Baschwitz’s wandering life completed a full circle. At the peak of his career, just before his retirement, Baschwitz participated in a key conference on journalism education, which immediately preceded the founding of the International Association of Mass Communication Research. The conference was in Strasbourg – then French again, and just opposite his German birthplace of Offenburg on the other side of the Rhine. This conference took place just before Strasbourg was designated the seat of the European parliament, which was also a symbol of Franco-German reconciliation.

Strasbourg had long been the capital of the Alsace-Lorraine region: a vital link between the main mining-and-industry areas of Germany and France. The region changed hands several times, and had thus become a centre of gravity for modern European history. It only had a surface area of just fifteen thousand square kilometres and a population of just a few million inhabitants: and yet it became the bone of contention par excellence between the two major powers repeatedly fighting for dominance over the western half of the continent. It seemed as if it might tip the balance of power between the two hegemons.

The Rhine flowed along the Franco-German border here, which had ultimately ossified into a long string of huge stone fortifications connected by the subterranean tunnels of the opposing Maginot and Siegfried lines. A thin, over-defended stretch, at the heart of two centuries of continuously escalating battles, from the invasions of the Sun King and Napoleon to the global conflagrations of the First and Second World Wars.

Earlier, Strasbourg had probably been one of the places where Gutenberg developed printing with movable type after Mainz. This had revolutionized early mass communication and led to the Reformation, the spread of the Bible in native languages, and the religious wars. But it had also led to the notorious *Malleus Maleficarum*: the manual for the witch-hunts that occupied Baschwitz’s later works.

He had been born into a dynasty of printers himself: it was one of a limited number of newly emerging modern professions that was open to Jews (in contrast to most farming and certain traditional guilds). So there is a nice convergence in the fact that Kurt was to become a pioneer of the science of the press, of newspapers, and of mass communication.

Assimilated Jews had evolved into a very specific intermediary social category in Germany, France, and elsewhere, also because of their involvement in trade. Identifying with the national ideal but with more emphasis
on international and universal values, they played a central role in the emergence of both liberalism and socialism, or of humanism and a modern intelligentsia. Inside-outsiders, they helped develop new perspectives on the dynamics of man and society, and were early pioneers in the new disciplines of psychology and sociology. Baschwitz was exactly such an intellectual – straddling different worlds.

Germany had been late to unify, remained much more decentralized than either Great Britain or France – and does to this very day. There was even more of a tradition of *Wandergeselle*, or journeymen, in Germany than in the surrounding countries. Both artisans and students learnt by successively spending time in a number of regional capitals, each with their own outlook. Baschwitz did as well.

Baschwitz had done his secondary schooling in Frankfurt am Main: a prime financial capital. He also studied in nearby Heidelberg: along with other sleepy provincial towns, a major centre of quiet reflection. But he also studied in the booming northern capital of Berlin, and the southern capital of Munich. Thereafter, he first went to work in Hamburg, the major seaport and most international trading hub, choosing to go into the newspaper business. All of this gave him a varied overview of his giant emerging country and its many contradictions, for instance between the *Gemeinschaft* community of the idyllic traditional countryside and the *Gesellschaft* society of the bustling new metropolises. He also was a witness of the mass in its various incarnations: visible in crowds and riots, invisible in newspaper audiences and opinion currents.

Halfway through the First World War, his newspaper sent him to the adjacent neutral Netherlands as a foreign correspondent. The view of the conflict he had become familiar with at home proved to be profoundly at odds with the view of the conflict prevailing abroad. This got him thinking – about mass propaganda, enemy images, and the mass delusions of peoples confronting each other. His patriotism held firm at first. But the post-war intrigues in the press world of the Weimar Republic further shook his certainties. Especially when they culminated in the emergence of the Nazi movement, the coming to power of Hitler, and the firing of opponents and Jews like himself.

Well into his adult life, at age 47, Baschwitz thus felt forced to flee to the same Netherlands, with which he was already somewhat familiar. A relatively small country, hardly the size of a single large German state – such as the adjacent state of North Rhine-Westphalia. But Holland was also idealized as Germany’s political *alter ego* by many liberal German citizens who were caught up in the authoritarian turn at home. It was a delta area
that had developed into a hub of long-distance trade, and more easily kept
the free trade and freethinking that Baschwitz continued to favour. Further,
Amsterdam retained the small scale of a provincial town, but cherished a
rather cosmopolitan orientation. This is where he ultimately flourished,
and wrote his most important books.

They show that Baschwitz was and remained a very typical Bildungs-
bürger, following the nineteenth-century German ideal of a well read and
well-educated, professional middle class citizen. His books abound with
quotes from, and references to, the German philosophical and literary
classics. Most of all Goethe and Kant, Lessing and Schiller, but also Heine
and others. He had read about Frederick the Great and other Prussian kings,
the works and memoirs of the Iron Chancellor Bismarck, but also of major
foreign statesmen like Napoleon – and their various opinions on emerging
mass politics. Baschwitz was a scholar of a type that has become increas-
ingly scarce in overspecialized and fragmented modern social science.

This is also reflected in his central method, which becomes apparent when
we focus on his books alone, and leave aside the distraction of his many
articles and lectures (which usually deal with the same themes anyway).
His method throughout was basically using a comparative socio-historical
approach to explore the visible and invisible mass. Once he got to work on a
particular theme, he read widely, collected examples from various countries
and epochs, and laid them side-by-side. He tried to identify the similarities
and differences, reflected upon their possible causes and consequences. In
this way he attempted to identify the key processes at work. He thus worked
by induction from everyday practice, not by deduction from a grand theory.

This is what he did with the four themes of his books (the four P’s), and this
is how he made some interesting observations that were sometimes ahead
of his contemporary colleagues, even in the Anglo-American world. Though
his first book nominally dealt with war propaganda, it was rather original in
its analysis of the socio- and psycho-dynamics of enemy images. His second
book nominally dealt with newspaper history, but not only focused on the
institutions but also on ‘the invisible mass’ of their audiences: their segmenta-
tion and orientation, their evolution and impact on the political process.

His third book nominally dealt with mob and crowd behaviour, but
was really a reflection on the kind of mass politics that was increasingly
threatening democracy. First in Russia, then in Italy, and now in Germany,
agitators invoked ‘the will of the people’ to regiment and subject them. His
1938 book was a desperate call to reason, even though it mostly came too
late, could not reach German audiences, and thus fell on largely fell on deaf
ears. His fourth and later books nominally dealt with the older phenomenon of witch-hunts, but in fact considered irrational mass persecutions like those of the Jews: how they originated, persisted, or could be brought to an end.

In a sense, Baschwitz’s works make up four limited *capita selecta* on the riddle of the mass that float around the fringes of a broader psycho-social science. Yet they are all connected by a common focus on the strange dynamics of collective subjectivity: of leaders and followers, of social movements and media audiences, of party electorates and national citizenships, in a constant ebb and flow of conflict and consensus-seeking, of decelerating and accelerating change.

It is the ongoing negotiation of meaning, of always-new ‘definitions of the situation’, that is still at the heart of some specialized problem areas within mass psychology and collective behaviour sociology, within studies of mass psychology, culture, and ideology. Even if his contributions were rather idiosyncratic, and risk getting lost in the hustle-bustle of mainstream psycho-social science today.

Another characteristic was that his books were written in plain everyday language, with plenty of anecdotes and stories. As a journalist and academic, as an intellectual, he preferred to address an educated lay public, and therefore kept away from unnecessary jargon. Even though his sentences and arguments could sometimes become convoluted, as was common among Germans of his category and class (and even considered a sign of literary sophistication).

More or less literal translations into English, Dutch, or other languages, tend to make this problem even more acute, as we have sometimes seen; although reformulations with shorter sentences and slightly different wording may sometimes iron the distracting wrinkles out. The current book has tried to provide representative samples from his thought, in their original form.

At the same time, his six books form only one half of the picture. The other half is the quiet and persistent work of a quarter century, from 1933 onwards, to put ‘newspaper science’ and mass communication (as well as mass psychology and public opinion) on the map and the agenda in The Netherlands, elsewhere in Western Europe and even the world as a whole. To give it a place within the larger framework of an entirely new social and political faculty in Amsterdam, which was to help improve the *quality* of thinking about the nature and the challenges of democracy.

He did this while also promoting the collaboration between press theorists and press practitioners, out there in the real world. All of this needed a quiet, patient, and persistent diplomat, and that was what he became.
Without him, it would have been much more difficult to bring these different people and currents together. He was a peacemaker. He helped extend the emerging networks of 'press science' and 'publicistics' to Scandinavia in the north, to the Latin countries in the south, and linked them with the Anglophone countries across the waters in the west.

Even though he himself was not particularly well versed in English, he recognized that it was bound to become the dominant language for both science and media. The journal *Gazette*, which he founded, soon developed into a respected pillar of the emerging new field, alongside the International Association of Mass Communication Research.

So Baschwitz deserves a central place in the history of the field of mass communication and public opinion, as well as in that of adjacent mass psychology and collective behaviour sociology, or even that of psycho-social science in general.