

confiscated and the staff arrested. Public outcry forced Strauss to resign in 1963.

14. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 23 Feb. 1967.

15. Walter Bußmann, *Der deutsche Widerstand und die "Weisse Rose"* (Munich: M. Huber, 1968), 8.

In January 1968 the newly founded University Institute for Political Science was named after the Scholl Siblings.

16. Kirchberger, "*Weisse Rose*," 38f.

17. Namely Kirchberger, "*Weisse Rose*."

18. Sperber's 1980 speech and those from 1983-92, with the exception of 1984, are collected in: *Die Weiße Rose und das Erbe des deutschen Widerstandes: Münchener Gedächtnisvorlesungen* (Munich: Beck, 1993).

19. See Steffahn, *Weisse Rose*, 91f.

20. Richard von Weizsäcker, "Wenn Freiheit nicht in Solidarität mündet . . ." *Kulturchronik* 2/1993, 4-7.

in: *Soundings* 22:9(1994), 39-42

The White Rose: Questions and Reflections

George J. Wittenstein

Fifty years ago five of my close friends, all students at the University of Munich, as well as my tutor in philosophy, Professor Kurt Huber, were tried by the People's Court, sentenced to death, and executed for high treason. I will not go into details of the student anti-Nazi movement, which has become known as "The White Rose." After all, the exhibit, which you have seen, relays some of the basic facts as they are known today. There are numerous questions, however, the answers to which are still unknown, and may never be known. I will touch on these.

First, as to the name "White Rose": No one really knows its origin. It was selected by Hans Scholl, and is most likely based on a mistaken reference to a novel by Clemens von Brentano, a German novelist of the nineteenth century, the period of romanticism.

A question frequently asked is, why leaflets were used instead of more active resistance such as sabotage. To understand this, one must realize that the latter was impossible in a country where virtually everything was controlled by the State: police, army, communications, news, the judiciary, education, even the arts. Political indoctrination started at a very early age, as early as pre-school, and continued through Hitler Youth with the ultimate goal of complete mind control. Children were exhorted in school to denounce even their own parents for derogatory remarks about Hitler or Nazi ideology. My own teenage cousin, for instance, threatened to denounce his father, and I was barely able to deter him by pointing out to him that he might be destitute if his father were attested and incarcerated.

Organized resistance was practically impossible. One could not speak openly, even with close friends, never knowing whether they might not be Nazi spies or collaborators. Everybody was obligated to spy on everybody else and report his observations to the authorities: this was every citizen's patriotic duty! So well organized was the control and surveillance by the party that each city block had a party functionary assigned to spy on his neighbors. This *Blockwart* (block warden) was ostensibly responsible for the well-being of the residents of his "block," but, in reality, had to monitor, record, and report on activities, conversations, and remarks of each person, as well as on their associations. Even the privacy of one's home was not assured:

a tea cozy or pillows placed over the telephone were popular precautions against eavesdropping by bugging. Nor did one ever know what mail had been secretly opened.

I remember only too well an incident in a cinema: someone sitting a few rows in front of me was led away by the Gestapo. He must have made some derogatory remark about Hitler to his companion during a newsreel. Whoever had overheard that remark must have tipped off the ever-present authorities.

How difficult it was to make contacts is illustrated by the fact that I learned only a few years ago that there were over 300 resistance groups in Germany; but virtually none knew of the existence of the others because of the difficulty in communication and the great risk involved. Consequently, the White Rose members decided to resort to leaflets, with which they hoped to reach a large number of persons upon whom they hoped to have an impact: students, academics, and the intellectual elite, to incite a ground swell for a general uprising.

Yet another question, and to me the most disturbing and perplexing one, revolves around the events of that fateful February 18, 1943, itself: the day of Hans and Sophie Scholl's arrest. As you know, they had just deposited leaflets at the doors of every classroom in the building of the university and, after having left the building returned once more to dump the remaining leaflets from the third tier of the inner courtyard. Why this almost foolhardy return? Did they, as has been speculated, know that the Gestapo was already on their trail? Did they choose this as a last desperate act of self-sacrifice, hoping that it would result in a general uprising in Germany? There are, indeed indications to make this a distinct possibility. Further, why did Hans have Christoph Probst's draft of a leaflet on his person when he undertook this dangerous mission? Christoph Probst had long before been transferred to the University of Innsbruck (a fair distance from Munich), and was no longer actively involved in producing and distributing leaflets. There would not have been any material evidence to incriminate him, other than that he was a friend of Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell. If Hans Scholl really expected, nay, even asked for or intended to provoke his arrest, why then did he have this draft on him incriminating Christoph Probst, and thereby causing his death? This, too makes even less sense because the group had always tried to protect Probst, who was the only one among us who was married and had children. Lastly, Hans was a strong, athletic young man; he could have easily overpowered the janitor, and fled. Of course, by

not appearing for roll call at the student company, he would have been discovered soon enough as a suspect author of the leaflets. Nevertheless he and Sophie would have stood an excellent chance to hide until nightfall and then, under cover of darkness, make their way by bicycle to our farm where we had the facility to hide them until the end of the war, or even smuggle them into Switzerland later. (They were well aware of that possibility because we had discussed it in the group whenever we spoke of the risks and our options to save ourselves.)

I leave these questions to you to ponder as they have vexed me for fifty years. Maybe the material which has come to light in East Berlin and Moscow since the fall of communism will help us piece together some of these riddles and find some of the missing links.

Finally, and most importantly perhaps from a historical point of view: What did the White Rose accomplish? Is there a relevance for us today, fifty years later, and if so, what is it?

What did the White Rose accomplish? The answer is simple: overtly, nothing. There was no general uprising, there were no demonstrations, no protests. The government acted so swiftly and ruthlessly that it achieved completely its goal of quenching a potential public reaction or demonstrations through a total news black-out until the trial and executions were over; to set an example of prompt retribution for other potential agitators, and to intimidate anyone who might consider even the slightest expression of sympathy. Whatever silent opposition existed, was thrown into helpless shock, rage, and fear. Many approved of the action taken by the Nazis. I remember only too well the remark of a student in a row ahead of me when, during lecture, the arrest of the White Rose members was announced; he said: "They should be hanged from the tree in front of the university."

Only the British government made use of the event: they reprinted the sixth leaflet by the millions and dropped them over German cities. And yes, a few courageous men and women within Germany tried to continue the work of the White Rose by copying and distributing the leaflets, but were soon discovered and additional arrests and executions followed.

The second part of my question "What is the relevance of the White Rose for us today, fifty years later," is harder to answer.

I just returned from Munich where I attended services in memory of Alexander Schmorell and Professor Kurt Huber, who were executed on July 13, 1943. There were perhaps 200 to 300 persons attending the main event in the largest auditorium of the university, very few of them students. When I asked for the reason for such poor

attendance, I was told that young people were tired of hearing about Nazi crimes: since early childhood they had been indoctrinated with the horrors perpetrated by their parents and grandparents, for which they feel they should not be held responsible. This was a problem of an older generation, not theirs. Rehashing these events has lost its effectiveness. Presently, having fallen on hard times, they were interested mostly in gaining admission to the university, which had become increasingly difficult, and they were concerned about their future careers in a period of fierce competition. Many students who walk past the memorial marker in the university daily don't know what the names inscribed thereupon represent. As a matter of fact, an annual memorial lecture had to be discontinued in 1968 because of massive demonstrations by radical students who attempted to usurp the legacy and name of the White Rose for their own political purposes. Only twelve years later, in 1980, were the lectures resumed.

This is in marked contrast to an earlier generation shortly after the war, who, as students, looked up to the White Rose as their heroes. There are young people today who are deeply moved by the ideals and principles espoused by the White Rose: we just had a postcard from a young woman who attended a conference of several thousand young Europeans in the former East Germany, who pledged to uphold and work for these ideals.

Obviously, each generation anywhere will have to deal with its past in its own way. Of critical importance is to neither deny nor to distort history, but to learn from it. The White Rose Foundation has been very active sponsoring exhibits and lectures at schools, universities and public libraries. Several high schools have been re-named after Scholl, Graf, and Probst, and the house in which Huber was born has been saved from demolition. Likewise, there has been a welcome recognition of the White Rose in some western countries; an example is the exhibit and related events at UCSB. I was deeply touched when, in May of this year, after a lecture at an international conference of historians, a Professor from the University of Orange Free State in South Africa told me that he had routinely included the White Rose in his lectures on World War II.

Collaborators/Informers and Resistance Fighters

Ursula Mahlendorf

The difficulty of resistance against Nazism can best be understood if we know the psychological context of collaboration with the regime within which the resistance took place. We can then also better understand the danger to the person who risked opposition and appreciate the psychological qualities required for opposition to the regime. In Lillian Garrett-Groag's 1991 play, *The White Rose*, performed under Peter Lackner's direction at UCSB, as well as in Michael Verhoeven's 1982 film, *The White Rose*, this psychological context of collaboration appears in the eagerness of the population to collaborate with the authorities (e.g., the university janitor's outraged pursuit of the students distributing leaflets) as well as in the atmosphere of distrust and fear this population has helped create (e.g., the guardedness and suspicion dominating the train scenes).

Theodore Adorno's study of *The Authoritarian Personality* conducted during the 1930s in the US can provide the psychological profile of the ordinary citizen who would support a fascist regime. Adorno et al. examined "the relation of antimorality prejudice to broader ideological and characterological patterns" (p. 605). They held that such prejudice fed "on deep-lying unconscious sources" (p. 617). German contemporary studies of the profiles of citizens who are given to ethnophobic reactions in former East and West Germany, such as Horst Richter's *Umgang mit der Angst (Dealing with Fear)* for former West Germany and Hans Joachim Maaz's *Die Entrüstung (Disarmament of Rage)* for former East Germany, largely confirm the persistence of the authoritarian personality structure and its fascist potential in the German population. Persons of fascist potential cannot perceive reality except in terms of stereotypes, projections, and power fantasies; they are alienated, rigid, repressed, given to denial, anti-intellectual, fearful, and dependent on and highly ambivalent about authority. Their submissiveness to authority on the ego level is complemented by violent "anarchic impulses, and chaotic destructiveness in the unconscious sphere" (p. 675). To maintain their precarious psychic balance, these personality types need scapegoats such as foreigners, ethnic minorities, or anyone who is different upon whom they can project their own unacceptable emotions, traits, or desires and in whom they can punish or eradicate these. Adorno and his successors