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A sentimental reeducation: Postwar West Germany's intimate geographies

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ABSTRACT

Can a population or community be "taught" to feel and act differently through an externally imposed politico-cultural paradigm? What kinds of unexpected feelings (at odds with behavioral norms and expectations of the educator/observer) emerge from the collision of different political histories and cultural orientations? This paper examines American and West German social theories concerned with democratizing West Germany in the context of the Cold War and in the wake of initial US-Allied attempts at "reeducation" in the postwar period. Based on an analysis of Theodor W. Adorno's radio broadcasts and writings on the possibility of an "education to autonomy" after Auschwitz, this paper explores how West Germans came to "feel differently" through the gradual and contradictory negotiation of a democratic "habitus", ultimately demonstrating the agonistic and ambivalent processes constitutive of substantial democracy.

In 1954, American philosopher Ernest William Hockings published a critical account of the US-American occupation's attempts at denazification and democratization of the German population in the West Zone. This work addresses the pedagogical efforts of the US occupation forces in Germany, taking issue with the simultaneously unqualified and overdetermined nature of the concept of "democracy":

> I am thinking of the deep and radical unfinishedness of our reflections about democracy. And therefore of the profound, perhaps insuperable, difficulty of conveying a faith in which we ourselves are not entirely sure or clear. (Hocking, 1954: 280)

During the US occupation, the concept of democracy covered more than the organization of a political system alone. Hocking clearly understood "democracy" to include a manner of being, comportment or even an attitude, as evidenced by his concern that the unruly behavior of the US military forces, for instance, could be interpreted by the German population as a measure of the fallibility of democratic values in the broader context of re-education: "Whatever we had to *say* about democracy, our democracy would be judged chiefly by what we *did*: every political and legal practice of ours would be examined with care by the Germans subject to it to discover what, in terms of social action and of respect for personality, we meant by the term 'democracy'" (Hocking, 1954: 85). Although not directly naming particular "democratic" sentiments, Hocking addresses the normative aspect of democratic comportment, regarding what he believes West Germans still have to learn about "democratic way of life." He emphasizes the necessity of acquiring "a habit of marginal watchfulness" and "the habit of delegation" as the sine *qua non* of democratic behavior (Hocking, 1954: 113). In other words, he argues for the inculcation of democratic behavior and feelings in the German people and, specifically, that the Germans should feel and behave differently, not only in the traditional arena of politics, but also in their everyday lives.

In addition to legal and institutional reform at all levels of German society, re-education thus implicitly encompassed technologies of individual comportment and public behavior that relied on performative dimensions. Democracy, Hocking implies, might even be learned through mimetic practices: "We had an affirmative program. […] We were going to illustrate democracy rather than define it, and explain it as we went along" (Hocking, 1954: 111). This "show-not-tell" approach encompasses the "language" of emotions and the syntax of behavior, thus it sometimes seems less obvious as a technology of democratization than institutional changes or the opinion polls conducted by the Allied High Commission for

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Occupied Germany (HICOG) (1949–1955) (Merritt and Merritt, 1980).[1] Hocking recognizes the central role of emotion in training toward democracy when he states: "Emotion must be part of any effective moral pedagogy" (Hocking, 1954: 225). And moral pedagogy is most effective, Hocking ventures, when it is an affectively differentiated, rather than an emotionally void experience. That is, it works best when encompassing a dialectical movement between negative and positive feelings:

> The punitive spirit, on its emotional side, has a swift and passing importance, as part of the experience that must enter the dialectic of the moral learner. As indefinitely prolonged, it has its consummation in the ancient theological invention of Eternal Retribution […]. But no one considers Hell an educational institution: its inhabitants, if any, are God's personal failures. (Hocking, 1954: 227)

In the case of the US occupation of Germany, the path beyond the "hell" of defeat was paved with the Cold War-motivated good intentions of democratic rehabilitation.

Along with the central role played by emotion in social behaviors and normative value construction, the role played by spatiality is often overlooked when we attempt to determine the ways in which emotion may be understood as a disciplinary, rather than a spontaneous and disruptive, force intrinsic to any political orientation. Part of the process of re-education was a demand for Germans to feel and act differently—to eschew totalitarian passions and behavior in favor of what was characterized in vague terms as an empathic, levelheaded democracy. What might be called a geopolitical concern with emotion and affective behavior was thus there from the very inception of US-Allied theories and practices of democratization.

The success or failure of re-education and democratization in postwar Germany is not the principal concern of this paper. Instead, the accent falls on reconstructing the theoretical preconditions underlying concrete practices of technologies of democracy in the postwar West German context. Specifically, I am interested in examining the socio-psychological approach to subjectivity first addressed through the concept of "character" in the US-American context, and the form that this discourse takes in the radio addresses of returned Jewish émigré, philosopher and cultural critic Theodor W. Adorno. In broadcasts on public radio in the late 1950s and 1960s, Adorno openly expressed his investment in restructuring the psychological makeup of the German individual by encouraging critical reflection on spaces coded public and private: namely, through educational institutions, including the family unit. In turn, within the normative spaces of the family and educational institutions, Adorno envisages modes of feeling and behavior through a restructuring of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, or what we can understand as "intimacy-geopolitics" proposed by geographers Rachel Pain and Lynn Staeheli (2014). Here, intimacy is characterized as a set of spatial relations, a mode of interaction, and involving a set of practices. In the context of this article, intimate geographies can be understood as an important aspect of the space that one inhabits and through which one receives the social coordinates anchoring the individual to certain communities. These are particular intersubjective spaces and communicative modalities through which discussion, conflict, and behavior are negotiated, and act to reproduce or, at times, to alter a society's habitus or social norms and ways of existing in the world.

[1] For an analysis of institutional measures of democratization that set the stage for learning democratic comportment, ranging from youth groups to policy decisions, see: Rupieper (2005); and Kreis (2015).

Adorno's broadcasts date to a period in postwar West German history when "re-education" had been put on hold with the focus on the Cold War agenda of the US Allied forces. The US-Allies had already granted the population in the Western Zone free reign to organize the new democratic political system, resulting in the Bonn Republic; the public culture of democratic debate propagated by intellectuals such as Adorno was a translation of some of the core premises of "re-education" into a German idiom by way of the German philosophical tradition. These broadcasts discussed practices of education, teaching, and child rearing in the family in the Federal Republic of Germany, and exhibited premises of "re-education" less from the perspective of an inculcation of democracy through the American way of life, than in the form of a Kantian-inflected call of the individual to "*Mündigkeit*" or autonomy, maturity, and self-determination, as qualities or comportment central to democratic forms of governance.

These radio broadcasts raise interesting questions and indicate paradoxes, including: can a population or community be "taught" to feel and act differently through an externally imposed politico-cultural map? What kinds of technologies are needed to create the intimate geographies conducive to democratic political subjectivity? Which prejudices are at work in conflating political behavior and attitudes into singular national stereotypes, then used as a measure of the ethics of an entire population? How are emotions engineered as a vehicle for, as well as being a constitutive part of, moral and political learning? And, what is being assumed about how the exposure of a nation to intimate geographies other than those of fascism, might restructure the political subject such that it then embodies democratic values, feelings, and behaviors?

Tracing exemplary rather than exhaustive illustrations of "re-education" through the lens of spatiality and affect provides us with tools for reading emotions and practices of feeling differently in their historical context. It also suggests the ways in which some emotions are politicized or how certain behaviors become coded in overtly political terms, such as how democracy came to be associated with friendliness and tolerance in the West German context, while fascism was seen as a conduit for excessive, de-individualizing, and potentially destructive emotions, such as hatred and rage. Exploring the restructuring of the West German public sphere, such as the creation of spaces and institutions charged with fostering re-education by promoting "democratic" activities, reading for emotions suggests a powerful paradigm focused on the psychological subject for mapping intimate, less official geographies peculiar to interpersonal relations. As a form of relationality, intimate geographies are always constituted by—and in turn constitute—the emotional and comportmental norms of a lived environment. The norms of a society may be understood to act as a barometer of political and historical sea changes and more subtle shifts between cultures—or, in postwar West Germany's case, within a specific culture over a period of time.

1. The stick or the carrot?

As suggested by Hocking, at least two models of "sentimental re-education" can be charted in the postwar period: those of the stick and the carrot. In relation to processes of democratization, the first mode is represented by the punitive urge of the Allies who liberated the camps, bore first-hand witness to Nazi atrocities, and wished to call the German population to accountability, presumably by way of individual and national shame and through an admission of guilt (Weckel, 2012; Parkinson, 2015). The second model emerges from the political context of the Cold War, which motivated positioning the West Germans as Allies in the fight against the perceived threat of the Soviet states.

Even before the Allied defeat of Nazi Germany, emotions were a

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