During the workshop it became clear to the participants that the general approach of the two speakers, their intellectual traditions and modes of reasoning were oceans apart. To American observers the German tradition of Historik as represented by Rüsen might seem to be completely outmoded; to German observers the American tradition as represented by Novick might fall behind a level of analytical precision once reached by German philosophers, historians, or sociologists like Max Weber. This state of affairs should suffice to plan a conference bringing together historians and philosophers of history from Germany and the United States.

_Detlef Junker_

"Political Myth, Symbolic Politics, and the Shaping of German National Identity in the 19th and 20th Centuries: The Case of Herman the German."

*Workshop with Andreas Dörner. Washington, D.C., September 14.*

_Convenor: Dietmar Schirmer.*

The fact that national identities—as collective identities in general—are not the effect of natural predisposition nor an outcome of historic determination can be considered a truism. Much less obvious is the answer to the question of how the social and cultural processes of identity formation actually work in a given historical context. At this workshop, political scientist Andreas Dörner (University of Magdeburg) presented and discussed the results of his major study on a particular aspect of the shaping of German national identity since the late eighteenth century: the construction, popularization, and transformation of "Herman the German" as the single most important figure within German national mythology.

Dörner's starting point was Napoleon's occupation of Germany. In order to mobilize the nationally unconscious masses against the French occupiers, Prussia's military elite turned to the symbolic politics of national identification. The symbolic capital at hand was a cultural tradition of fictional and historical narration that had developed through the centuries. The task was to politicize and popularize the stock of this tradition. As it turned out, Herman the German—a mythological figure referring to the Germanic soldier Arminius who led a tribal rebellion against the Roman occupants which culminated in a battle at the Teuto-
burg forest—provided the narration that could most successfully be exploited for the purposes of national identity building.

The career of the myth of Herman remained closely linked to the political and social history of German nationalism. In bold theses, Dörner analyzed the multiple redefinitions of the myth and their correlation to the respective redefinitions of the scope, intentions, and functions of German nationalism in general. By focusing on the two most important representations of Herman and his narrative—Heinrich von Kleist's play "Die Hermannsschlacht" and the Herman monument in Detmold—Dörner presented the history of the myth through the doomed revolution of 1848, the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, and the National Socialist regime, until its decline after World War II.

The lively and extended debate on Dörner's very well-received presentation focused largely on theoretical and methodological questions about the systematic status of political symbolism within the broader context of political and social history. The overall consensus was that a meaningful and relevant analysis of symbolic politics always has to take into account the social context in which it takes place in order to avoid falling back to an old-fashioned and socially irrelevant intellectual history. A second major part of the discussion dealt with the somewhat speculative but nevertheless fascinating question of whether or not the history of the Herman myth can be told as a grand narrative of German history at large.

*Dietmar Schirmer*