



HASENSPRUNG
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Hasensprungbrücke at the Diana lake in Grunewald

There are several Grunewalds, and the one I feel closest to is the little stretch of a road that connects Koenigsallee and Winklerstraße, not far from Villa Walther. Its name is Hasensprung, and the contrast to Villa Walther, where many of us Fellows live, could not be greater. The latter is a huge and awkward building, a mixture of several architectural styles and infused with a distinct hubris of the original owner.

Hasensprung is very different. It was created during the same time period in Imperial Germany, but it is small and insignificant. It is just a road of two or three hundred meters that should perhaps not even be called a road. If there was not a sign on Koenigsallee that told you that you had now come to “Hasensprung”, you might not even have noticed it.

In any case, as you leave Koenigsallee and walk down the Hasensprung, you will soon come to its centerpiece, which consists of a tiny bridge that spans a narrow channel between two of Grunewald’s artificial lakes, Dianasee and Koenigssee. As if to illustrate its small scale and human dimensions, the bridge is decorated with two identical sculptures of a rabbit made of a limestone called coquina. The sculptures are about a meter long and half a meter high, and their color is light gray. One of the rabbits is leaping in the direction of Koenigsallee and the other in the direction of Winklerstraße. Each has been caught by the sculptor in a leap in the air, with none of its feet touching the ground, as if to illustrate that all it takes to cross the little stream is to stop, gather your strength – and take a Hasensprung!

Each of the two small sculptures stands on top of a meter-high wall that runs along the two sides of the bridge, at its exact middle. This strategic place of the two rabbits places them at the very center of Hasensprung, spatially as well as metaphorically. According to local history, there were plenty of rabbits in the area around the time when Bismarck decided to create a wealthy villa town called Grunewald; and this may also have been what inspired the sculptor of the rabbits, Eberhard Encke. Both of the sculptures have the date “1924” cut into their base, which means that they were created four years after the construction of the concrete bridge on which they stand.

But the Hasensprung has not always looked the way that it does today. When the bridge was originally constructed as part of the founding of the *Villenkolonie* in the late 1800s, it was made out of wood. It had a rustic-looking appearance and an odd little roof in the middle. The entrance to the bridge was guarded by two fierce-looking lions in natural size. As can be seen from the postcard, both are lying down, staring stonily away from the road, perhaps to make sure that no enemies are approaching or so they won't be tempted to attack one of the local inhabitants as these approach the bridge.



Hasensprung, historical postcard

The choice of lions as a motive for sculptures was very popular in Grunewald at the time, where figures of lions, sphinxes, and dragons can still be seen on some of its wealthy estates. Lions, as we know, are aristocratic animals, violent predators of the first rank. They also have never been seen anywhere in Germany, except for in the zoo. Rabbits, in contrast, have happily hopped around in Germany, at least since 1502 when Albrecht Dürer produced his famous drawing of a rabbit, “Feldhase”. Also, German children prefer *Hasen* to lions (especially when they are made of chocolate).

No, no one ever saw a lion leap over the little channel that connects Dianasee and Koenigssee, where our little bridge is situated. And there was never any place called

Löwensprung in Grunewald, so Eberhard Encke did the right thing when he replaced the lions with a figure that went along with the name of the road and with an animal that actually lived in the area.



A Grunewald Hase

Eberhard Encke (1881–1936), the sculptor of the two *Hasen*, is unknown in today's Germany, but was a popular and appreciated artist in his day. Modern art historians have decided that it is the avant-garde artists who should be remembered and not people like Encke. In any case, after WWI the atelier of Eberhard Encke was broken into and looted, so we know very little about the history of his sweet rabbit sculptures. In fact, there does not even exist a full-length article about the sculptor himself.



Dürer's Feldhase (1502)

It can be added that not only Grunewald, but also intellectuals have their Lions and Rabbits, with the former doing what they can to frighten the little rabbits and show that they are the kings of the jungle. I have always considered this to be a pity and my heart is definitely with the *Hasen*. But it also occurs to me that the difference between the two is perhaps not so large any longer. The days of the old, academic lions are gone. According to the Wikipedia, a rabbit can jump four and a half meters, which is pretty impressive, even if a lion can jump about twice that length, in a good *Löwensprung*. On the other hand, rabbits have nearly 360 degrees of panoramic vision and can move their ears around as they want, to better locate a sound – two clever things that lions cannot do. And finally, to clinch the argument about the superiority of the *Hasen* from our modern perspective: they are confirmed vegetarians, which is something we want also animals to be these days.

My own work at Wiko consists, I would say, of four *Hasensprünge*. The topic of the first was the work of a sociologist whose writings I very much admire, Robert K. Merton. The main material I used for this article came from the archives of Columbia University and consisted of Merton's lecture notes from his class in theorizing (1942–1954). Merton, as I could document, was the first social scientist to single out the topic of theorizing as an important and special subject in its own right and to teach a course in it. I greatly enjoyed writing this essay. What made the writing extra enjoyable was that I did my work mostly sitting on the back of one of my favorite Academic *Hasen*, enjoying his vigorous leaps!

If my own first leap was long and well executed, thanks to Merton, the second can be described as a short little one. It did not end with a painful belly flop, but not with an elegant landing, either. The topic was the role of definitions in sociology: what constitutes a definition, how definitions should be used when you theorize, and the like. I dutifully presented all of the relevant arguments and added some small thoughts of my own. The only one of these that has stayed with me is the following. If you do not take the time to spell out what you mean by a word or a term, it is likely to be misinterpreted. This insight also has an interesting corollary, namely that most conversations would soon come to an end if people did not constantly misunderstand one another.

Leap number three is about the use of abstractions in sociology. What is an abstraction; how should abstractions be used; and how can you become better at using abstractions in sociology – these are three questions I try to address in this article.

My fourth and last leap is not finished yet – it still hangs in the air, so to speak, a bit like our two *Hasen*. It is an essay about an aphorism that I like very much: *How do I know what I think till I see what I say?* The general idea is that when you open your mouth to say

something, you do not know exactly what it is that you will end up saying. For this, you have to wait and see till you have spoken.

The interesting thing about this phenomenon – and this is what has made the aphorism popular with a number of writers and artists – is that the process it describes can also be read as a rough guide for how to be creative. Also in this case, you have to start without knowing what the result will be. To be more precise, you have to begin by going into yourself, stay there, and see if you can do something interesting. To do something interesting means that your thoughts need to take off on their own and do things that you could not have predicted, a bit like the way the figures of a good literary author take on a life of their own.

The key to creativity, from this perspective, is to learn to go into yourself, stay there, and see what happens when you start to explore things. What you need to do, in brief, is to take a leap and stay suspended for a while in the air, before you land. A bit like the *Hasen* of Eberhard Encke, frozen as they are in beautiful limestone and creativity. This is the main significance, as I see it, of his two sculptures: the two sweet rabbits that are waiting for you when you start walking down the little road in Grunewald called Hasensprung.



References

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