Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre accomplished – a pretty stiff standard, to be sure. But there is also a major question here about the politics of scholarship. For if, on the one hand, it is certainly true that the historians who became *émigrés* had no monopoly on historical innovation, we also need to recognize on the other hand that the methodological innovations of *Landesgeschichte* went hand in hand with reactionary,

even racist views. These historians examined settlement patterns and material culture because they were looking for the true German *Volk*; and they rejected political history within conventional state borders because, in the aftermath of the Treaty of Versailles, they rejected Germany's borders. Aubin, Kötzschke and others were explicitly preparing political ammunition; it was not accidental that they were heavily compromised by their services to the National Socialist regime.[43]

One result was to taint a potentially valuable historical vocabulary. Classic French works of regional history routinely have a chapter called 'La Terre et les Hommes', and nobody bats an eyelid; but try that in German – 'Land und Leute' – and the phrase instantly summons up a questionable lineage stretching back to Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl. Two American authors can write a book called *Rooted in the Land*; but put that into German and you have something all too close to the Nazi adjective *schollengebunden*.[44] Further examples could easily be cited. Like other disciplines with which it had cooperated, *Landesgeschichte* as an enterprise was compromised after 1945. And, by a cruel historical irony, as it cleaned itself up, it lost much of what had made it innovative. There was a retreat into more narrowly-conceived constitutional and legal history; interdisciplinary work declined. By the 1970s *Landesgeschichte* looked to be in danger of losing its public.[45]

And yet, just at the moment when it seemed doomed to provincial irrelevance, came signs of new life. The 1970s and 1980s saw intensive debate over local history. Younger practitioners of *Landesgeschichte* called for a return to the more ambitious ideas of Aubin and Kötzschke – to recover, as it were, the baby that had been thrown out with the bathwater after 1945. Others speculated on the possibilities of an 'open' *Landesgeschichte* sympathetic to

the revived contemporary interest (including popular interest) in local history and *Heimat*. The same years saw the emergence of something that called itself 'regional history'. It developed – and this is significant – in new universities with no established chairs in *Landesgeschichte*, and tended to be aggressively modern in its embrace of social and economic history. And it is equally significant that *Regionalgeschichte* attracted practitioners and advocates who saw it as a fruitful angle of approach to contemporary history.[46] Despite their many differences, these scholars – and, incidentally, some of their colleagues in the GDR – were all concerned with the advantages of studying the totality of a region by turning up the magnification and exposing the fine grain of history. Many of them could have echoed the comment of Karl Lamprecht almost a century earlier: 'Here in the local the universal appears truly clear and immanent'.[47] Alas, and not for the first time, these debates remained largely separate from the more familiar arguments that took place in these years within mainstream or so-called 'general history' – the *Sonderweg* debate, for example, or the *Historikerstreit*.

The importance of physical landscape as one element among others was common ground among those I have just been talking about. That is even more true of a further conduit through which the sense of place has returned to German history-writing. I mean the development of environmental or ecological history. This has long enjoyed a higher visibility in other countries, such as the United States. But the contrast should not be overstated. Since the 1980s there has been an impressive increase in the number of scholars working on this aspect of German history, both in the Federal Republic and elsewhere, particularly the United States. German environmental history also seems to have passed through something like the same cycle as its American counterpart. Strongly present-minded concerns, especially with pollution, and

a desire to establish the lineage of an environmental movement – these have been followed by work of growing sophistication.[48]

It is, of course, true that those who are interested in a subject – as I am in this one – tend to become most aware of its practitioners, especially younger scholars who have just finished or are still completing their dissertations. But I do not believe that my own impression here is false, namely that the best is still to come – that German environmental history has come of age, and can no longer be regarded as the unmediated pursuit of Green politics by other means. And judging by the work that is already under way, that shift will increasingly manifest itself in studies concerned with particular places, such as Rainer Beck's magnificent village study, *Unterfinning*, and with specific habitats or eco-systems – with wetlands and heath, high moorlands and forest, each with its specific flora, fauna and hydrological regime.[49] Environmental history gives us another reason to attend to a sense of place.

Here let me anticipate a couple of likely questions. First, are we not playing with fire if we encourage this return to the physical environment, to the soil? To which I am tempted to answer: We're adults, we're allowed to play with fire (and while we are about it, we might emulate the American scholar Stephen Pyne and write about fire as a historical phenomenon[50]). My more measured response would be to voice a genuine conviction that such fears are groundless. The scholars I have been discussing carry no nationalist baggage. In fact, unlike the advocates of geopolitics mentioned earlier, they are not principally concerned with the nation-state at all. Many of the new regional historians are expressly open to a comparative history within a Europe of the regions. There is no reason to fear that *Lebensraum* lurks behind

every discussion of *Kulturraum*; it doesn't. As for the environmental historians, their frame of reference is at once sub-national and supra-national. Recent work on the Rhine and Mosel valleys, for example, is utterly free of the nationalist axe-grinding that disfigured many earlier works.[51] Environmental history, in Germany as elsewhere, could be seen in many ways as the translation into historical practice of a slogan familiar to members of my generation: think globally, act locally.

A second question: Surely laying emphasis on the physical environment raises the spectre of geographical determinism – the same problem that bedevils geopolitics? This has long been a criticism of the *Annales* school, for the most part unfairly, I think. Take Lucien Febvre's *Geographical Introduction to History*.[52] This is a sustained critique of determinism in the name of what he called 'possibilism' – the importance of human agency in the reciprocal relations between people and environment. That perspective runs strongly through the work of Febvre and Marc Bloch, even if this is clearly less true of Fernand Braudel. Febvre's 1931 history of the Rhineland, happily reissued recently in German translation, remains an exemplary exploration of how mentalities arise in a geographically defined area that was also a porous border region.[53] Febvre was writing about the construction of the 'other' before there was a word for it. In Germany, determinist currents ran more strongly. But in their programmatic statements, Hermann Aubin and colleagues in the Rhineland *Landesgeschichte* group pointedly referred to environmental 'conditioning influences', not 'determinants'. And the title of their main work in the 1920s was 'Cultural Currents and Cultural Provinces in the Rhine Lands'.[54]

As for the present, the sort of determinism Febvre attacked – links between climate and character, or the

generalizations about peoples and races to which they often lent legitimacy, and not just in Germany – *this* language of determinism is surely dead in serious scholarly discourse. If there is an imbalance today in the way we construe human interaction with the environment, it lies in the other direction. Reading yet another article on an 'imagined community', one is sometimes tempted to echo Gertrude Stein and complain that there is 'no there there'. We might benefit from recovering a sharper sense of the physical space within which human agents have acted historically, something that can become lost in this age of cyberspace, virtual reality and simulacra, when historians visit many websites but rarely lace up those stout walking shoes to investigate either countryside or town.[55]

As I noted earlier, the historians who write about symbolic landscapes emphasize the 'constructed' or 'invented' character of their places. Indeterminacy is their common coin. Yet for most of German history – of human history – most people lived lives that rubbed up hard against the physical, material constraints of their environment. We are usually prepared to grant the importance of this for the medieval and early-modern periods to which *Annales* and *Landesgeschichte* devoted most of their attention. But we should not lose sight of how much it continued to be the case even as the human condition began to change in the modern period – change (let me add) that was distributed so unevenly, occurred so convulsively and often came at such a high price that the term 'modernization' seems almost mockingly inadequate to describe it. In not losing sight of these truths, we might want to remember that useful little marxist concept 'necessity'. Or we can recall Lucien Febvre's plea that we explore the human interplay with the environment, under which he included relations with the soil, the vegeta-

tion, the animal population and endemic diseases.[56] Whatever our guide, let us remember the advantages of keeping our feet on the ground.

This does not mean that we can or should disregard the cultural constructions that human actors have placed on their relations with the material environment. The two approaches are complementary, not antithetical. Let me offer you some brief examples drawn from my own current research. Take those large-scale programmes to drain marshes and settle colonists pursued by Frederick the Great on the Oder, the Warthe, the Netze and elsewhere.[57] The resolution of the ensuing conflicts between fishermen, farmers and floodwaters involved a literal reshaping of the land – with echoes down to the present day, as the latest Oderbruch floods remind us. Yet these great undertakings also carried eminently cultural and symbolic meanings: the conquest or 'improvement' of nature, the representation of power, not least the power of German 'culture' over 'swamp-dwelling' Poles. Or consider, in the following century, the so-called rectification of the Rhine between Basel and Worms by the Badenese engineer Johann Tulla.[58] How can we neglect the dramatic material consequences? The Rhine was remade. Fifty miles were lopped off its length as the shallow, meandering, miles-wide stream was transformed into the familiar modern artery. Malaria disappeared, but at huge cost to the local eco-system. Modern ports and steamers thrived, while small boatmen were ruined and hundreds of floating mills disappeared. Flooding was stemmed, but became a greater threat downstream. Digging for Rhine Gold in the gravel beds ended, becoming a mere motif in Wagner (if anything in Wagner can be called 'mere').[59] As this last example suggests, however, once again the material world cannot be viewed in isolation. Tulla's work also became a potent symbol of human power over na-

ture, another contribution to the nineteenth-century cult of progress. And by stopping the Rhine from wandering over its flood-plain, the engineers also fixed what had hitherto been a constantly shifting border with France, in the very same years that Rhine Romanticism made a cult of the craggy stretches of the river below Mainz and thereby opened up a cultural front against the Gallic enemy.[60]

These examples give some indication of how much we limit our historical imagination when we place the cultural and the material in separate boxes. The same applies to those who want to write the history of the German forest, or the German mountains, or the historical relationship of Germans with the animal population, with *Bruder Tier* – a dimension of history that has, regrettably, received less attention from German historians than it has from scholars of France, Britain and the Americas.[61] In the second half of this lecture I have tried to offer the untimely thought that the mainstream of history may have as much to gain from recovering a sense of the physical environment as it has already gained from considering mental topographies. Above all, however, the two are not mutually exclusive. Just as human history and natural history have to be grasped in their relationship to each other, so we should try to find ways to accommodate in our histories the imagined places of the culturalist and the physical places of the materialist.[62]

I turn to some concluding remarks. Many of you will have noted the paradox in my undertaking here – a lecture concerned with a sense of place, delivered in the form of a *tour d'horizon*. This is rather like a total abstainer giving a guided tour of the distillery. (There are, of course, more unreliable guides to a distillery than the total abstainer.) But there is a larger paradox than that. Marc Augé has catalogued the rise of 'nonplaces'; the sociolo-

gist Joshua Meyrowitz has suggested that, in an age of globalization, we have 'no sense of place'.[63] Yet a good argument could be made that exactly the opposite is true. Over the last twenty years, at the popular as well as the scholarly level, there has been a growing interest in the spatial dimension of our lives and a renewed concern with the sense of place.[64] The 'Where' is being rejoined to the 'When'.[65] I have tried to trace two rather different ways in which this has been true for German history, and to argue for an attempt to bridge the gap between them.

Let me therefore end by quoting Fernand Braudel. Few historians did more to realize the plea of Vidal de la Blache for 'an increasingly geographical conception of mankind', but Braudel's vision of history was much more generous and inclusive than that.[66] Writing almost forty years ago, he used a classic metaphor of place in referring to the different 'landscapes' – material, social, cultural, political – that historians encountered and juxtaposed in their work. He continued:

> 'But history gathers them all together; it is the sum total of all these neighbours, of these joint ownerships, of this endless interaction'.[67]

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2 Alexander Pope, *Epistles to Several Persons*, 'To Lord Burlington' (1731), l. 57.

3 I owe this point to a paper by Helmut Schneider delivered at a conference on 'Water: Cultural Representations and Ecological Questions', University of Oregon, 16-19 October 1997.

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5 *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 24/2 (1998).

6 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Territory of the Historian* (Chicago/Ill., 1979; orig. French edn 1973).

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8 Michael Stürmer, 'Preußens Erbe an die deutsche Geschichte', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 October 1981, cited in Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Renaissance der "Geopolitik"?', in id., *Preußen ist wieder chic ... Politik und Polemik in zwanzig Essays* (Frankfurt/M., 1983), p. 63. See also David Calleo, *The German Problem Reconsidered* (Cambridge, 1980); Gregor Schöllgen, *Die Macht in der Mitte Europas* (Munich, 1992).

9 Geoffrey Parker, *Western Geopolitical Thought in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1985); Dan Diner, '"Grundbuch des Planeten". Zur Geopolitik Karl Haushofers', *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 32 (1984), pp. 1-28; Rainer Sprengel, *Kritik der Geopolitik. Ein Deutscher Diskurs 1914-1944* (Berlin, 1966).

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[11] Quoted in James J. Sheehan, 'What is German History? Reflections on the Role of the *Nation* in German History and Historiography', *Journal of Modern History* 53 (1981), p. 1.

[12] Stephen Potter, *Lifemanship* (London, 1950), p. 43.

[13] Compare, for example, Howard Zehr, *Crime and the Development of Modern Society: Patterns of Criminality in Nineteenth-Century Germany and France* (London, 1976), or Eric A. Johnson and Vincent E. McHale, 'Urbanization, Industrialization, and Crime in Imperial Germany', *Social Science History* 1 (1976-77), pp. 45-78, 210-47, with the following: Lothar Machtan and René Ott, '"Batzbier!" Überlegungen zur sozialen Protestbewegung in den Jahren nach der Reichsgründung am Beispiel der süddeutschen Bierkrawalle vom Frühjahr 1873', in Heinrich Volkmann and Jürgen Bergmann (eds), *Sozialer Protest* (Opladen, 1984), pp. 128-66; Regina Schulte, *The Village in Court* (Cambridge, 1994); Richard J. Evans, *Tales from the German Underworld. Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth Century* (NewHaven/Conn. and London, 1998); Larry Wolff, *Postcards from the End of the World: Child Abuse in Freud's Vienna* (New York, 1988).

[14] See David Blackbourn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Bismarckian Germany* (Oxford, 1993), Wolfgang Ayaß, *Das Arbeitshaus Breitenau* (Kassel, 1992) and Wolfgang Schmidt, 'Stadt und Militär in Regensburg', *Die Alte Stadt. Vierteljahreszeitschrift für Stadtgeschichte, Stadtsoziologie und Denkmalpflege* 21 (1994), pp. 1-18, all with further references.

[15] Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (ed.), *Orte des Alltags. Miniaturen aus der europäischen Geschichte* (Munich, 1994). Those who think that this has a Foucauldian ring may wish to note that, in one of his lesser-known pieces, Michel Foucault named many similar 'sites' in which 'history unfolds', including the church, cemetery, theatre, garden, museum, library, fairground, brothel, barracks and prison. See: 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* 16 (1986), pp. 22-7.

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Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton / NJ, 1985), and Peter Galison, *How Experiments End* (Chicago / Ill., 1987). For the influence on historians of Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, see collections such as Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley and Sherry Ortner (eds), *Culture/Power/History. A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* (Princeton / NJ, 1994); Wolfgang Hardtwig and Hans-Ulrich Wehler (eds), *Kulturgeschichte heute* (Göttingen, 1996); Thomas Mergel and Thomas Welskopp (eds), *Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft. Beiträge zur Theoriedebatte* (Munich, 1997); *Central European History* 22/3,4 (1989), special issue. Works dealing with canon- or discipline-formation include: Hugh West, 'Göttingen and Weimar: The Organization of Knowledge and Social Theory in Eighteenth-Century Germany', *Central European History* 11 (1978), pp. 150-61, Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *Building a National Literature: The Case of Germany 1838-1870* (Ithaca / NY, 1989), and Suzanne Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970* (Princeton / NJ, 1996).

17 Rudolf Vierhaus (ed.), *Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im Zeitalter der Aufklärung* (Heidelberg, 1981); Ulrich Im Hof, *Das gesellige Jahrhundert. Gesellschaft und Gesellschaften im Zeitalter der Aufklärung* (Munich, 1982); Richard van Dülmen, *Die Gesellschaft der Aufklärer* (Frankfurt / M., 1986); Otto Dann (ed.), *Lesegesellschaften und bürgerliche Emanzipation. Ein europäischer Vergleich* (Munich, 1981); Hans Erich Bödeker, 'Das Kaffeehaus als Institution aufklärerischer Geselligkeit', in Etienne François (ed.), *Sociabilité et société bourgeoise en France, en Allemagne et en Suisse* (Paris, 1987); Hans Erich Bödeker and Ulrich Herrmann (eds), *Über den Prozeß der Aufklärung in Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert: Personen, Institutionen und Medien* (Göttingen, 1987); Deborah Hertz, *Jewish High Society in Old Regime Berlin* (New Haven / Conn. and London, 1988); Helmut Reinalter (ed.), *Aufklärung und Geheimgesellschaften. Zur politischen Funktion und Sozialstruktur der Freimaurerlogen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1989); Reinhold Kuhnert, *Urbanität auf dem Lande. Badereisen nach Pyrmont im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1984).

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[19] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York, 1980; orig. French edn 1925); id., *La Topographie légendaire des évangiles en Terre Sainte* (Paris, 1941). See also Patrick H. Hutton, *History and the Art of Memory* (Hanover / NH, 1993).

[20] Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols (Paris, 1984-92).

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[24] Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials. The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley / Calif., 1990). See also Alon Confino, *The Nation as Local Metaphor. Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill / NC, 1997).

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[38] Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester, 1954), p. 26; Georges Duby, *History Continues* (Chicago/Ill., 1994), p. 28.

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[43] See Lehmann and Van Horn Melton, *Paths of Continuity* (note 42); Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards* (note 23); Willi Oberkrome, *Volksgeschichte. Methodische Innovation und völkische Ideologisierung in der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft 1918-1945* (Göttingen, 1993); Jürgen Kocka, 'Ideological Regression and Methodological Innovation: Historiography and the Social Sciences in the 1930s and 1940s', *History and Memory* 2 (1990), pp. 130-7.

[44] William Vitek and Wes Jackson (eds), *Rooted in the Land. Essays on Community and Place* (New Haven / Conn., 1996). In similar, serenely unapologetic vein, see Emily W. B. Russell, *People and the Land through Time* (New Haven / Conn., 1997), and Deborah Tall, *From Where We Stand. Recovering a Sense of Place* (Baltimore / MD, 1996).

[45] See Carl-Hans Hauptmeyer, 'Zur Einführung', in id. (ed.), *Landesgeschichte heute* (Göttingen, 1987), pp. 5-15.

[46] On these different developments, see Pankraz Fried (ed.), *Probleme und Methoden der Landesgeschichte* (Darmstadt, 1978); Ernst Hanisch, 'Regionale Zeitgeschichte', *Zeitgeschichte* 7 (1979), pp. 39-60; Peter Steinbach, 'Neue Wege der regionalhistorisch orientierten Alltagsgeschichte', *Hessisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte* 30 (1980), pp. 312-36; Ernst Hinrichs, 'Zum gegenwärtigen Standort der Landesgeschichte', *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte* 57 (1985), pp. 1-18; Franz Irsigler, 'Vergleichende Landesgeschichte', in Hauptmeyer (ed.), *Landesgeschichte heute* (note

45), pp. 35-54; Jürgen Reulecke, 'Von der Landesgeschichte zur Regionalgeschichte', *Geschichte im Westen* 6 (1991), pp. 202-8; Bernd Weisbrod, 'Region und Zeitgeschichte: Das Beispiel Niedersachsens', *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte* 68 (1996), pp. 91-105. The great project led by Martin Broszat, *Bayern in der NS-Zeit*, illustrates well the connection between the new regional history and contemporary history. The chronology of the project – the first volume appeared in 1979 – also makes it characteristic of all the tendencies under discussion here, for which the later 1970s were the decisive seed-time.

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[49] Rainer Beck, *Unterfinning. Ländliche Welt vor Anbruch der Moderne* (Munich, 1993).

[50] Stephen J. Pyne, *Vestal Fire. An Environmental History, Told through Fire, of Europe and Europe's Encounter with the World* (Seattle, 1997). This work, dealing with Europe, is the fifth volume in Pyne's "Cycle of Fire" sequence. For a more synoptic work on the same subject, see Johan Goudsblom, *Fire and Civilization* (London, 1992).

[51] For example, Christoph Bernhardt's research project at the Institut für Geschichtswissenschaft of the TU Berlin, on the History of the Upper Rhine 1770-1914 from an environmental history perspective; or the work of Mark Cioc at the University of California, Santa Cruz, who is completing an 'eco-biography' of the Rhine. On the Mosel, see Sandra Chaney, 'Visions and Revisions of Nature: From the Protection of Nature to the Invention of the Environment in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1945-1975, PhD dissertation, University of N. Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1996. On earlier works of history-as-propaganda, see Franziska Wein, *Deutschlands Strom – Frankreichs Grenze. Geschichte und Propaganda am Rhein 1919-1930* (Essen, 1992).

[52] Lucien Febvre, *La terre et l'évolution humaine. Introduction géographique à l'histoire* (Paris, 1922), translated as *A Geographical Introduction to History* (London and New York, 1925).

[53] Albert Demangeon and Lucien Febvre, *Le Rhin* (Strasbourg, 1931), which was subsequently published in a different form as *Le Rhin. Problèmes d'histoire et d'économie* (Paris, 1935); Lucien Febvre, *Der Rhein und seine Geschichte*, ed. by Peter Schöttler (Frankfurt/M., 1994).

[54] Hermann Aubin, Theodor Frings and Josef Müller, *Kulturströmungen und Kulturprovinzen in den Rheinlanden. Geschichte – Sprache – Volkskunde* (Bonn, 1926; reprinted Darmstadt, 1966).

[55] In making this point I am fully – and unapologetically – aware that such a position falls under the rubric of what Jean Baudrillard has called 'the panic-stricken production of the real', and that Marc Augé would place me in the ranks of conservatives 'condemned' to speak the language 'of the land and roots'. See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor / Mich., 1994), p. 7; Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London and New York, 1995), p. 35.

[56] We have a description of a discussion in 1950, in which Febvre continued to insist on addressing these elements in history. See Fernand Braudel, *On History* (Chicago / Ill., 1980; orig. French edn 1969), p. 206.

[57] See Max Beheim-Schwarzbach, *Hohenzollernsche Colonisationen* (Leipzig, 1874); Heinrich Berger, *Friedrich der Grosse als Kolonisator* (Giessen, 1896); Walter Christiani, *Das Oderbruch. Historische Skizze* (Freienwalde, 1901); Peter Fritz Mengel (ed.), *Das Oderbruch*, 2 vols (Eberswalde, 1930-34); Erich Neuhaus, *Die Fridericianische Colonisation im Netze- und Warthebruch* (Landsberg, 1915); Paul Schwarz, 'Die Urbarmachung des Warthebruches in den Jahren 1767-1782', *Die Neumark. Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Neumark* 6 (Landsberg, 1929), pp. 3-47; Otto Kaplick, *Das Warthebruch. Eine deutsche Kulturlandschaft im Osten* (Würzburg, 1956); Benno von Knobelsdorff-Brenkenhoff, *Eine Provinz im Frieden erobert. Brenckenhoff als Leiter des friderizianischen Retablissements in Pommern 1762-1780* (Cologne and Berlin, 1984). Readers of Fontane's *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg* may recall that the author – whose father lived in the Oderbruch – returns repeatedly to discuss these reclamation schemes.

[58] See Heinrich Cassinone and Karl Spieß, *Johann Gottfried Tulla. Sein Leben und Wirken* (Karlsruhe, 1929); Fritz Schulte-Mäter, *Beiträge über die geographischen Auswirkungen der Korrektion des Oberrheins*, dissertation, University of Freiburg (Leipzig, 1938); Heinz Musall, *Die Entwicklung der Rheinniederung zwischen Karlsruhe und Speyer vom Ende des 16. bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Heidelberg, 1969), pp. 196ff.; Egon Kunz, 'Von der Tulla'schen Rheinkorrektion bis

zum Oberrheinausbau', *Jahrbuch für Naturschutz und Landschaftspflege* 24 (1975), pp. 59-78. See also Christoph Bernhardt's project at the TU Berlin (note 51).

[59] Schulte-Mäter, *Beiträge* (note 58), pp. 62, 74-5, 78; Musall, *Entwicklung* (note 58), p. 236.

[60] An outline of my views can be found in 'Besiegte Natur: Wasser und die Entstehung der modernen deutschen Landschaft', a paper delivered to a conference on 'Wasser' held at the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, 21-25 October 1998, the proceedings of which are forthcoming.

[61] No German historical work so far can stand alongside Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (London, 1983), Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge / Mass., 1987), Kathleen Kete, *The Beast in the Boudoir. Petkeeping in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley / Calif., 1994), or William Cronon (ed.), *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York, 1996). But see Siegfried Becker and Andreas C. Bimmer (eds), *Mensch und Tier. Kulturwissenschaftliche Aspekte einer Sozialbeziehung* (Marburg, 1991).

[62] I find great value in the division made by Henri Lefebvre (he was concerned with urban settings) between physical space, social space and mental space. See *The Production of Space* (Oxford, 1991; orig. French edn 1974).

[63] Augé, *Non-Places* (note 55); Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (Oxford, 1989). Cf. Paul Virilio, *Open Sky* (London and New York, 1997), p. 37: 'How can we really live if there is no more *here* and if everything is *now*?'.

[64] See Rolf Lindner (ed.), *Die Wiederkehr des Regionalen. Über die Formen kultureller Identität* (Frankfurt / M., 1994). More generally, see John A. Agnew and James S. Duncan (eds), *The Power of Place. Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations* (London, 1989). At the popular level, the '*Heimat*-boom' is probably the best example of this phenomenon.

[65] This could be regarded as a rejoining of Kant's *nebeneinander* and *nacheinander*, the next-to-each-other and after-each-other.

[66] Braudel, *On History*, p. 52.

[67] Ibid., p. 131.