1958-1968: Retirement Years

Baschwitz continued to be active during the last ten years of his life. Mostly, this time was dedicated to the completion of the study he considered his ‘magnum opus’: Hexen und Hexenprozesse, which I have already discussed. But he also spent time on all kinds of other activities, ranging from advising some major institutions to commenting on various current affairs in newspaper interviews. Some examples were provided by interviews on the supposed ‘generation conflict’ and shift of the 1960s.

Ongoing activities

During his early Weimar years, Baschwitz had despised the socialist party as ‘too Red’ and too light-heartedly willing to flirt with revolutionary ideas. His daughter claimed, however, that in the post-war Netherlands, he had gradually come to vote for the labour party (which had absorbed the progressive liberal party to which he had probably felt close before). At one point, he had even participated in a Partij van de Arbeid PvdA (or social-democratic Labour party) ‘think tank’ exercise about election campaigns.

Around the time of his retirement, Baschwitz set up a private ‘Center for Mass Psychological Studies’: a kind of consultancy organization that could do sponsored research and produce reports about various issues. It was a stichting (non-profit foundation), but was also founded as a way to procure him an additional salary of 2,400 guilders per year. It had a board with a few long-time dignitary friends, covering the entire political spectrum.

One was Harm van Riel: member of the senate for the liberal-conservative party, soon the chief of its senate group, then ‘Grand Old Man’ (but never a cabinet minister). Another was law professor George van den Bergh: a former prominent member as well as a parliamentarian for the social-democratic party. He descended from a family of innovators and entrepreneurs, and was himself involved in the ‘invention’ of such ideas as alternative time-keeping

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1 File 125 has duplicate texts related to a kind of round table with social-democratic/labour luminaries from the NVV trade union, the PvdA party, the VARA broadcaster, and the Arbeiderspers publishers. Baschwitz contributed a few pages with ‘Some thoughts (by a theoretician) on the influencing of public opinion during an election struggle’. 
and alternative book-printing methods – which, however, in the end amounted to little.²

After the war and Bachwitz’s final separation from his first wife, he had lived alone, hiring a cleaning lady twice a week and a housekeeper on weekdays – who apparently cooked lunch or dinner for him. His daughters, with their partners or children, also came to stay on occasion, for a variety of reasons. His son was far away in the U.S., but once visited for Christmas with his wife and children. Occasionally, Baschwitz also wined and dined with other academics. He had an informal Sunday social club with professorial colleagues, for which he once gave a talk about the Jewish Kabbalah. Ever since his younger days as a journalist, he had shown an interest in such esoteric subjects.³

Baschwitz was not really religious anymore, but had meanwhile adhered to a Freemasons lodge. For the official bicentenary of the chapter, the lodge published a memoir claiming that several Dutch royals and the founders of major political parties had secretly been members over the years. Baschwitz contributed a paper on ‘Mass and personality’, which praised the ‘emotional community’ of ‘similarly minded’ individuals, their common ‘spirit of freedom of thought and tolerance, of fraternity and love for humanity’. The small Freemason minority of notables had indeed exerted a considerable influence throughout Europe over the centuries, such as in the promotion of social reforms.⁴

But his solitude began to weigh on him.

Late life romance

Ascona used to be a small, idyllic fisherman’s village on the Swiss coast of the Lago Maggiore or Great Lake. It was one of several mountain lakes that were often experienced as the sunny Southern shores of the Germanic world.

² Van den Bergh’s ‘Euro-clock’ proposed an alternative gradual transition between winter and summer time, by first adding and then subtracting 50 seconds a day. He also proposed to first print double the number of lines on a page to spare paper, then use a ‘mask’ to alternatingly cover even or uneven lines – as in his 1958 handbook of state law. Or use different colours and special glasses instead. See the article about him on Wikipedia.

³ Ever since he reviewed a book on ‘The Old Sages’ for the Literary supplement of the Hamburger Fremdenblatt, 2 June 1913. It was to be the first of a series on alchemy, and more. Baschwitz’s personal archives also contain a separate file on magic and paranormal phenomena. In a sense, this was also a logical extension of his interest in witchcraft. (Ebels-Dolanová, p. 42-43).

⁴ Edited by its Grand master. See Davidson.
fading into the Latin one, right on the Alpine border with Italy. Before the wars, Ascona had become a hideout for German artists and writers such as Herman Hesse, had had a notorious artist commune, and had also been visited by utopian socialists of various persuasions. It had thus become a reference for the intellectuals of Baschwitz’s generation. After the wars, it slowly developed into a major tourist destination – particularly for people from the Germanic world.5

So it was in Ascona that Baschwitz decided to spend a long summer holiday in 1957, to contemplate on what to do with the ‘next phase’ of his life – after his retirement finally became effective, at least in part. It was here that he met Ilse Scholz, more than twenty years his junior, who had some kind of job in clothing or fashion. They romantically danced ‘in a grotto’, and felt attracted to each other. But she had to report back for work in West Berlin. He lingered a while, but soon decided to break off the rest of his holiday and return prematurely to Amsterdam. Each played the music they had danced to at home, recommended classical records to each other, and began to dream.

Over seventy letters of their yearlong \textit{Brautbriefe} or courtship correspondence in German survives: hers in regular longhand writing, his mostly in the type-script that he had become accustomed to as a journalist and writer. One of his earliest letters said he was already embellishing his balcony with flowers and a sun- or windscreen, in view of her first brief shuttle to Amsterdam at the end of that very same summer. He added: ‘Although I do not understand what you \textit{junges Ding} [young thing] would get from an \textit{alten Krauter} [old bachelor] like me [...] an old bear’. She then returned for Christmas and Easter.6

During the autumn, he proudly sent her a newspaper clipping with a picture showing the large audience for one of his public lectures. In the spring, he confessed to a near Freudian lapse of tending to write her last name as Schutz (protection) rather than Scholz. By that time, he often signed off with ‘a thousand greetings and kisses’.7

She was initially careful and appropriately reticent, reluctant to give up her job, salary, and independence in Berlin. But he promised to help find her similar opportunities in Amsterdam, and she suggested that he contact

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5 Kieft’s fascinating book on early 20th century utopianism and subsequent war enthusiasm, includes interesting sketches of bohemian life around Ascona just before and after the First World War. Among the visitors were the German socialists August Bebel and Kautsky, the Russians Kropotkin and Lenin, and the Dutch Domela Nieuwenhuis. Kieft, p. 87-103, 449-475.

6 His descendants allowed me to glance at the correspondence. The quote is from 4 August 1957.

7 6 November 1957, 1 May 1958, and 26 April 1958, respectively.
the fashion houses of Max Heymans and Dick Holthaus to that effect. He also tried to find her a small apartment near the large green Vondelpark. When she repeatedly mentioned fatigue, stress, and tensions with her boss, he gleefully answered that he was pleased ... as this might finally make her decide to make the leap into the unknown. With the blessing of her Berlin-based mother Charlotte Kreimann. (Her father Emil Scholz had died in 1936.)

He soon proposed to her: she would not need a separate home or even a job, if she did not want them. He spelled out that he had a regular annual income of 15,600 guilders altogether – minus the 3,600 in alimony that he paid to his first wife, from whom he had long been divorced. On top of that, he had irregular earnings from lectures, articles, reports, and every now and then a bigger chunk of a few thousand for books – to cover possible ‘extras’. He also had rebuilt savings of 10,000 as an ‘iron’ reserve (with the disastrous German early 1920s and Dutch late 1930s in mind). So: ‘wir sind nicht reich, aber uns reicht’s, nicht wahr?’ (A word play for ‘we are not rich but would have enough’).

So in the end she ceded to his advances. They married in Amsterdam, in 1958. For the honeymoon, they returned to Ascona. After that, she still had to return to Berlin until the autumn. He mentioned that they might visit the much-discussed World Expo with its futuristic ‘Atomium’ building in Brussels thereafter. They went to the Dutch artist village of Bergen with its sand dunes and long white North Sea beach. Surviving snapshots from these holidays show them relaxed and happy with their new life together.

Eighty

In early 1963, Baschwitz’s circle was shocked to learn that he had been hit by a stroke. He was under great stress to complete the German original of what he himself considered his *magnum opus, Hexen und Hexenprozesse*. At first he was incapacitated, but he gradually recovered – through the unwavering support of his much younger wife. Everybody was relieved. His colleagues, staff, and friends decided to offer him another grand reception in the same Vondelpark in 1966 – for his 80th birthday. The pictures show him and his spouse in good shape and spirits.

Press articles and reception speeches summed up his great achievements. The administrator of the Press Library he had founded reminisced in the main journalists’ magazine: ‘When Baschwitz was one of the first to leave his native Germany in 1933, he knew that the sterile *Zzeitungswissenschaft* (newspaper science) as it was taught at a number of institutions in that
country, was a failure. Most of its practitioners had stood ready to put their intelligence at the disposal of Goebbels’ propaganda apparatus’. 8

The headline of a newspaper interview emphatically told the Dutch public ‘Thanks for the hospitality’, during all these decades. He also noted: ‘Three years ago, I was seriously ill. But that is to be expected after [such] a life of tension and excitement’, even though ‘I have never been active in practical politics’. The headline of another interview repeated his central claim that ‘Freedom of the press excludes mass delusion’, and announced that he still wanted to write an overview book about Wahnverblendung (massive delusional blindness). 9

In the newspaper he had long headed, his successor Rooij to the main press chair praised Baschwitz’s ‘still-great intellectual vigour and lucidity’ as well as ‘his great honesty and uprightness’. At the reception, he told him: ‘Your coming to our country’ has been ‘of invaluable significance for scientific life in The Netherlands’, and added that ‘building on the foundations of Baschwitz’s pioneer work’, the first full-time, three-year school for

9 Protestant daily Trouw, 2 February 1966; social democrat daily Het Vrije Volk, 1 February 1966.
professional journalists was finally about to start the next academic year in centrally located Utrecht.\(^{10}\)

Visitors from Germany included a famous schoolmaster crusader against the belief in witchcraft and attempted witch-hunts from Hamburg, whom he had supported over the years in his struggles. His colleague from the press chair in Münster brought him copies of the *Zeitungs-Verlag*, with some of his own articles he had never seen published – since they went to print after he had been chased out.\(^{11}\)

The *Zeitungs-Verlag* itself even sent a representative – whose elaborate article, however, did not dwell very much on how Baschwitz had left in 1933. Instead, it concentrated on painting an idyllic picture of his current life, more than thirty years later:

> The house where he lives is one of those small canal houses, abundant in the Dutch capital. The shrill light of an early winter afternoon shines into a tidied room, arranged with nut-brown antique furniture. From behind his desk, the ‘press professor’ views a façade leaning forward, old patrician houses, a lively street and the silent water of the Prinsengracht canal surrounded by icy fringes.\(^{12}\)

**The mass psychology of the unruly 1960s**

The 1960s were of course the decade of a worldwide generational shift, as the post-war baby-boomers became adolescents and young adults. They had grown up in peace and comfort, unlike with the war and crises that their parents had experienced – making them rebel against their entirely different values. This resulted in a rapid succession of crowd events, social movements, and rapid shifts in public opinion worldwide, which brought mass psychology and the sociology of collective behaviour back to the centre of attention. Not surprisingly, Dutch journalists and media returned time and again to the ‘Old Sage’ Baschwitz for comments. Time and again, he proved mild and lucid.

It began in 1965 in Amsterdam with the so-called ‘Provo’ anarchist movement. A small group of youngsters promoted playful ‘white’ utopian

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11 Hamburg: Johann Kruse. Münster: Henk Prakke. He had studied in Groningen where Baschwitz’s sociologist colleague Pieter Jan Bouman introduced communication. Prakke had taught newspaper studies there (a colleague had already taken up broadcasting studies).
12 *Zeitungs-Verlag*, 28 January 1966 (Vol. 63, Nr. 5).
plans, through ‘happenings’ and street agitation. They were also set on provoking the authorities – to reveal their ‘true repressive nature’ through their automatic reflex of always sending the police to ‘restore order’.13

Two journalists asked Baschwitz how new these activities were. He told them: ‘We have certainly always had this – let’s say, actions by radical youths that are relatively unstructured. A radical party always has a youthful current. But in The Netherlands? There is no exciting political party available’. Although one was soon founded.14

He continued: ‘Young people with their Sturm-und-Drang [turbulent adolescence] – you understand how I mean this – do not know where to go. Of course, there have always been rebels and hangers-on. There are certainly no criminals among their [the Provo’s] leaders. It is a bourgeois group. Well, don’t include this; I do not want to hurt their feelings’.15

The next spring, 1966, there arose great consternation that the crown princess Beatrix had fallen in love with a German diplomat who had served in the Wehrmacht as a youngster at the very end of the war – stirring painful memories. Their marriage in Amsterdam was disturbed by smoke bombs. One of the aforementioned journalists later remembered that Baschwitz had predicted that this storm would soon subside, and that the affable Prince Claus would become even more popular than his father-in-law Prince Bernhard.

Baschwitz had said: In the past, ‘royal persons have been exposed to attack and became very popular later. This is what I was thinking about in recent days. I would bet with you that the mood of the majority will soon prevail again […] a kind of sympathy with the young couple will emerge’. His prediction proved entirely right.16

The next summer saw violent riots with barricades in the very heart of the capital. Construction workers protested that their holiday allowances had been cut because they happened to belong to the wrong (a ‘non-recognized’ communist-oriented) trade union. After one of them died during a confrontation with the police, and the largest (right-wing) newspaper De Telegraaf

13 I did all three of the research projects for my graduate/master’s exam on this movement under Brouwer, at what was then called ‘The Baschwitz Institute’.
14 Hans van Mierlo and friends founded the ‘Democraten 1966’ or D66, meant to be an innovative secular party. They had irregular successes and failures over the years. He became a minister of foreign affairs, but (so far) the party has never succeeded in entirely replacing the Christian democrats in the political centre.
15 Interview by Tessel Pollmann-Schlichting and Ferd Rondagh, about ‘Man and Mass’, p. 111-113. Printed copy in the Baschwitz archives, file 2. It is not entirely clear where and when it was published.
16 Quoted by the same Ferd Rondagh in the daily de Volkskrant, 25 September 1971, in an article about Baschwitz’s successor Rooij. Compare my 2003 study Het mysterie monarchie.
wrote that he had died of a heart attack, they besieged the paper’s building and seemed ready to torch it. Baschwitz was asked about the large numbers involved in such disturbances. His response was:

Apart from the really aggressive people and their direct followers, there were many spectators. [But] in such cases, spectators are also involved. They help to make the situation confused, and thereby protect the perpetrators – without meaning to. They also encourage the perpetrators by simply being there, which is interpreted as them showing a sympathetic interest. They also maintain uncertainty about the attacks – as no one knows how many bystanders may join the action. But even if no one does, the anonymity of those committing violence is boosted by thousands of spectators – as is their sense of impunity.

Other mass psychologists later elaborated such observations into a larger framework.17

Death

Baschwitz did not live to witness the May events of 1968 in Paris, the Prague spring, or the many radical youth revolts that challenged the post-war world status quo; as he died and was cremated after the first week of that year. His former political science sub-faculty was torn apart by conflict: between staff (i.e. his former assistants Daudt and Brouwer), between professors (like his long-time friend and colleague, sociologist and Americanologist Den Hollander) and their students, as well as between students of various persuasions. In an ironic ‘return of the repressed’, many younger assistants and students turned to different currents of Marxism, leading to endless ideological disputes and disturbed lectures.18

The next year, the central administrative building of the University, the ancient Maagdenhuis, was even occupied by students for half a week.

17 Quoted in his obituary in the daily newspaper Het Parool, 8 January 1969. The new approach to riots tried to spell out the many different ways in which the actions of both protesters and police restructured the key ins-and-outs of the situation, in successive steps. This facilitated some options and discouraged others for both sides.
18 Details throughout Gevers, p. I, 34, 61, 65-66. Den Hollander had been in touch with Baschwitz when the latter was in hiding – witness a brief and otherwise trivial letter dated 9 December 1943 (in the university library).
The ‘Baschwitz Institute’ produced an elaborate ‘content analysis’ on how newspapers of various persuasions covered the event.

But Kurt Baschwitz had already died on Epiphany, at the end of the first week of the new year, 6 January 1968 – a month before his 82nd birthday. In spite of his eventful life, he had reached a respectable age, at a time when many did not even reach retirement. He lay in state at Pothoff undertakers in Amsterdam South, and was then cremated at Driehuis-Westerveld. Two sides of his divided family placed separate ads.¹⁹

Obituaries in the Dutch press were full of praise. The major daily de Volkskrant carried a headline on ‘A wise scholar’ who had gone. Another article in the archives has a final paragraph lauding ‘his inborn modesty […], his restless work drive […], his unshakeable scientific integrity’.²⁰

Yet his intellectual heirs felt uneasy that his unique contributions soon tended to be forgotten because of two major shifts. One the one hand, there was a shift in ages and styles: the pre-war qualitative approach by a multi-disciplinary generalist had been superseded by post-war quantitative approaches by all kinds of sub-disciplinary specialists. On the other, there was a shift in cultures and languages: the German and continental approach had been superseded by the overseas Anglo-American approaches. Baschwitz no longer fit into the picture; it was difficult to give him his proper place and due.

Upon the centenary of his birth, his two Dutch successors in the fields of press history and mass psychology wrote half a page in a major daily, pleading for English translations of his major works, or at least summaries of them. Without them, he risked being erased from scientific history.

The present intellectual biography in English, with vignettes on half a dozen of Baschwitz’s major books, is an attempt to belatedly grant at least part of their wish.²¹

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¹⁹ The first was by Isa and her first son Bubo, then sixteen. The other was from Anton Gundelach, the father of her second son (who had died in an accident), and the rest of the Baschwitz family.

²⁰ de Volkskrant, 8 January 1968 (by Couvé, the former administrator of his press library). The second article is an unmarked clipping, probably from the university weekly Folia of those days (by his press chair successor Maarten Rooij).

²¹ Marten Brouwer & Joan Hemels, NRC Handelsblad, 4 February 1986.