

Lecture Hanna Behrend at the STATE UNIVERSITY of NEW YORK (SUNY)
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Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Zukunft
[Searching for the lost future]:
a series of publications situated outside the German mainstream
on problems of global relevance

One of the features of German unification in 1990 was the wholesale replacement of GDR elite by West German academics assisted by a minute fraction of ex-dissident East Germans. A considerable number of the displaced East German scholars, particularly in the fields of the social sciences and the arts, reacted to their elimination by founding a wealth of organisations, publishing houses and periodica. Thus they continued to publish and engage in academic ventures in their various fields. All these endeavours were, of course, situated outside the German mainstream and almost totally ignored by it.

One of the organisations forming this “Subordinate Culture” was the Gesellschaftswissenschaftliches Forum [Forum of Social Scientists] founded in 1991. As one of its founding members, I was responsible for a publishing venture established under that organisation’s umbrella, and sponsored by Humboldt University’s interdisciplinary centre for women’s studies, one of the very few achievements of the period of transition or the *Wende* that has survived to our days. The project was called “Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Zukunft” [Searching for the Lost Future]. It was initiated in 1994 and had, by 2005, published a total of eighteen volumes. Authors and members of the editorial board were East and West German academics, most of them experts in sociology, economics, history, and psychology as well as literary scholars.

The books dealt with the changes that were taking place in gainful employment, with regard to gender and ethnicity, human and women’s rights, ecology and sustained economics, in respect of identity and civil rights movements.

Our motive was to provide readers who were deeply concerned with the state of a world-in transition, troubled by the shattering defeat of their previous visions, and groping for new solutions with a popular presentation and up to date information on problems of importance to the future of mankind. We never aimed to provide our readers with readymade answers to all their questions but with adequate up to date knowledge concerning the topical debates on important social, political, economic and ecological problems. This should help them to arrive at an independent viewpoint and thereby increase their self-confidence.

Long term teacher-student research teams in the GDR

Post-unification transition at GDR universities did not only bring about the end of the previous system of teaching and research. It also spelled the end of the indigenous reform efforts which had snowballed up in 1989 and their replacement by conservative West German standards in all fields of academia.

The new era also put paid to the student-teacher cooperation in long term research projects which had been part of the curriculum in the English-American Department at Humboldt University.

One such project was founded in 1966 by Phyllis Mary Ashraf, an English lecturer and expert on working-class literature in Britain and Ireland. It involved teachers and students of English-American departments at GDR universities, English, American and (West)German scholars interested in the subject, as well as English and Scottish trade union and other political activists. It was tolerated by the GDR higher education authorities but too independent-minded to be popular with them.

When Mary retired in 1969 I took over the project and helped it to survive diverse bureaucratic and political trials and tribulations.

By 1985 we realized that the emancipatory impetus of classic working-class literature had waned and fiction from the pens of women, particularly of migrant origin and in Third World countries, was taking up the really important emancipatory social, cultural, and political issues of the day. Inspired by feminist contacts in Britain and by feminist texts, we henceforth adopted a feminist theoretical approach integrating it into our Marxist point of view. We also found certain progressive post-structuralist and post-modern ideas very productive. Thus we familiarized ourselves with the interesting theoretical achievements elaborated by the new civil rights and specifically the women's movement integrating them into our own concepts.

Race - Class - Gender

Unification put an end also to our project as part of both academic research and university teaching. Our team therefore turned the project into a new extramural venture called Race-Class-Gender and in 1993 and 1994 produced two publications. One reviewed the work we had done from 1966 to 1990, the other discussed our new feminist theoretical approach.

The difficulties of an extra-mural project at a time when the team members and our authors were being catapulted into a totally different social order and were individually struggling for their economic survival were enormous. In 1994 we therefore decided on a radical reform of the project:

“Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Zukunft” [Searching for the lost future]

The team found a suitable publishing house and under its umbrella published forthwith a series of popular treatises on topical social, political, cultural, and literary subjects. These were intended for a clientele composed of politically and culturally interested East but also West Germans.

We turned our team into an editorial board with me as editor-in-chief and worked out publishing programmes, found suitable East and West German authors, edited the manuscripts and battled with the publisher to ensure speedy publication and distribution of the books.

We had been aware for some time before the *Wende* of the considerable economic and social changes that were globally taking place: Information technology had given rise to high-tech capitalism which, in turn, had brought about a tremendous increase in labour productivity, but also permanent mass unemployment plus constantly rising precarious living and working conditions for a growing number of people while a minority became ever wealthier.

In Germany, the steamrolling down of “real socialist” economy went hand in glove with radical neoliberal politics replacing the more liberal pre-1990 political conditions. These had corresponded with the fordist economy in need of large numbers of classical industrial workers. Henceforth, industrial labour speedily lost their economic prominence, the trade unions declined and their former political power waned. The socialist and social-democratic parties were long deformed and clearly on the retreat. They were unable even to defend the rights and privileges the workers had achieved in the past century. The final defeat of the classic industrial working-class movements in 1990 left the exploited and discriminated without an organisation or a strategy in Europe as well as overseas.

The feeling of security and confidence in the future which had been a prominent feature of the post-war decades had begun to fade by about 1980, both in East and West Germany. The processes of transition in the post-1990 period shook many people to their very roots, not only in the former GDR. Socialist beliefs and visions were discredited but they left a gap because the deficiencies of the social system which had originally given rise to them prevailed and, in fact, were becoming more and more evident. What had, not very aptly, been called “the velvet revolution” had brought about the end of “real socialism” but it had by no means left the world a more peaceful or just place – quite the contrary: insecurity reigned supreme.

Our books were to give people confidence in the future and spread awareness of the continued existence of ideas and visions of a better world of more equal chances for men and women from all parts of the globe, all social strata and religious denominations. We wanted to reach, above all, that minority of visionaries and utopians still in quest of a better world and motivate them to a critical assessment of the past and to carry on.

Presenting our visions: The first four volumes

The books we published from 1995 to 1997 took up basic aspects of our concept. **Volume one**, *Emanzipation = menschliche Selbstveränderung?* [Does emancipation imply mankind’s ability to self-reform?], analysed the defeat of “real socialism” and drew certain conclusions therefrom. Anneliese Braun dealt with emancipation under patriarchal and capitalist conditions. Hans Wagner presented his views on the human capacity to reform the process of global transformation. My own contribution dealt with achievements and deficits of Marxist and feminist theories. The volume was first presented in a public library in Berlin on International Women’s Day, 8 March 1995.

Author of the **second volume** was a sociologist and educationalist from Westfalia, Hartmut Krauss, editor of a left-wing theoretical journal, who wrote *Das umkämpfte Subject. Widerspruchsverarbeitung im ‘modernen’ Kapitalismus* [Contesting the subject. Dealing with contradictions in ‘modern’ capitalism] inspired by the theories of the Soviet cultural historians Vygotsky and Leontjev and the critical psychologists Klaus Holzkamp and Ute Osterkamp.

A totally different but equally topical subject was taken up by another West German author, the sociologist Daniela Weber, a city councillor in Erlangen, whom we were able to engage for our **Volume 3**, called *Verfolgung – Vertreibung – Überleben. Frauen in den Weltfluchtbewegunge* [Persecution – expulsion – survival. Women in global flight]. She surveyed very competently the situation of women fleeing from wars, revolts, massacres, destitution and ethnic purges, dealing particularly with the growing number of African women and children in flight since the 1990ies and the sexual abuse they are exposed to. At one reading from the book, we collected 250.-DM in donations from the public for the benefit of refugee children.

Volume 4 produced in 1997 took up a subject of cultural history. I wrote *Rückblick aus dem Jahre 2000 – Was haben Gesellschaftsutopien uns gebracht?* [Looking back to the year 2000. What use utopian visions of society?] dealing with three famous utopian works in the light of their topical relevance: Edward Bellamy’s *Looking back to the year 2000*; William Morris’ *News from Nowhere*, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*.. Isolde Neubert-Köpsel and Stephan Lieske provided excursi.

Isolde Neubert-Köpsel pointed out that the disappearance of utopian visions of society did not mean the end of utopian ideas in general. Post-modern ideas could likewise transport visions of a better world .

Lieske based his contribution of Ernst Bloch's concept of utopia and underlined that a utopian vision which did not claim an ideal world would not contribute towards social change.

The theoretical standpoints manifest in the excursi in Volume 4 were incompatible, thus revealing our principle of plurality.

Various facets of alternative ways of life

The following three volumes presented various facets of alternative lifestyles. **Volume 5** was one of our most successful books. East German sociologist and mathematician Ursula Schröter surveyed the situation of women in the GDR; Eva Kaufmann, a retired professor of German literature, analysed texts by well known GDR women writers. Expert on dramatic art Renate Ullrich assessed careers, ambitions, motives of GDR actresses and analysed their attitude towards gender and their insistence on "living complete lives".

Volume 6 written by politologist Roland W. Schindler dealt with Hannah Arendt's political theory and its importance for democratic reforms. He underlined Arendt's emphasis on mature citizenship enhanced by a system of education developing people's perceptions and judgement.

A different facet of alternative ways of living was feminist sociologist Carola Möller's object in **volume 7**. She was co-authored by West and East German scholars and a Czech biographer. The book presented collected data on teams engaged in non-commercial ways of exchanging commodities and services and an analysis of the trends found. The volume was launched in Cologne in September 1997 when the Stiftung Fraueninitiative [women's initiative, a trust fund which sponsored feminist studies in alternative ways of working and living] was also presented to the public.

The great changes in gainful employment

While the subject of labour and working conditions was never totally absent in any of our publications, the public debates which took place at the end of the 1990s on that subject motivated us to present our views on these changes and our conclusions from them more specifically in volumes 8, 10, and 11.

In **Volume 8**, Anneliese Braun related labour to emancipation. She discussed gainful employment without emancipation and compared this to a state of emancipation without gainful employment [*Arbeit ohne Emanzipation und Emanzipation ohne Arbeit*]. She reviewed critically the transition which was taking place in employment and surveyed various alternative visions of a future organisation of labour designed to reform working conditions and eliminate mass unemployment. Discussing the alternative models of labour outside gainful employment, such as alternative labour markets, dual and humane economies, ecofeminism, and cooperatives, she underlined that unless new alternative modes of production emerged already under patriarchal and capitalist conditions, no political revolution would have a chance of surviving. It would lack an adequate economic foundation and the economic deficiencies would inevitably undermine the democratic structures.

Volume 10, *Die Arbeit als Menschenrecht im 21. Jahrhundert. Beiträge zur Debatte über einen alternativen Arbeitsbegriff*, [Gainful employment as a human right in the 21st century. Contributions towards the debate on alternative ideas of labour] was a collection of essays on this debate. Gisela Notz, sociologist working for the social-democratic Friedrich Ebert trust fund, since retired, analysed the debate from her feminist standpoint. Carola Möller probed

into the term of *Eigenarbeit* [working for one's own benefit]. The American philosopher Danga Vileisis presented Marx' and Engels' understanding of the term of labour. Anneliese Braun contributed her views on *Grundsicherung* [basic provisions] pointing out that such provisions would also need to take women's unpaid labour into account.

A study on the problem of working hours of single parents by sociologist Petra Drauschke, and a further contribution on viewpoints and conflicts of women attending a women's technology centre in Berlin presented by its chairperson, Michaela Richter, and a documentation of the public debate on the future of labour supplied by Bleibaum and Steitz completed the volume.

Menschenrechte auch für Frauen, **Vol. 11**, by sociologist Ute Klammer and theologian Sabine Plonz, primarily dealt with women's struggle for human rights which also touches the subject of labour. The West German sociologist Ina Holthaus provided a feminist review of human rights followed by an essay on Olympe de Gouges. East German philosopher Astrid Franzke analysed Louise Otto-Peters' treatise on *Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb* [The right of women to gainful employment]. A paper on the history of women's struggle for human rights was provided by Gisela Notz.

Ute Klammer and East German economist Christina Klenner presented the male-oriented discourse on the future of labour represented by Ulrich Beck, Giarini/Liedke, Dettling Bergmann and Rifkin. Educationalist Katrin Andruschow discussed the innovative potentials for a community-oriented sector of economy.

Journalist Gabriela Simon presented the prospects of gainful employment in the field of personal services. Mechthild Hartmann-Schäfers, also an educationalist, gave a critical feminist assessment on voluntary work for the Roman Catholic Church. Sabine Plonz discussed the erosion of working conditions and the future of labour. A final contribution on the prospects of labour against the background of human rights was submitted by myself.

Presenting topical problems by means of biographical reports

In keeping with the feminist principle that the private is the political, we decided, in the first decade of the new century, to expand our clientel by concentrating on biographies. Thus in 2000 Gisela Gassen submitted her autobiographical *Morgen beginne ich ein neues Leben. Mein Weg in die Frauenbewegung* [Tomorrow I'm starting on a new lease of life. How I became a member of the women's movement] Gassen, managing director of Berlin's women's council, describes in **volume 9**, how she, a politically indifferent West German working-class girl, became involved in the women's movement in the 1970s and '80s.

Volume 12, *Biographien des 20. Jahrhunderts. Elf europäische Frauen im Interview*, [Biographies of the 20th century. Interviews with eleven European women], also published in 2000, revealed the roads to women's consciousness by women from France, Hungary, Finland, Russia, Great Britain, Croatia, Portugal, Holland, and the two German states, as well as by a migrant woman from Japan living in Germany. The book also mirrors important facets of European history.

Another autobiographical volume was provided by a former elementary school teacher, Elviera Thiedemann, who, in **volume 13**, reported on her post-unification experiences. She lost her teaching job and found only precarious work after 1992. She describes her various unsuccessful efforts to make use of the new post-unification opportunities and her attempts not to become a failure.

Volume 15, my own and Gisela Notz's *Über Hexen und andere auszumerzende Frauen*, [About witches and other eliminable women], published in 2003, comprised two biographical contributions and two historical treatises. My own contribution surveyed women's persecution from the time of medieval witch hunting to the period of Nazi oppression and finally to the repressive policy against women in the Federal Republic of Germany. Exemplarily, at the trial in Memmingen, a medical practitioner was prosecuted for performing abortions and his patients were likewise exposed to repressive measures.

Historian Ingrid Ahrendt-Schulte demonstrated in her paper how in the middle ages women's medical and agricultural competence was criminalised and prosecuted.

The biographical contributions were Ingrid Stegherr's report about the life and suicide of her grandmother, a Bavarian antifascist, and Gisela Notz' biography of a German Jewish resistance worker and Holocaust victim, who returned to Berlin after the Second World War and served in Berlin's House of Representatives on behalf of the Social Democratic Party for many years.

General surveys with a personal touch

In 2000 the editorial board decided to discontinue the purely autobiographical themes and return to more general subjects, while attempting a synthesis of the personal and the academic styles of presentation.

Our first attempt was **volume 14**, politologist Peter Döge's and my own *Nachhaltigkeit als Politische Ökologie. Eine Kontroverse über Natur, Technik und Umweltpolitik*, [Sustainability meaning Political Ecology. A controversy on nature, technology, and environmental policy] published in 2000. The book presented arguments and counter arguments on ecological subjects and the Green movement by way of a fictitious correspondence between the two authors. Peter Döge showed how the West German environmental movement had eventually snowballed into the Green Party. He dealt with motives and various theoretical concepts elaborated by this civil rights movement. I questioned some of his arguments and offered counter arguments. Despite our basic agreement on the need for fundamental social, political, and ecological reforms of the patriarchal and capitalist social system, we disagreed quite often on various details. The dialogue demonstrated our ways of coping with differences of opinion: Where viewpoints proved incompatible, the two correspondents agreed to differ.

Hannah Lund was the author of *Die ganze Welt auf ihrem Sofa. Die Frauen der europäischen Salons im 18. und 19. Jh.* [All the world gathered on their sofas], **volume 16**. She presented a survey of those first steps taken by women in France, Britain, and Germany towards emancipation when they left the narrow confinement of their homes by founding salons and inviting people generally of higher ranks than themselves to an intellectual exchange. Lund analysed the importance of these salons for gender equality.

Volume 17 dealt with Cuban women. Madeleine Porr presented *Von Träumen und anderen Wirklichkeiten. Einblicke in das Leben kubanischer Frauen*. [Dreams and other realities. Looking at the lives of Cuban women]. The author spent six years in Cuba integrated in the life of the ordinary people there which she described without embellishments or condemnation. She interviewed Cuban women from different social strata, adding examples of graphic art produced by Cuban artists.

The last **volume (Nr. 18)** was produced by a different publishing house. The author was the late Nils Floreck who submitted a collection of interviews with women (e.g. a bishop of the Protestant church, politicians, trade unionists, deputies, managers, a student, etc.) on what feminism had done for them. The volume was called *Stark und mutig, schön und weise - Gespräche mit Frauen aus Ost und West*, [Powerful and brave, beautiful and wise. Talking to women in East and West Germany]

The book was launched on 21 November 2005.

By that time, almost twenty years after German unification, the publishing venture came to an end. The bulk of its clientel among the displaced East German elite and sympathizing progressive West German academics whose ranks provided both our authors and the members of the editorial board, had meanwhile reached retirement age or died; a few of the younger ones had been integrated into mainstream academia or were engaged in other fields and thus no longer able to spare time for commitments outside their gainful employment.

Although lack of funds and support had prevented the books from being best sellers, the volumes which found their way to readers always helped them to understand the increasingly complex world which they were confronted with, a little better and strengthen their confidence in the chances of bringing about a more just and peaceful state of affairs. While we did not find the path leading to “the lost future”, we did, by means of our books, give readers confidence that continuing the search for it was both possible and worth the effort.

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