

Chapter 11 Europe 1998 (Prague, Linz, B urgenstock, Saarbr ucken)



Wednesday, July 1, Prague, Czech Republic

I'm just at the start of a 2-week trip that will include Prague in the Czech Republic, Linz in Austria, B urgenstock in Switzerland, and Saarbr ucken in Germany. I expect Prague to be by far the most interesting of them all, and I also have more time here to myself, so I expect this journal to deal mostly with it. Also, unlike most of my earlier journals, I have been to all four countries before. But I was in Prague only as a student in 1964, when it was still firmly communist, so it is very new to me now.

I landed in Prague at about noon today, after flying through the night, connecting in Amsterdam, and getting only about three hours of sleep. I was absurdly lucky, after being assigned an interior seat in the middle four, to have no one show up for the aisle seat next to me. I moved to it after takeoff. Also, it was a bulkhead seat, meaning I had a wall, not a seat, in front of me. That too gave me more room. A nice start for the trip.

At the airport I asked at the information desk how best to get to my hotel, and they called a car for me at a prearranged fare. The driver provided commentary all the way into the city, pointing out parks, embassies, an army installation, etc. What struck me on the ride, though, were things he didn't point out, such as two Esso stations with giant inflatable tigers on their roofs. Or the spray-painted graffiti that was on so many surfaces, very like New York. I had looked forward to the architecture in Prague, and to the scenery in the surroundings, and both were disappointing on this ride into town. Most of the buildings were nondescript, sooty apartment blocks that were undoubtedly built by the communists. And the countryside was nothing special.

You'd think that the road from an airport to the major city it serves (Prague has a million people, my driver said) would be a thoroughfare, but the route my driver took was hardly that. He turned many times and at one point went through a parking lot to reach a side street on the other side. You'd think he was trying to run up the meter, but we'd already agreed on the fare (and there wasn't a meter – in fact, this car showed no signs of even being a taxi). Maybe he just liked the back streets, as I often do in Ann Arbor.

My hotel is well inside the city, of course, but it turns out not to be very close to the oldest parts of the city center, as I learned later. So, the architecture here, including the hotel itself, is also nondescript. It is semi-modern, but not new enough, I'm sure, to have been built since the "velvet revolution" (which my books say they call the end of communism nine years ago). The lobby is nice, but I was surprised when I went right away for lunch (my room wasn't ready yet) that the only restaurant in the hotel is a cafeteria with a very institutional atmosphere and appearance, located down a long uninviting hallway that doesn't especially seem meant for the public. Just what you'd expect, I guess, from what must have started as a state enterprise that didn't much care if you ate there or not.

There was a small menu posted at the door, only in Czech though, so I couldn't read it. I thought that wouldn't matter, however, since in a cafeteria I'd be able to see the food and point at what I wanted. Nope: the steam table was too deep, and I couldn't see a thing. Fortunately, the woman in line in front of me got a bowl of soup and a plate of two rolled up pancakes that looked good, so I just pointed at that and said I'd have it. Both were delicious. The pancakes were filled with some sort of spinach mixture that I'd be happy to have again.

After lunch I went back to the desk and checked in, then asked the concierge for my bag, which I had left with him before I went to lunch. He was a young fellow, and quite agreeable, but he moved as if in slow motion. Pushing a small hand cart, he led me slowly across the lobby, down a hall, and into a luggage room, where he got my bag and

put it gently on the cart. Then he led me again back into the lobby and to the elevator, where as an afterthought he asked my room number. We came up in the small elevator and he led me again slowly down the hall to my room. Two maids were outside its door when we arrived, and he chatted with them for maybe a minute before they moved out of the way, and we could go in. Once inside the room, he looked a little vague as to what to do next, but then pointed at the small television and told me slowly that that's what it was. Since I didn't expect much useful information from him at this point, I'm afraid I tuned him out.

So, I still don't know what the small speaker is on the table by the wall. It has a knob to turn it on, but nothing happens. The only cord leading from it is not a power cord, but a thinner one with an unusual plug into the wall. It seems unrelated to the telephone, or to anything else. My best guess is that I will hear Big Brother talking to me from it at some point.

In spite of having bought two books about Prague and the Czech Republic and read one of them, I still did not know how to handle tipping this fellow. The book had said something about just "rounding up," but there was no number to start with here. I pulled what I hoped was an appropriate coin out of my pocket and asked him if it was OK. The coin was 20 something, but I didn't know if it was 20 crowns, in which case it would be about 65 cents, or 20 hundredths of a crown (since they do have a smaller unit than the crown, and I didn't yet know the symbols for either). I asked him, "Is this all right?" He said, "That's twenty." I gave it to him, and he slowly left my room.

I should perhaps explain, now, what I am doing here in Prague. Back in Ann Arbor I had met, last winter, a Czech economist who was visiting and who suggested that I visit Prague when I came over for the conference in Switzerland that I'll be attending next week. When I later told him the dates I would be able to visit, he noticed that it would be during a two-week workshop for young academic economists that his institution, CERGE, would be hosting here. The workshop was being organized by CEPR, the European equivalent of the National Bureau of Economic Research, which holds conferences and other such events in the United States. He was not himself involved with the workshop, but he offered CEPR my services and they set up a seminar that I will give to the workshop tomorrow evening.

CEPR had booked my hotel and sent me a map showing both it and CERGE. They had not told me exactly when and where I would give the seminar. I now also realized that all the contact with the Czech I'd met had been by e-mail, and I now had no idea what his name was, or how to reach him. So, while the workshop itself didn't particularly interest me, I decided I might as well go over to CERGE and see what I could learn.

My slow friend the concierge was very helpful telling me how to get there. There is a tram passing in front of the hotel that goes quite close to CERGE, and I just needed to get off at the fourth stop. Of course, before he got to that information, he traced its entire route on the map and marked it (helpfully, I admit) with the tram number (9). He'd have sent me off at that point, but I knew from my reading that I wasn't ready. I asked him

about a ticket for the tram, and he sent me to a small vending machine on the wall just outside the hotel doors and told me to buy an 8-crown ticket (about 25 cents). He also told me, when I asked, how to use the ticket, which you are supposed to have stamped by the little machine as you board the tram. It's an honor system, except for spot checks by inspectors who can impose heavy fines.

I thought that I was on my way, until I tried to insert a 10-crown coin (I was pretty sure that's what it was) into the vending machine. The coin slot was blocked, apparently intentionally. I read the instructions, which fortunately were printed not only in Czech, but also in German and English (not Russian – I've seen no Russian here yet at all). When I followed them, it worked fine. You first press the button for the denomination ticket that you want, then another that confirms it, and only then a metal plate that blocks the coin slot moves out of the way. It accepted my coin and after maybe fifteen seconds of activity inside, gave me a ticket and change. I thought briefly of buying a second ticket for my return, but now that I knew the ropes, I figured I'd find these vending machines near every tram stop, so I didn't bother.

The tram itself arrived quickly and was a fast and easy ride to where I needed to be. CERGE is in a large old building near the old center of the city, and I could see already that things were looking up for me, architecturally. Inside the building I followed signs to the workshop on the second floor, up two very long flights of stairs. I went into the room where the workshop was being held, slightly interrupting the young woman who was presenting her paper about an East European stock market. I looked around the room but didn't think I saw my nameless Czech friend. I also didn't see my Czech colleague from Michigan, Jan Svejnar, who I knew was one of the workshop organizers. I sat down to listen to the paper, not knowing what else to do.

Just a couple of minutes later, the door opened again, and Kathy Terrell, Jan Svejnar's wife and also my colleague, stepped into the room. She looked around and didn't find what she was looking for (Jan, it turned out), but she did see me, with surprise. We both waved and smiled, and she left. I sat there for a few more minutes before I decided that she could probably help me, and in any case that I didn't want to listen to this paper. So I interrupted the group one more time by leaving.

I caught up with Kathy in the workshop office, where I then also met her two kids. After we'd chatted a bit and I told her that I couldn't remember the name of my Czech contact, which I only had on e-mail, she suggested that she could get me access to my e-mail to solve the problem. Together we went to the fourth floor, where the computers were. We had almost reached the end of a long winding hallway when we met my Czech friend coming out of an office. So I did hook up with him and didn't need the computer. His name is Kresimir Zigic. [He is now a friend and goes by Kreso.]

It turned out that he didn't really have any idea himself where or when my seminar would be, but about that time one of the administrators showed up, having learned I was in the building, and told me all I needed to know. The seminar will be here in the hotel, not at CERGE, at 7:00 PM tomorrow evening in the banquet room, and it will be followed by

dinner. There is another such seminar and dinner this evening with the same schedule, and I will attend that to see the layout.

That seemed to conclude my business for the afternoon, so I spent the next few hours wandering about the old part of the city. It is quite wonderful! The buildings go back several hundred years in, I'm told, several styles, and many of them have now been restored so that they look good. Prague had the good fortune not to be damaged during World War II, and the buildings also were not replaced by 1950s architecture, communist or western. The city center was sort of kept in mothballs all that time, as nothing much happened here, and newer buildings were built on the outskirts. Now, with the market economy, everything is being turned into stores and such, but with surprisingly good taste, for the most part. Somebody realizes that this place is a treasure, and they seem determined not to mess it up. Of course, there are lots of people and some traffic (though some streets are closed to it, fortunately), but that can't be helped. I'm looking forward to spending the next few days exploring it, and to just sitting and enjoying it, some of which I did today.

The weather, by the way, is partly cloudy in the low 70s, which couldn't be better. I did not have my camera with me today, since I hadn't thought that far ahead. I sure hope this hasn't been the last of the good weather.

One thing that I saw on my brief excursion was a sign for a series of Mozart concerts. Starting tonight and then every night for three weeks they are having concerts in the Estates Theater, which is the building where Mozart himself premiered his opera, Don Giovanni. Each of the concerts has excerpts from Don Giovanni, plus other things, not all Mozart. The program for Friday includes arias from Marriage of Figaro, so I bought a ticket to that.

I ended my walk for the day at Wenceslas Square, which had a stop for tram number 9, and I figured it would be easy to get back to my hotel. I started looking, therefore, for a vending machine for a ticket. I couldn't find one anywhere near the tram stop, even after I'd asked several of the people who were waiting. I had my guidebook, so I looked at that, and it said that tickets were sold at metro (subway) stations and at tobacco shops. But I couldn't find a tobacco shop anywhere, even when I walked several blocks. The book also mentioned that you could buy tickets at the metro stations that would be good for several days, and considering the difficulty I was having, I thought that would be a good idea. I walked to the metro station, not too far away, and bought a five-day ticket. I'm not sure I'll save money, but I will surely save time.

Saturday, July 4

I am now almost to the end of my stay in Prague. During my stay I have mainly walked around various parts of old Prague, taking pictures and doing some shopping. But I have also attended three concerts. It turns out that they have small concerts going on all the time here, and people are passing out flyers advertising them as you walk across the old town square, so it's easy to find out about them. Most are classical music,



Wenceslas Square viewed from the top of the National Museum, from Wikipedia 2023

with greatest emphasis on Mozart, because people like him, and Dvorak, because he's Czech.

On Thursday I had planned to spend part of the day sightseeing and part preparing for my talk that evening. I did go out in the morning, but I didn't get very far. I just did some shopping across the street from the hotel and came back to my room. And then I was so tired, perhaps because I knew I should be preparing my talk, that I went to sleep. I slept most of the afternoon, in fact, resetting my alarm one hour ahead each time it woke me until 5:00. Then I finally got up and prepared by lecture.

The evening before, I had attended another lecture here at the hotel that had been scheduled for these same students, so as to learn more of what was in store for me. That lecture was given by one of the governors of the Czech central bank, and it was quite boring for me, except for one thing. That was the interruptions by the hotel staff. The organizer of the event, an American named Mark, had planned that we would have the talk, followed by dinner, both in a room he had reserved just off the main dining room (of the cafeteria). The staff insisted on taking our orders, however, before the talk – or actually during it, since the speaker started before we knew about this. He stopped while they took orders for entrees (they gave us three choices), then started again only to have the staff come back in and start taking drink orders. He didn't stop speaking for this,

although some in the group seemed unable to order quietly. When that was done he had us to himself for ten or fifteen minutes, but suddenly the staff were back, plates of food in their hands, calling “Who has chicken?” not at all quietly, then slamming the plates down on the table. It took quite a while for all the entrees to arrive, during which time the poor speaker continued, and most who got served first waited to start eating. Eventually we all had our food (except the central banker, who hadn’t planned on eating), and we all started eating. The banker droned on. In fact, we finished our food, and the banker kept talking, even as the plates were cleared and we wondered about coffee and desert, neither of which ever came. The banker did stop, eventually, then gave long answers to the couple of questions that were asked, I think, only out of courtesy. It was an unpleasant evening, really, except for its elements of farce.

On Thursday evening, when I was to speak, I thought that Mark and I had agreed that we would reverse the order. We’d all eat first, and then I’d speak. But that wasn’t going to work, we found, since the hotel couldn’t have the food ready that early. So we opted for the same plan as the night before, except that Mark claimed he would make sure that they didn’t interrupt us. I agreed, skeptically, but before I could start, here they were again asking for our orders. This was ominous, but Mark assured us that this time they were going to serve us in the dining room, so as not to interrupt us. I did, in the end, give my talk uninterrupted.

I had already planned to keep it shorter than the night before, for obvious reasons. I said I would stop at 8:00, and he told the staff that. This time they did as they were told, and when I started to run over, Mark mentioned that plates of food were being put on our tables out in the cafeteria, so we’d better stop. I did.

I had been unsure, by the way, what sort of audience I would have for this talk, since the students presumably knew I wasn’t an expert on what they were interested in. But the students were all there, I think, along with my Czech friend (Kresimir, who I later learned is actually a Croat) and one of his colleagues, plus Jan Svejnar and Kathy Terrel from Ann Arbor. So that was nice.

After the dinner (which was quite good, really – wiener schnitzel), Kresimir, Jan, and Kathy took me down to the Charles Bridge, insisting that I must see it at night. They were right. The bridge itself and many of the old buildings are lit up, so that it is a glorious sight. The bridge is open to pedestrians only, and people seem to hang out there, strolling back and forth and then stopping at one end or the other for drinks, so it was a very sociable place to be. Jan and Kathy have an apartment right next to the end of the bridge. Their landlord has a beer garden outside it, so we ended the evening having Budweiser (an old Prague brand, older than Anheuser Busch) there.

I should say a word about Jan Svejnar. Jan is an economist, eight years my junior, who worked for a while at Cornell and then at Pittsburgh, becoming very well known for his work on transition economics. He is Czech by birth and grew up here in Prague, but he emigrated to the U.S. at some point and is now a U.S. citizen. Still, he is well known in Prague, and he served at one point as an advisor to their president, Vaclav Havel. As



Charles Bridge and Prague Castle at night from Web 2023

we looked at the Prague Castle from the bridge, he commented that he has a key to it, but he's not sure where he put it. He is widely quoted in the Czech press, and he has been mentioned as a possible candidate to become president.

All of which should give you a properly weighty impression of who he is. But two years ago, Michigan hired him away from Pittsburgh to be Director of our William Davidson Institute, which handles transition issues, and he also became a member of our Economics Department. I've gotten to know him somewhat well. He is just the nicest guy you could ever meet, friendly but quiet, with a light, self-effacing touch. He reminds me a lot of Ned Gramlich, which I guess is a parallel that may be significant. Jan was dismayed, a few weeks ago, when he told an interviewer what he thought was obvious, that the Czech crown was overvalued. This precipitated a major depreciation of the currency in the exchange markets, and got people angry at him. He was stunned.

All of this and more I learned during our stroll on the bridge and the beer afterwards. It was great fun!

Friday I was determined to sightsee, and I succeeded. There is not a lot to tell about that, and I hope that my pictures will do a better job than I can here of conveying what it all is like. As I had already learned, this is one of those places where you turn a corner and find yet more delightful buildings to look at. The vast majority are baroque, I guess, but there are other styles sprinkled among them plus frequent churches and towers in almost every block. Lots of arches too.

I worked my way down to the Charles Bridge again, crossed it and went up the hill to the Castle. The Castle is huge, perched atop a hill overlooking the river above the bridge, and surrounding a very impressive cathedral, St. Vitus. Inside the castle, which is a huge open area with the cathedral and other buildings occupying parts of it, I saw an ad for another concert, so I attended that. It turned out to be (not as advertised) just a pianist playing first Bach, then Mussorgsky, "Picture at an Exhibition." That's one of my favorites, so I was lucky.



St. Vitus Cathedral, Prague, from Wikipedia 2023

By the time I had worked my way through the castle and through its gardens, I was whipped, so I was glad to find a tram stop just outside the gardens. I got on, not worrying about direction, and soon found I was heading away from town. I got off and switched, and eventually managed to connect with the tram that goes by the hotel. I should have bought a proper map first thing, but I have only now done that today.

I had read in my guide that men should wear suit and tie to evening concerts, so I changed my shirt and put on a tie before I left for the concert I had booked on Wednesday. That was unnecessary, since most people at the concert were tourists who hadn't read the guide. One had, though, I think. Seated two rows in front of me was a family of three, mother, father, and son about ten years old. Mother was in a semiformal dress (about as formal as a tourist can manage, I'd guess) with thin straps that kept falling off her shoulders. Dad wore a tie with a sport shirt, the tie visible from behind under his collar. Son wasn't wearing anything special, except a pained expression. I didn't blame him. The concert consisted entirely of arias from operas, sung by a soprano and a bass sometimes separately, sometimes together, and accompanied by a piano. The first half was the Mozart I had come to hear, so I was enthralled. The boy was less so. The second half was other operas that mostly left me cold (or actually hot – the room wasn't very well ventilated). Still, I got my money's worth.

More than, actually. During the intermission they provided a free glass of champagne for everyone (I don't know about the boy). Since I don't care for champagne, I asked if they had anything else, but they didn't. So, I drank champagne, which I can testify is not the best way to quench a thirst.

These concerts are obviously meant for tourists, and I have no idea how they compare to actual operas. Our two performers were from the Czech opera company, but that doesn't mean that this is the way they would behave on stage. But regardless, it was interesting. The man seemed to be trying to inject some feeling into his singing, but I didn't find it very convincing. Perhaps this was because his mouth was hidden by his thick dark mustache. Or perhaps it was because he was playing the role of Don Giovanni, who I assume is some sort of handsome devil, but this man was bald on top with bushy hair on the sides and back, looking more like Ollie, of Kukla, Fran, and Ollie, than Casanova.

The woman looked like Liz. Now I like Liz and think she is very pretty, but she has never been my image of Suzanna, the bride of Figaro, who sings the aria that I am so fond of. I think I have always pictured Susannah York, if you remember her from the movie Tom Jones. But this woman was wonderful! She really did convey feelings as she sang, so that I learned for the first time at least a little of what it was all about. I had planned on just closing my eyes and enjoying the sound, but when she was singing, I had to watch. Which I suppose is the point.

They did a duet from Don Giovanni in which the man tries to persuade the very reluctant woman to come away with him, which she finally does, still very reluctantly. At the end of the concert, we were given an encore in which they did this duet again. But this time, when the woman finally was won over, she then threw herself at the man, tore off his tie, then his jacket, and had him fighting for his life. I was glad they ended on such a high note, since the rest of the music in the second half had been painful for me.

When I woke up today, I felt awful, so tired and achy that I wasn't sure I could get out of bed. Still, I had some things that I really needed to do (like arrange my train trip), so I

did force myself to get up. I went to breakfast without showering because the time they were serving was almost past, and there I met one of the students from the workshop who insisted on asking me questions about the New Trade Theory before my coffee. I don't think I was very helpful. It was only after I'd finished breakfast and then had my shower that I felt I could function. I blame it all on the glass of champagne.

Out and about, I first went to a shop where I had tried twice before to buy something I liked in the window, only to find it closed both times. The entire shop was the window display, by the way, with just a small space in the middle for the clerk, who would slide open the window to serve customers. She wasn't there again today when I arrived, and I was discouraged. But the next window had another such arrangement (these are the only two of these I've seen, here or anywhere), this one with a woman making change. She said the shop I wanted would open at 11:00, so I went for coffee and waited. Sure enough, the shop was open when I went back, and I bought what I wanted (a miniature of the Charles bridge for Pat's collection).

From there I went to the train station, wondering what difficulty I would have making my needs known and getting a train all the way to Linz in Austria. I needn't have worried. There was a window expressly for providing "train information" (in English), and another for selling the tickets. The only delay was waiting for two other groups of Americans who were in line ahead of me. And it turns out that there is a direct train from Prague to Linz that meets my needs perfectly. A brief hitch was that they didn't accept credit cards in payment, and I didn't have enough crowns. Thinking I'd have to go back to my hotel to get travelers checks and my passport, I turned away from the ticket window only to find an ATM machine in front of me that gave me all I needed.

As I waited in line at these windows, I observed the young man and woman who were in line ahead of me. I gathered that they were from some study-abroad program in Germany. They had visited Prague for the weekend and were now trying to get back. I think, from their attitudes, that their friendship was one of convenience rather than hormones, and both the convenience and the friendship were wearing thin. Every time he learned something new from the window about what they could or couldn't do, she'd say, "That sucks," and talk about how that was going to mess her up. In the end, I suppose she had a point, since it sounded like they were going to miss Monday classes, but that was the one thing that didn't seem to bother her. I was tempted to intervene, *in loco professoris*, but I didn't.

I forgot to mention that the day started with rain, so I had my umbrella rather than my camera with me this morning, but fortunately the rain let up. Still, I spent several hours doing more shopping than sightseeing. You'd be surprised how long it can take to buy a few T-shirts. It didn't take that long for me to decide what I wanted, and even to buy some at some of the stalls in an outdoor market that I had found. But two of the ones I wanted were at a stall that was currently serving an elderly couple from New York. I listened to all their agonizing about sizes, fabrics, colors, designs for what must have been twenty minutes. Every now and then the shopkeeper had to go out of sight to check her inventory or something, and the couple would engage in conversation with another

couple that was with them. I learned that all of them had colds, and that one of the men had a suspiciously red nose and wasn't feeling well – according to someone else, not him. His nose looked OK to me, but this discussion was hard for the shopkeeper to compete with when she returned. When the couple was finally done, she turned to me with relief, and I suspect I could have gotten her to give me my shirts if I had just promised to do it without such a fuss.

In the flyers I had collected today was a concert, in an old church, that I had decided to go to at 5:00. I went back to the hotel for a while first, then returned downtown. You'd think I'd be getting good at this, especially now that I have a map, but I got thoroughly lost for a while. Fortunately, I had left plenty of time.

This concert included a trumpet, a soprano, and an organ. The trumpet and organ started with "Trumpet Voluntary," which was our wedding march, and that was thrilling. Other things in the program were varied, but the final performance of a long thing by Mozart that I'd not heard before, listed as "Exsultate, jubilate," was wonderful. I'll have to look it up.

After the concert I wandered through Wenceslas Square for a bit and bought a sausage with bread and mustard at one of the stands. I found myself a place to sit and very much enjoyed it. Off to my left was a McDonalds (one of many I've seen in Prague), and I wondered how they can possibly manage to compete with sausages. Put a good sausage vendor on Stadium and I'll go there every time.

Back at my hotel I figured I'd settle in for the night, but before I had made much progress in that direction, the phone rang. It was Catherine Salant, wife of my colleague Steve Salant. It seems that she and Steve, who are here for a conference next week, were victims of a pickpocket. Twice. Yesterday, Steve's wallet was stolen, probably on a crowded bus, and they spent the day canceling credit cards, etc. Then today, Catherine had both her wallet and her passport holder stolen from the bottom of the handbag she was carrying. So now they are without all forms of money that they had, as well as any ways to get money (they are not even sure they can make phone calls), so she was calling me for a loan. Together we went to the local metro station where I drew all the money I could out of an ATM. They are, needless to say, feeling rather down on Prague and on their trip.

As I sit here, I am trying to make a phone call myself. I didn't try that until last night, at which point I read the directions that said I should dial the operator and get them to flip whatever switch makes it possible for me to dial out. But it turns out that last night, and again today since it is Saturday, the operator is off duty. So, the only way I can make a call is to give the number to the front desk and have them dial it. Last night, when I gave him the local access number for AT&T, he found it was busy and gave up. I eventually got him to try again, and I did make it through. Tonight, the woman who answered my call was much more agreeable, but so far all she has gotten for me is a dial tone. She said she'd try again, but I'm still waiting.

While I wait, have I mentioned the cars? Apparently, Czechoslovakia had its own car company under communism, called Skoda. There are Skodas everywhere here, most looking like you'd expect: obsolete old rattletraps. But there are also a very few new ones that look as modern and stylish as a Taurus. They are mixed in with just about every conceivable variety of other cars that might be exported from other countries. I've even seen a few – very few – sport utility vehicles and minivans.

How about dogs? There are lots of them being walked by their owners, but for a while I thought that all of them were dachshunds. They weren't, it turns out, but that still is by far the most popular breed of dog here. Go figure.

Monday, July 6, Linz, Austria

Just a quick entry while I wait for Willi Kohler to pick me up. I've spent the night in a very nice hotel, far more luxurious and comfortable than any I've stayed in lately in Prague or Delhi.

I've got a new entry for Pat's collection of misspellings of Deardorff. In my room here I was greeted by the TV, which was on and displaying the a welcoming message especially for me: "Herrn Professor Dead"

Sunday was uneventful. It was raining steadily, so I didn't try to go out until time for my train. I got some work done, but in the hotel and on the train, which was a five-hour trip direct to Linz. Having coffee in the hotel lobby I looked up and saw one of my former students. I wasn't sure, though, until I heard her make a phone call and identify herself as Annette. I said hello, and we chatted briefly, marveling at the small size of the world. She is here for the same conference next week as Steve Salant. When a Michigan resident (Jan Svejnar) organizes a conference in Prague, one shouldn't be too surprised to see familiar faces here.

The train was considerably less comfortable than I had remembered from Europe before, perhaps because it was Czech. The ride was bumpy, and the seat firm. I picked a car to board based mostly on class of service (2) and nonsmoking, but I missed the little sign that was supposed to tell me it was reserved for families with small children. The conductor explained this when he checked my ticket, but he didn't insist that I move unless necessary to make space for more families, which didn't happen. It did mean, though, that I was surrounded by children through most of the trip (though they seemed to be all gone by the time we entered Austria for the last hour). Two boys with their mother in my own compartment were constantly on the move, in and out of the hallway, and chattering nonstop. It is perhaps easier to ignore their chatter when you can't understand it, and I wasn't distracted except to enjoy watching them.

I arrived at the hotel about quarter to nine and was told that "five o'clock tea" would be ending at nine. This odd name turned out to apply to a happy hour with buffet and (old) rock music. I went in for dinner, rejected the buffet and instead ordered a sandwich and

goulash soup. As I ate, I watched a handful of middle-aged couples dancing to “Blue Suede Shoes” sung by a balding Austrian. The soup was good.

Thursday, July 9, Bürgenstock, Switzerland

The first day of the conference here is over now. I presented my paper, so I can coast for the next two days. I’ve just returned from dinner and am nestled into one of two huge beds, covered by a feather comforter, and feeling pampered.

To continue with Linz, Willi picked me up Monday at 10:00 from my hotel and took me to his office at the university. The university is on the edge of town, not downtown like most European universities, because it was built only comparatively recently (the 60s). It seems a comfortable place to work, but with only the charm you’d expect from that era. Willi himself has a nice large office, twice the size of mine, with a couch and chairs round a coffee table, and a secretary in an office next door. He is clearly one of the top people here, which is nice to see.



View of Linz and New Cathedral from Wikipedia 2023

He had just returned from a bit of a trip himself, so he had work to do catching up, and I read a student paper on the couch while he went through his mail and e-mail. At one point we went for coffee, and at another for lunch, both with a group of his junior colleagues. Eventually, mid-afternoon, we left and drove to his apartment in downtown Linz, where his wife Gabi was.

The apartment, as he led me to expect, was much smaller than their apartment in Essen, where Pat and I had visited them a few years ago. Here they had opted to be in the center of the city for its convenience, and they took an apartment on the top floor of an old building that was just being renovated. The apartment itself is two stories tall, up under the eaves on the fifth and sixth floors, with slanting roof and windows that look mostly

up. There's a small living room, dining room, kitchen, and half bath downstairs, two bedrooms and bath upstairs reached by a spiral staircase. A balcony off the living room downstairs accommodates two chairs and a table nicely, but its solid wall is high enough that only Willi and I, not Gabi, can see over it, even when standing. The place is furnished with their very modern touch, and they apparently had to shop around for a carpenter who would build them shelves and other built-in things in white painted wood. The apartment is very pleasant and does not feel small to me at all, although I gather that Willi and Gabi both needed quite some time to get used to it.

After they'd showed me the apartment and we had chatted briefly, we went out to visit a couple of monasteries that are nearby. Both included remarkable baroque churches and nice gardens. One is the resting place of composer Anton Brückner, whom Willi told me a good deal about. When we returned to the apartment, he put a Brückner symphony on the CD player, and I did rather like it until Gabi vetoed having any music while she cooked. She is apparently somewhat anxious about her cooking.

She needn't have been. The dinner was wonderful: a huge green salad of iceberg lettuce and very nice tomatoes, followed by goulash served over slices of a "napkin dumpling." The dumpling is almost the size and shape of an American football, cooked by wrapping it in a cloth napkin and suspending it somehow in boiling water. It is made of something more than just dumpling stuff, whatever that is, because it has bits of color throughout it, suggesting the presence of some bits of vegetable perhaps. Anyhow, there was great concern and consternation as Willi unwrapped the dumpling, to see if it had come out right, which apparently, after some doubts, it had. Willi cut slices of it for our plates and Gabi ladled goulash over it. It was delicious, but they served me twice as much as they each took themselves, and I felt obliged to have seconds. I was unpleasantly stuffed by the end, and glad when they suggested another outing before desert.

The outing was a walk through the city, which was indeed near at hand. The main downtown area begins just a block from their door. We walked through it, across the main plaza, and over to the town castle, which sits high on a bluff overlooking the river. It was a bit of a climb up to it, where we looked down on the Danube valley from what they said was their favorite place in Linz. It was nice, although not quite as pretty as you might picture if you are thinking of the Danube as "beautiful blue." It is muddy brown, and they don't know where it ever got that name. We walked back down, then through more of the city, which all is very attractive, with nicely maintained old buildings. Back at the apartment again, we had desert and then talked into the night, not stopping for bed until after midnight.

In the morning I slept in a bit, getting up after Willi had left for work, and had breakfast with Gabi. Then I spent the morning on my own exploring downtown Linz with my camera. It was a perfect sunny day. I returned, leaving time to iron some shirts I had washed, but Gabi had done it for me with her machine. So, we just talked some more until Willi picked me up for the seminar I was to give. The seminar was better attended than we'd expected, and it went well. Willi was the only trade person there, but that didn't seem to matter. Afterwards we went to a restaurant with a small group, then



Castle of Linz am Rhein from Wikipedia 2023

returned to the apartment and watched the World Cup. It was once again late before I got to bed.

Wednesday I was up earlier, and Willi took me to the train station, where I easily found the seat on the train to Zurich that Willi had kindly reserved for me the day before. This train was much more comfortable than the one from Prague, and I enjoyed the trip. I slept part way, ate a sumptuous lunch in the opulent dining car, and watched as we rolled through mountains and valleys, especially towards the end of the trip. It was not spectacular however, as I had hoped it would be.

My instructions were to take another train to Lucerne, and from there a taxi to Bürgenstock. In Zurich I first needed to get money, then a ticket to Lucerne. In the station I glanced around for a booth offering change and found none, but then noticed a machine that would do it for me. Feeding in some Austrian currency, it immediately gave me Swiss. Then I looked for a place to buy a train ticket, and again found a machine that did the job almost instantly. I began to think that I'd never have to talk to a Swiss.

In Lucerne, though, I decided I really needed a person to help me get a ticket and a seat reservation to Saarbrücken on Sunday, and with not too much searching I found a large office staffed by the train company with agents who spoke English and could do all that. Switzerland, as I'd been told it would, works.

It wasn't yet particularly pretty, however. From the train coming into Lucerne I had seen no lake, and all I saw now was a typical European city. I easily found a taxi to take me to Bürgenstock, but even that ride found little of beauty for a while. Only on the edge of Lucerne did we find the lake, and we quickly left it to start climbing. The climbing continued for quite a while, in part because we were stuck behind a slow-moving tour bus that had some difficulty with the hairpin turns. Eventually, we emerged near the top of the "spit of land" that is the Bürgenstock, extending out into Lake Lucerne. But the lake was still not visible until I got into my hotel.

It turned out that I was a day early. The conference, as I knew, didn't start until Thursday, but since it started in the afternoon, guests were not expected until Thursday morning. I've learned since that at least one person spent the night in Zurich, having arrived in Europe on Wednesday, but I'm glad I came ahead. I've had enough moving around, and I spent a relaxed evening settling in.

Part of that was dinner at one of the restaurants here. The obvious choice, requiring neither a long climb nor a tie, is the one in the Park Hotel which serves primarily Italian food. When I entered there was no obvious host or hostess, so I got the attention of a passing waiter who seemed almost doubtful that they could seat me. But he got another person, a woman, who did seat me politely but still doubtfully at a corner table. She immediately offered me a mineral water or something else to drink, which I accepted. But after that, except for a nice young woman who kept bringing me more bread, nobody approached me for the longest time. The one who had seated me came by once, asked if I wanted to order, and seemed surprised when I said yes. Then she said she'd be right back, and I never saw her again. Eventually I got the attention of yet another waiter, this time a man, and he too said he'd be right back. He did return, although not right away, and I ordered. Now the wait began for the food itself. First my soup, then my entree, took forever, and each time I just about gave up and left. Eventually I did get my food, and all of it was wonderful. I've now warned my colleagues today, as we've now eaten there twice more, that the service is a bit slow, and that has been confirmed. But the food has always been good enough to make up for it.

In addition to being a spit of land, the Bürgenstock is also a resort including three separate hotels (the Grand, the Park, and the Palace), plus various shops, a golf course, and other attractions including a very fancy club with two swimming pools, workout equipment, and posh, tie-only bar and restaurant. For the conference we are all in the Grand, which is the oldest, built in the 1870s. It is indeed quite grand and well maintained, if not at all modern or particularly up to date. One side, mine, looks out on a green valley with snow-capped mountains beyond and the sound of cowbells nearer by. The other side, which we can view from the main rooms, looks out on Lake Lucerne, which extends into valleys in several directions, with mountains beyond. Both views are quite beautiful.

The booklet of information in the room gives a "history" of Bürgenstock – just a list of dates and events. Most intriguing is "1989 Blowing up of the Park Hotel," followed by "1991 Opening of the new Park Hotel." I wonder if I will learn anything more about that.



Grand Hotel Bürgenstock from Web 2023

Today I devoted to the conference, even though it didn't start until afternoon. I spent the morning preparing my presentation. The conference, at least so far, is much more focused than most I've been to, and all on topics very close to what I've been working on myself. So that makes it interesting. There are only a dozen or so of us attending, and no outsiders, so we are really a small group talking among ourselves.

Tuesday, July 13, Saarbrücken, Germany

It is now the last evening of my trip. I am just back from giving my seminar here and then having dinner with several faculty. I am more than ready to go home, although it has been a very good trip.

Friday and Saturday of last week were spent almost entirely with the conference at Bürgenstock. There was a full schedule of papers, even over-full, since two papers that had been planned for Sunday were moved into the earlier schedules since several participants would be leaving Sunday morning.

After the papers on Friday, Henryk Kierzkowski, the organizer, led us on a walk up to the top of the Bürgenstock. It was a bit of a climb, followed by a surprising elevator that had been built into the rock below, and into the air above. It takes you to the level of the highest point on the Bürgenstock, but a little way out from it. You cross a little bridge to get to the peak itself. Once at the top it was a good place to view the scenery, but not

much else. There was a pasture, however, including several more cows with cow bells jingling, and that was nice.

After the papers on Saturday, Henryk had arranged a bus to take us to Lucerne and a guide there to show us around. Since I had seen nothing to like in Lucerne on Wednesday, I wasn't too excited about that, but it turned out I just hadn't seen the good parts. It really is a charming city, and I returned to it yesterday, with two hours to spare on my way out, and enjoyed it.



The river Reuss in the old part of Lucerne from Wikipedia 2023

Both evenings we had excellent dinners after these scheduled activities. Friday's dinner was preceded by a stand-up cocktail session that I'd have been happy to do without. In part this was because I found myself caught with another fellow to talk to who was just as bad at small talk as I am. We both mostly looked around at others who were more talkative, wishing we were with them. Once seated for dinner, both evenings, I was lucky enough to be close to Ron Jones, who is much better at this.

Sunday the conference was essentially over, since we'd moved the last two papers to prior days, but those of us who remained took an hour or so to meet and talk about plans for the future. We'd had a brief discussion of this before, and I'd been full of ideas then. But on Sunday I'd run dry, so I mostly listened. The plan is for another conference in Hong Kong in the fall of 1999.

After this meeting, Rick Harris and I took a walk. We went further out along the Bürgenstock than either of us had before, and we saw views of mountains and valleys that we'd otherwise have missed. We realized that the conference schedule really hadn't allowed us much time to ourselves, and we wished that it had been different. There is, for example, a funicular railway from the hotel down to the shore of the lake, and neither of us ever got a chance to ride it. But this morning walk made up for a lot. The sky was clearer than it had been before, and the air was fresh.

I got back from the walk a bit later than I meant to, and the taxi that another fellow and I had booked to take us to town was already there. I kept them both waiting longer than I should have as I collected my things and checked out. In Lucerne, the other fellow, whose name is Giovanni (but not Don), and I walked together a bit until it was time for his train, then I walked alone. I'd checked both my bags in a locker at the train station, so I was feeling very free. I ended with lunch, risotto and mushrooms, at a table next to the river with swans and an odd duck begging us for handouts.

My train took me to Mannheim, and somehow, I never noticed when I entered Germany. I changed there to another train for Saarbrücken and arrived here a little after seven in the evening. Christian, who had invited me, had put me in the Hotel Mercure, which he said was five minutes walk down by the river. Coming out of the train station I didn't see either the hotel or the river, but it was clear which way led downhill, and sure enough, after a few minutes walk I saw both. The hotel is new and modern, and I'm glad it is being billed directly to the university so that I don't have to know what it costs.

After checking in I set out for a walk and stopped at the desk for a map. They gave me one and mentioned that there was a party going on in the old part of town, which they directed me to. Sure enough, the entire old section of several square blocks was filled with crowds of people and booths selling food, drink, and merchandise. It felt and looked much like Ann Arbor's Art Fair, which I'll be attending day after tomorrow. I had my dinner from several booths.

One was a beer booth where I asked for a Coke. I got it, in a nice traditional Coca-Cola-shaped glass. I didn't want to stay put, though, so I continued to wander as I drank it, wondering how they could afford to use real glasses in a situation like this. When I finished, I decided to return the glass, so I went back to the booth where I'd bought it and left it on the counter. I turned away, but after a few steps I heard a voice speaking German behind me that I somehow knew was addressing me. I turned back, and she somehow conveyed that I was entitled to a two-mark deposit return, which she gave me. That's about a dollar, which I hadn't realized I had paid when I bought the Coke.

Back in the hotel, I managed to stay awake and even interested as I watched the final match of the World Cup. I had already rooted against both France and Brazil in the semi-finals, and now that they were playing each other I didn't know whom to root for. I decided on Brazil, but found myself against my will actually liking several of the French players, so when they won, I wasn't unhappy.



Saarbrücken in January 2006 from Wikipedia 2023

This morning I called my former student, Christian, wondering what he would do with me now that I was here somewhat earlier than he'd counted on. He seemed to have no plans, so I kept the day to myself and only went out to the university shortly before the 5:15 seminar. It was a rainy day, though, so I didn't do much; mainly worked.

The seminar went very well, better than the one in Linz, I'd say. There was one fellow there who seemed really smart, and I talked with him more at dinner. I also talked some with Rolf Richter, who has been a frequent visitor to Ann Arbor, as he walked me back to my hotel after dinner. Overall, a pleasant but undistinguished visit. Not that I really wanted anything more at this point.

Thursday, July 16, Ann Arbor

Not much more to report after that last entry. I took the train to Frankfurt airport, and the plane to Detroit. The train was interesting primarily in that it seemed to be powered by a gasoline engine in the front car, where I was sitting. I only realized that when they turned it off briefly before we started, and I became aware of the quiet. This was unusual, since all the other trains I'd ridden had been quiet all the time; I think they were electric. During the ride you could hear this one change pitch as we changed speed, shifting gears I suppose. This train also had the feature that the cars tilted into the curves when it was going fast. And it did seem to go rather fast, although the noise of the engine made that hard to judge.

11. Europe 1998

This was certainly one of the more pleasant trips I've taken, and I hope my journal gives that impression. There was a lot that was pretty to see, and the weather was just about perfect. It was an easy trip, of course, since in most places I spoke at least a little of the language, and it was nice to have a chance to use my German.

I also got some distinct impressions of the national characters of these four countries I visited. They are not that different, but still you could tell them apart. The Germans seem confident, but theirs was the least attractive people and culture. The Swiss have built a country that works like clockwork, appropriately, although the speed of the clock is not very fast. The Austrians are like the Swiss, but more laid back. They don't seem to work quite so hard, but they achieve almost the same result. And the Czechs, well, they are still finding their niche. But they are easily the most human of the lot.