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Disappointment and the Emotion of Historical Law and Change

Early on in Helma Sanders-Brahm's 1975 film "Unter dem Pflaster ist der Strand", the protagonist Grischa muses to her new lover Heinrich that she would like to see more of a merging between her "professional and private life."[1] This leads to a more general discussion about pursuing change, for oneself and more broadly. Heinrich, recalling the "revolutionary feeling" of a few years earlier, mourns the loss of his sense then that change was to be imminent, quick, and total. "Of course," Grischa answers: what Heinrich describes "is a utopia." The lesson she drew from the earlier period, conversely, was to keep at her efforts, using past disappointments to rethink how to produce change. But Heinrich seems to find the sense disabling: now he spends his evenings in a bar, or returns home alone, for "a couple of hours" when he can be "happy." Sanders-Brahms intercuts their discussion with documentary footage from the late 1960s, of protestors in West Berlin struggling against water cannons, apparently from the "Battle of the Tegeler Way."[2] Heinrich then describes a fantasy counterpart to the historical footage. In this version, protestors take over the water cannons aimed at them. The police throw canisters of tear gas, but the wind carries the gas back to the police. The protestors continue their march, ending up at the Technical University Berlin, where they remove their wet clothing and make love. "We thought, tomorrow it will all start happening!" "But," he finishes the story, "nothing happened, you know?" Worse still than this disappointing past was the corrosive effect of the disappointment: dividing activists in a self-eating sectarianism, or casting them out of politics altogether, leaving them isolated and emotionally bereft. So contemporary activist Volker T. recalled retrospectively, "I think it was '75, '75. And it was now personally […] very hard for me then […], I lost the majority of my circle of friends, all aside from this political disappointment, that it all fell apart."[3]

But had really nothing happened? Grischa importunes Heinrich to change his own head, in order to understand the story – history – in a new way, "without the utopia." By using his disappointments with the past as a means to rethink history, how change occurs, he would be able to challenge the present and create a different

[1] Helma Sanders-Brahms (dir.), Unter dem Pflaster ist der Strand (1975), DVD Zweitausendeins, 00:10:07–00:12:43.

[2] Sander-Brahms (dir.), Unter dem Pflaster, 00:21:23–00:22:08. The *Schlacht am Tegeler Weg*, from 4. november 1968, is often understood as a turning point, a moment when it seemed clear that peaceful protest in the streets had failed to elicit desired results.

[3] Interview Volker T., 28. 6. 2004. Volker T. is one of 55 contemporary activists I have interviewed for Belinda Davis, The Internal Life of Politics: Extraparliamentary Activism in West Germany, 1962–1983, Cambridge 2021. Outside of the best-known interview subjects, I identify subjects by pseudonym.

future. Sanders-Brahms's film reminds us that the political inspiration and activism of the extraparliamentary opposition – and arguably political engagement broadly – stemmed from emotional impulse as much as from "theory."[4] The observation is no challenge to the seriousness of protestors' ideas or to the "appropriateness" of their politics. It is rather a recognition that political principles, ideas and ideals, bear sources in feeling; that feeling itself is imbricated with and often indistinguishable from the "cerebral," presumed "rational" bases of fundamental political ideals, such as freedom, and justice, and that this is moreover no intrinsically bad thing. Contemporaries recalled a new life feeling, a certain life mood that constituted the broad movement in the first place, rather than any rigid or even specific theory: it was a community feeling itself that created the feeling of a common community of destiny, and pushed them to act on the feeling.[5] Feeling drew activists together: in a common excitement, even "love" – and fear. But, as Heinrich's experience demonstrated, emotion also tore at the fabric of the movement, through the disappointment and despair that atomized activists.

What difference does it make in this context to more explicitly consider the role of emotion, affect, and feeling? Recent scholarship on popular protest has begun to address the role of emotion and affect in spurring and informing activism. This

[4] See directly on this range of issues also Bernhard Gotto's important Enttäuschung in der Demokratie. Erfahrung und Deutung von politischem Engagement in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland während der 1970er und 1980er Jahre, Berlin/Boston 2018. Compare too the recent efflorescence of historial literature treating emotion in the "old Federal Republic", including as related to politics, e. g. Anna M. Parkinson, An Emotional State. The Politics of Emotion in Postwar West German Culture, Ann Arbor 2015; Joachim Häberlein, The Emotional Politics of the Alternative Left. West Germany, 1968–1984, Cambridge 2018; Sven Reichardt, Authentizität und Gemeinschaft. Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren, Frankfurt am Main 2014; also variously Frank Biess, Republik der Angst. Eine andere Geschichte der Bundesrepublik, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2019; Detlef Siegfried/David Templin (eds.), Lebensreform um 1900 und Alternativmilieu um 1980: Kontinuitäten und Brüche in Milieus der gesellschaftlichen Selbstreflexion im frühen und späten 20. Jahrhundert, Göttingen 2019; Norbert Frei, 1968. Jugendrevolte und globaler Protest, München 2008; Detlef Siegfried, Time is on My Side: Konsum und Politik in der westdeutschen Jugendkultur der 60er Jahre, Göttingen 2006, among recent works more or less directly addressing emotion in the culture and politics of the 1970s see also Martha Nussbaum, Political Emotions. Why Love Matters for Justice. Cambridge (Mass.) 2013. There is by now an extended transdisciplinary literature on the history of emotion broadly. This particular piece does not intervene in this important literature, taking "disappointment" rather as a point of departure in the broadest sense of activists' response when their efforts to realize change failed. See for important recent work on emotion in history broadly e. g. Ute Frevert, Vergängliche Gefühle, Göttingen 2013; as well as ibid. et al. (eds.), Gefühlswissen. Eine lexikalische Spurensuche in der Moderne, Frankfurt am Main 2011.

[5] These are commonplace expressions from my interviews. Emotion in politics was in mainstream contemporary German thought and still is to some degree a source of concern, tied to a fascist world view; compare Sybille Steinbacher, Auschwitz. Geschichte und Nachgeschichte, Munich 2017 (first published 2004); also Volker Weiß, Faschisten von heute? Neue Rechte und ideologische Traditionen, in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 42–43 (2017), pp. 4–9. Yet the latter is questionable, as is the idea altogether that emotion can be removed from political thought and engagement. See Gotto, Enttäuschung in der Demokratie, compare also Maik Tändler, Das therapeutische Jahrzehnt. Der Psychoboom in den Siebziger Jahren, Göttingen 2016.

work has examined the ways in which particular emotions have brought protestors together or divided them, encouraged or discouraged their action; it has demonstrated how grassroots political leaders (like their more formal political counterparts) have used emotion to manipulate both activists and "outsiders."[6] Yet the scholarship has looked relatively little at the ways in which affect relates to activists' view of what is possible in the broader sense: what history looks like and how change occurs within that vision.[7] Conversely, work in the last decades has treated the question of epistemic changes in the modernist world view, and what such changes means for human agency and its value beyond reinforcing the general status quo.[8] But this work has attended too little in turn to questions of emotion: to how feeling has mediated an understanding of history and change without benefit of teleology or a belief in secular progress, alongside a willingness to engage politically.[9]

This piece sketches the role of affect and emotion in mediating young West Germans' experience. Focusing here particularly on disappointment, alongside other feelings, the essay argues that, as disappointments mounted in the experience of young activists, in cycles of hope and the crushing of that hope in rapid succession, it transformed their understanding of history. In turn it transformed their view of their own role in enacting change. This understanding took a variety of forms, from group to group and over time. Ultimately, it coalesced in a post-

6 Cf. fn 4.

7 See as an exception Gotto, Enttäuschung in der Demokratie. This essay is consistent with Gotto's rethinking of the narrative of the 1970s as simply negative – and lasting – in its effects. Recently discussion has grown concerning emotionally-embedded of narratives of the "old FRG" and challenges to them; compare Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Lutz Raphael (eds.), Nach dem Boom. Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit 1970, Göttingen 2010; Konrad H. Jarausch (ed.), Das Ende der Zuversicht? Die siebziger Jahre als Geschichte, Göttingen 2008; ibid and Martin Sabrow, eds., Die historische Meistererzählung: Deutungslinien der deutschen Nationalgeschichte nach 1945, Göttingen 2002; also Andreas Rödder, Das „Modell Deutschland" zwischen Erfolgsgeschichte und Verfallsdiagnose, in: Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 54 (2006), 345–63.

8 See e. g. debates between Judith Butler and Seyla Benhabib, as in Seyla Benhabib, Ethics without Normativity and Politics without Historicity, in: Constellations 20 (2013), pp. 150–63; also discussion of "epistemic agency", e. g. Catherine Z. Elgin, Epistemic Agency, in: Theory and Research in Education 11, 2 (2013), 135–52. Of course, the rethinking of historicity began even before World War II, and continued apace during the period of these activists' own political engagement.

9 These discussions are now emerging; compare Moritz Föllmer, Individual and Modernity in Berlin. Self and Society from Weimar to the Wall, New York 2013; Nina Verheyen, Diskussionslust. Eine Kulturgeschichte des „besseren Arguments" in Westdeutschland, Göttingen 2010); and Pascal Eitler/Jens Elberfeld (eds.), Zeitgeschichte des Selbst. Therapeutisierung – Politisierung – Emotionalisierung, Bielefeld 2015; also early exception Frederic Jameson, who described postmodernity as accompanied by a waning of affect. Cf. Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act, Ithaca 1981; and ibid., Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Durham 1991. See broadly on recent moves from narratives of the FRG as a triumphalist narrative of modernity Frank Biess and Astrid Eckert, Introduction: Why Do We Need New Narratives for the History of the Federal Republic? in: Central European History 52 (2019), 1–18.

modern world view with surprising and salutary influence, a world view worth revisiting all the more after the events of 1989 and other watersheds that have informed continued changes in this thinking.[10]

I. The Feeling of Modernity

Heinrich's emotional roller coaster, as Sanders Brahms depicted it, was politically meaningful in fundamental ways. Feelings like hopefulness and disappointment were both cause and effect not only of political action, but also of political thought, even of a broader Weltanschauung. Modernity itself was tied from its origins to a secular optimism, notwithstanding the individual, variable life experiences of millions of Europeans. Manifest in the work of figures from Leibniz, to Kant and Hegel, to Marx, and Seebohm Rowntree, embedded in prescriptions for reform and in "scientific" predictions of revolution, an overarching optimism prevailed over detractors, as modern Europeans in large numbers saw history as progressing forward toward some more or less perfect end: a secular heaven on earth. World War I dealt a heavy blow to this vision throughout Europe. Still, across the increasingly broad political spectrum, a certain optimism re-emerged and seductively triumphed in the interwar period, in anticipation still of a possible "perfect" society, a utopia made real, whether through historical law, human will, or both.[11]

World War II and its aftermath exerted a still heavier strike to this vision. Yet in the new West and East Germanys, their respective political leaders nevertheless triumphantly posited their versions of historical determinism, whether Germany

[10] That the 1960s and 1970s saw a flourishing of postmodern thought is wellknown, including as manifested in the contemporary work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and others. The argument here is how, in contrast with e. g. Foucault, contemporary activists came to these ideas through experience in a form that supported their agency and the possibilities for change. See Belinda Davis, Civil Society in a New Key? Feminist and Alternative Groups in 1970s West Germany, in: Sonya Michel/Karen Hagemann (eds.), Civil Society and Gender Justice. Historical and Comparative Perspectives, New York 2008, pp. 208–223; compare extended examinations of postmodernity and the postmodern subject, Andreas Reckwitz, Das hybride Subjekt. Eine Theorie der Subjektkulturen von der bürgerlichen Moderne zur Postmoderne, Göttingen 2006; also Andreas Rödder, Wertewandel und Postmoderne: Gesellschaft und Kultur der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1965–1990, Stuttgart 2004. On the critical role of experience in contemporary politics, compare Bernhard Gotto, The Best Thing that Remained of '68? Experiences of Protest and Expectations in the West German Women's Movement on Change during the 1970s and 1980s, in: Friederike Brühöfener/Belinda Davis/Stephen Milder (eds.), Social Movements After '69: West Germany and Beyond (under press consideration).

[11] To be sure, there was also a powerful competing despair concerning history (not always entirely divorced from the prospect of renewed hopefulness). Among the best-known published authors of such thought, cf. Oswald Spengler, Der Untergang des Abendlandes, 2 vols., 1918 and 1923. Yet even Spengler's pessimism still held firmly to a certain redemptive notion of historical law. The work was started before the war, but arguably its wide interwar audience, along with that e. g. for prewar writer Julius Langbehn, was a function of the war's effect on the German emotional landscape.

was rebounding after its "Betriebsunfall" to return to its destined national (or "Western") path, or had rather stepped up to its fate in crushing fascism, capitalism's last gasp. Still, ordinary Germans in both new states expressed especial skepticism and resignation, based on their life experiences. Older Germans above all exhibited a hopelessness and helplessness in their world view: a sense both that there was a certain randomness to what would come next, and that they were impotent to change it. This reflected broader philosophical transformations of the postwar period in much of Europe, transformations particularly intense in a Germany, where a proclaimed triumph of will was now so formidably vanquished. The existentialist thought that began its rise even before World War II presaged a deeply felt "nausea" among new West Germans, alongside rejection of a foreseeable or indeed any historical path.[12]

The sources of these transformations varied by individuals and groups. In 1964 West Germany, returned émigré Theodor Adorno believed that "[a]fter Auschwitz," "in light of the magnitude of the catastrophe, the appeal for progress would have had something absurd about it."[13] For most West Germans, Auschwitz formed far less the center of shifts in their historical understanding. Nevertheless, the experience of war and its aftermath produced disappointment with the past and cynicism concerning the future.[14] In the mid-1950s, social scientists at the conservative polling organization Institut für Demoskopie fretted that the great majority of adult West Germans were "apolitical": "how can we have a democracy, if so few care about their freedom?"[15] Yet, throughout the 1960s, Rudolf Augstein, editor of the premier newsmagazine "Der Spiegel," roundly urged fellow West Germans, including politicians, to maintain their "cynicism" toward politics, by recognizing their own limited power to change history, and the dangers of trying.[16]

From the first years of the Federal Republic, younger West Germans seem to have adopted their elders' sense of the cavernous unknown before them and a corresponding skepticism. SDS and KPD activist Christian Semler (closely associated with the actual Battle of the Tegeler Way) recalled the early postwar influence on him of his mother and her "very liberal friends," who rued "the overlooked

[12] Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, La Nausée, Paris 1938, written between his 1936 "L'Imagination" and his 1939 "Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions," in which Sartre himself connects world views to affect. See too Mechtild Rahner, "Tout est neuf ici, tout est à recommencer …" Die Rezeption des französischen Existenzialismus im kulturellen Feld Westdeutschlands (1945–1949), Würzburg 1993.

[13] Stichworte zur 1. Vorlesung, 10. 11. 1964, in: Theodor Adorno, Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit (1964/65), ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, Frankfurt am Main 2016, p. 9seq.

[14] Davis, Inner Life; see also Biess, Homecomings; ibid and Robert Moeller (eds.), Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe, New York 2010; and the highly influential early discussion Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens, München 1967.

[15] Cited in: Renate Köcher, Lebensverhältnisse 1951–2001: Ein Rückblick mit Daten des Allensbacher Archivs, in: Heins Sahner (ed.), Fünfzig Jahre nach Weinheim. Empirische Markt- und Sozialforschung gestern, heute, morgen, Baden-Baden 2002, pp. 59–73, here p. 66.

[16] Rudolf Augstein, Meinungen zu Deutschland, Frankfurt am Main 1967, p. 33.

chance at a new beginning," and who concluded, "one cannot do anything." He described here not so much the negative effects of the war and defeat as the perceived failure to take advantage of the resultant yawning postwar openness, to create something better than the Federal Republic and the emerging Cold War. This "disappointment over the absent break-out" out of existing realities and into freely imagined possibilities had "very far-reaching consequences. Because, really […], it promoted among a relatively high number such a fundamental aversion to the Federal Republic." Semler traced his own political vision to these adults' "non-acceptance of the Federal Republic," and to their own "very strongly unhappy consciousness."[17] Within the intellectual left among other circles, despair seemed to deepen, even as West Germany grew richer and more materially sated through the 1950s and 1960s. Peter Brückner described it as a full-on "crisis" of epistemic understanding, and understanding of one's place in the world. Collapse of the historical paradigm cut deep: "it affected the inner life story, their self-understanding, their identity, at least for the elders among us."[18] Yet, Semler continued his own self-narrative, where adults around him had thrown their hands up, and "made their peace with the Federal Republic," he determined that he and others should rethink how to make the change he wished to see.

II. Disappointment and its Lessons

Helma Sanders-Brahms and Christian Semler both tell stories of political choices West Germans made in the early postwar decades, based on mutually informing and transforming political understanding and emotion. In the mid-1970s, Sanders-Brahms contrasts two paths that West German extraparliamentary activists took after their own experiences of great disappointment, alongside shock and despair. The best-known of these experiences, the deadly police shooting of protestor Benno Ohnesorg in June 1967 and the assassination attempt on Rudi Dutschke in April 1968; the failure to prevent parliamentary passage of the Notstandsgesetze in 1968; the fragmentation of the movement; and the escalation of violence associated in the early 1970s with the rise of the Red Army Faction (RAF) and the vastly expanded arms of the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA) are a few of many moments activists point to retrospectively as fillips to deep rethinking. Sanders-Brahms characterizes the sojourners on these two paths as comprising those who can only look back, with nostalgia for what might have been, and those who rather use their disappointment and despair to reshape their understanding and their attendant action. Those who felt pushed to pursue other options, for example,

[17] Interview Christian Semler, July 2003. Semler seems to allude to Theodor Adorno's concept of the "unglückliches Bewusstsein"; Adorno in turn followed Hegel.

[18] Peter Brückner, Psychologie und Geschichte. Vorlesungen im "Club Voltaire" 1980/81, Berlin 1982, p. 267.

some version of working-class revolution, do not warrant significant attention in her rendition.

In her portrait, the path-takers break down by gender.[19] Sanders-Brahms juxtaposes Heinrich with Grischa, her own apparent avatar.[20] Grischa learns from her disappointments. She moves on from grand narratives and their authors to seek new sources of knowledge, for example, by interviewing working women about their everyday experiences and choices. She forges her own future pragmatically, transforming her life according to her own needs, defying pre-defined paths. She is practical, refusing to be caught in sectarian stand-offs, rather joining with others as it makes sense for her immediate political interests. Heinrich, by contrast, is paralyzed by the past: by disappointment with the immediate past – and even by the sense that, raised by Nazis, he cannot escape fascism himself. He cannot transcend the "stone in his heart"; he is emotionally "wrecked," rendering him unable to act. He imagines salvation now in effect in a traditional nuclear family with Grischa, a dubious "revolution by pair."[21] For him, home life represents no melding of the personal, the professional, and the political, as Grischa seeks, but as a site of relief from the last. Altogether, he seems to adopt the political hopelessness and desire for retreat that many young contemporaries associated with their elders. For his part, Christian Semler continued with the template of age in the telling of his own story. His mother and her liberal and leftist friends retreated in disappointment by the 1950s (adults like his father who embraced the new West German party politics, were, here too, simply out of the picture). However, Semler himself moved forward insistently, as he characterized it. He related a tale of continually refining his political understanding and vision, as his own ongoing disappointments informed a new vision. For our purposes, it is less important whether there were such pronounced differences by gender or even age than the way in which contemporary activists set up their self-narratives in a series of active choices, informed by experience and emotional response, to move forward by learning from the past, ultimately radically reinterpreting history altogether.[22]

[19] Cf. fellow filmmaker Helke Sander, who pled that fellow male activists not "'dogmentieren', sondern auch agieren," and who in turn represented this gendered distinction in her films, for example in: "Der subjective Faktor" (1981), and her own reflection in the character Anna.

[20] See Davis, Inner Life, in which women activists regularly cast themselves as more practical and concrete, not lost or misled by theory, and thus able to learn from all sources, and move on.

[21] Sander-Brahms (dir.), Unter dem Pflaster; "eine kleine Revolution zu Zweit" is actually spoken by the narrator, at 00:19:02.

[22] Generally, those born from shortly before the through the first decade afterward had good reason to view the way forward as a yawning openness in the most personal sense: changes in where they lived, their school system, even their family constellation seemed to offer a picaresque view of the world, neither stable nor moving in any intelligible fashion. At the same time, local and occupying forces alike worked to instill at least a perfunctory sense of the freedom and the responsibility to act, to make things better, while at the same time hardening Cold War and domestic policy constrained the possibilities for change. Cf. Belinda Davis, A Whole World Opening Up: Transcultural Contact, Difference, and the Politicization of 'New Left' Activists, in: Davis et al (eds.), Changing the World, Changing Oneself. Political Protest

Such archetypical paths as these offer illustrative versions of far messier real-life perambulations of thought. Through this period of popular political engagement both especially long and intense, activists swung rapidly and widely in their emotional register throughout the period. Emotions were neither singular nor serial. Deepest disappointment cohabited with fear – and with elation. Marianne I., a 25 year old in Heidelberg in June 1967, found the police shooting death of protestor Benno Ohnesorg to be a catalyst to her own serious political participation, producing a new emotional solidarity, by means of a reorganized understanding of society. Before the shooting of Ohnesorg, she hadn't found it "necessary" to be intensely politically involved. Now she [saw the West German state as bearing continuities with its Nazi precedent, and?] felt compelled to take a side.

"And that was '67 that I thought: Aha, I belong there somehow. So then I joined in, joined in demonstrating – and these completely specific feelings […] were also part of it, just by being in one group, and [distinct] from others: the one who screamed something at us out of the window, or police all around us. So, these feelings. I found it on the one hand very exciting and also very frightening. […] It catalyzed in me such a powerful thing: one should not just let things fall where they may; one should not take things just as they were presented."[23]

The particular combination of experiences of those who became extraparliamentary activists in the period created an emotional admixture that, in the event, tended to engender a sense of the possibility and even the need to "step into history," even as their understanding of history, and change, also transformed through their experience.

It was a growing apocalyptic sense in this period, a feeling that things could not stay as they were, that drove to the fore a sense of imminent "revolution." This was a notion that bore relatively little purchase among new and even longer-standing activists in the directly preceding years, at least as it pertained to West Germany, so these new feelings fomented a rapid rethinking of "history."[24] Yet, in the midst of the February 1968 international Vietnam congress in West Berlin, the Prague Spring, and the Paris May, many extraparliamentary activists felt a new enthusiasm and euphoria: a sense that "Revolution" was simply "in the air," coming on its own steam. The highly pragmatic Teresa B. rejected what she perceived as a dogmatic Marxism among fellow activists at the university in Marburg. But in this period suddenly "we all somehow had the feeling that we were helping a new moment to break through." The shy, reserved Eva Quistorp was upended by the new "revolutionary mood," but likewise felt called to be part of this imminent "world revolution": to be on the right side of history.[25] Activists, longstanding and those who first now engaged politically, now felt pulled from the bruising dismay of daily life, and perceived constant attacks on youth, by the thrill that "revolution" was at hand,

and Collective Identities in West Germany and the U. S. in the 1960s and 1970s, New York 2010, pp. 255–73.

[23] Interview Marianne I., 4. 7. 2004.

[24] Cf. e. g. Rudi Dutschke, Geschichte ist machbar, ed. by Jürgen Miermeister, Berlin 1980.

[25] Recorded in Ruth Zylberman (dir.), 1968, année zero, 2008.

revolution that would bring about a new world – even if the contours of this new world were vague at best. The idea of revolution inspired enormous excitement and high spirits, a sensation of joy and expansiveness, even of "love": for one another, and for revolution itself.

The idea of emotional highs accompanying revolution is hardly new or surprising. My argument here is two-fold. First, the very sense of potential, sense of opening, and the accompanying joy, growing out of their disappointments, came in a sense to define revolution at the time.[26] At the same time, this moment of relatively extreme emotional highs and lows related to a particular view of historical law and the possibilities of change. Avowed "anti-Communist" Daniel Cohn-Bendit rejected notions of historical determinism. Yet, in this moment, he recalled in the mid-1980s that "we loved it so much, the revolution."[27] Intense emotions created the sense of potential openness; the feeling of openness in turn drove a rethinking of how change took place.

This was no unmitigated sudden return to optimism and hopefulness. Disappointment retained its pride of place throughout the period. 1968 jolted forward, leaving a roller coaster of emotional response, in the wake of the crushing of popular politics in France, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Mexico City, and beyond. Revolution, for a few months so apparently imminent, quickly receded from vision. Still, most activists did not retreat from political engagement, or not for long: absolute numbers of those seeking broader change through extraparliamentary means now burgeoned. Profound disappointment had itself been an important spur to their activism in the first place, and continued to be so throughout the longer period. "1968," or 1967–68, was a watershed moment, spawning a series of especially deep disappointments – alongside other, often contradictory emotions. But, for most grassroots activists of the era, it was neither the first nor the last of them. As contemporary activists narrated their life stories, they counted ongoing, even devastating disappointments as drivers to political action and experimentation. Wolf-Dieter Narr remembered how the Vietnam war first spurred him to political action in 1963: a war that "meant for us all a great disappointment regarding the U. S."[28]

Narr's account alerts us to another layer of the story. "Historical law" is one, big story of how change works. At the same time, in activists' own narratives after the fact, they tell their own tales, replete with concluding morals, about how things happened. In retrospect, activists used accounts of disappointment, among other emotions, to speak to "learning processes": how they learned from ongoing disappointments; the uses to which they put them. Earlier still, Paul T. recalled the police beating and arrest of young people playing music and dancing in the street in

[26] Cf. on this definition Padraic Kenney, A Carnival of Revolution. Central Europe 1989, Princeton 2002.

[27] See Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Wir haben sie so geliebt, die Revolution, Frankfurt am Main 1987, originally French television documentary, Daniel Cohn-Bendit (dir.), Nous l'avons tant aimée, la revolution, 1985.

[28] Interview Wolf-Dieter Narr, July 2004.

1962 Munich, prompting what came to be known as the "Schwabing Riots." His disappointment with and shock at the beatings was overwhelming. "And that was a blow that one couldn't fathom. Why did [the police] so brutally beat young people, who were unarmed, who hadn't done anything?" Paul connected the events directly to the feelings of "injustice" he had experienced while still a child, in the 1940s, when parents peremptorily slapped crying children, "and only then asked why they were crying." By Schwabing 1962, he told the story, the experience and his accompanying emotions explicitly politicized him, pushing him to ask broader questions, concerning the role of the state and its relation to the public.[29] Writing in consequence of their own impending dissolution in 1969, Members of Kommune 2 characterized their impetus to come together in 1966, in consequence of their disappointments already at that point. "The disappointment […] and the desperate search for approaches to revolutionary practice" was what led directly to the week-long discussion and rethinking that led to establishment of both Kommunen 1 and 2.[30]

III. Using Disappointment: *Lernprozesse*

Deep disappointment persevered and only deepened after "'68," and continued to inform political choices. Grischa and Heinrich expressed their unhappiness not only with an unrequited vision of the future, but also with the dogmatism and sectarianism that set in as a result, as activists battled over history and theory. Frank Böckelmann had worked to spread carnivalesque anti-authoritarian politics in early 1960s Munich, designed to surprise, and joy. But he too now also experienced "great disappointment" a decade later, precisely with the "strict discipline" in politics some fellow activists now saw as requisite, in such an unpredictable historical moment.[31] The latter included figures like Christian Semler, who in 1970 cofounded the maoist KPD(/AO).[32] It had been Semler's own disappointment and

[29] Interview Paul T., 24. 7. 2005.

[30] Kommune 2, Versuch der Revolutionierung des bürgerlichen Individuums. Kollektives Leben mit politischer Arbeit verbinden!, Berlin 1969, p. 16.

[31] Interview Frank Böckelmann, 29. 6. 2004. Frank Böckelmann remembered his rising then falling hopes in the ability to offer a "Vorbild," through forms of disobedience. "Das war so utopisch," he sadly recalled forty years later. Cf. Gunnar Hinck, Wir waren wie Maschinen. Die bundesdeutsche Linke der siebziger Jahre, Berlin 2012.

[32] The KPD(/AO) (the group quickly dropped the "AO," Aufbauorganisation), one of a number of maoist K- or *Kadergruppen*, lasted from 1970 to 1980, by which point it had lost most of its membership. Communist parties in the federal republic, banned in 1956, were able to form again from 1968. Cf. Andreas Kühn, Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne. Die Lebenswelt der K-Gruppen in der Bundesrepublik der 70er Jahre, Frankfurt am Main 2005; Anton Stengl, Zur Geschichte der K-Gruppen. Marxisten-Leninisten in der BRD der Siebziger Jahre, Frankfurt am Main 2011; Hartmut Rübner, "Die Solidarität organisieren". Konzepte, Praxis und Resonanz linker Bewegung nach 1968, Berlin 2012.

subsequent rethinking that had spurred the foundation of the new party. Paul T. in Munich too joined the KPD out of "disappointment" with the outcome of the preceding years: not just that there was no revolution in 1968, but also in the innumerable lesser defeats of the period, such as the failure to prevent passage of new "emergency laws."[33] If the hundreds of thousands of protestors across the West German population could not convince parliamentarians even to reconsider these laws that seemed to threaten basic freedoms, then "the game was up"; what could be done? In 1969, Paul and others pulled back from politics to think hard about their experience, and what meaning they could derive from it. It seemed proven once again that "reforms" within the existing system were unlikely. Yet what was the alternative? "Then one discussed, how do we actually move forward? Because we certainly can't just keep at this actionism uninterruptedly," all the more in light of so many disappointing outcomes. "Then we really discussed," Paul repeated emphatically, "a year long, always looking to find a solution: how does this move forward?"

Disappointment did not always lead to deep political rethinking and continued intense engagement, to be sure. For some, the constant disappointments led to more permanent retreat: from grassroots politics, or from politics altogether, as related to shifting views of history and change. Was there indeed any "solution to be found," as Heinrich asked? Was the correct lesson of these experiences acceptance of an immutable capitalist logic of history, or even of a complete absence of historical logic, and an accompanying recognition of one's impotence to see and enact change? When intransigent despair and hopelessness like that of Heinrich set in, some activists became "dropouts," pursuing paths from self-medication to the contemporary "self-help" movement.[34] Such ongoing hopelessness was encouraged from outside. Activist Robert G. woke up one morning in 1973 with a special forces GSG 9 police pointing a gun at his head, because others in the apartment building were suspected of sympathizing with "terrorists." He remembered with evident feeling still how he worked to control his emotional response: but, finally, he "simply skived off." As he told the story, he congratulated himself on retreating politically: the end could have been much more dire. A good friend of his who had been traumatized by police violence turned to drugs, and – Robert linked the circumstances in his telling – she burned to death in her bed.[35]

Others moved to the comfortable embrace of mainstream politics, some out of a new hopefulness, others in self-described cynical resignation. Some former APO

[33] These laws, passed in May 1968, amended the *Grundgesetz* to permit state authorities to take on certain powers and suspend normal rights during "emergency" situations. Cf. Boris Spernol, Notstand der Demokratie. Der Protest gegen die Notstandsgesetze und die Frage der NS-Vergangenheit, Essen 2008.

[34] Cf. Robert P. Stephens, Germans on Drugs. The Complications of Modernization in Hamburg, Ann Arbor 2007; work in progress by Klaus Weinhauer and by Timothy S. Brown.

[35] Interview Robert G., July 2004.

activists joined the SPD already in 1969, expectant of Willy Brandt's accession to power, alongside disappointment with results of extraparliamentary action.[36] Perhaps Brandt could achieve "reforms" that Adenauer and his CDU successors had eschewed. Although he joined the SPD first much later, in telling his story, Thomas Schmid connected this SPD membership to the "hopelessness" he had come to feel in the Frankfurt Sponti "scene" that he had departed in the early 1970s.[37] For many, this new sanguinity dissipated quickly, as Brandt's clarion call to "dare more democracy" gave way to policies such as the 1972 "Radical Declaration," which threatened the professional life and livelihood of a broad swath of current and erstwhile protestors.[38] Yet former activist Teresa B. spoke still at the time that I interviewed her of her "beloved SPD."[39] For her, the move reflected a renewed commitment to the terms of political modernity, and to the notion of small, incremental choices toward a secular progress. It was in the 1970s too that many young professional historians who had counted themselves within the ranks of the extraparliamentary opposition now joined in describing modern Germany's Sonderweg: the notion that Germany had, for a shorter or longer period, detoured from political modernity, but had, in the shape of the BRD, returned to the proper path toward its fated future.[40]

Still other activists responded to their disappointments by turning, for a period, to "old left" conceptions of history, alongside the effective "old liberalism" of their mainstream party counterparts. As such, they shared with the latter the redoubled optimism of political modernity. The brief taste of possible "revolution" in the late 1960s had been seductive. Activists like members of the Moscow-oriented DKP (Deutsche Kommunistische Partei) committed to studying revolution: to divine whether the recent perceived failure of revolution related to activists' insufficient understanding of their role, or whether they simply required the perspective of a longer time line toward the inevitable end. Horst H., [whose Gymnasium communist group] was affiliated with the DKP, took up intense scrutiny of Germany's November Revolution of 1918, seeking keys in the historical past.[41] These activists

[36] Cf. Wolther von Kieseritzky, Einleitung. ‚Mehr Demokratie wagen'. Innen- und Gesellschaftspolitik 1966–1974, in: Helga Grebing et al. (eds.), Willy Brandt. Berliner Ausgabe. vol. 7: Mehr Demokratie wagen. Innen- und Gesellschaftspolitik 1966–1974, Bonn 2001, pp. 15–81.

[37] Interview Thomas Schmid, 27. 7. 2005.

[38] Activists tended to call the policy a "Berufsverbot," asserting a continuity between policies from the Third Reich, and reinvoked in the early aftermath of the war.

[39] Interview Teresa B., July 2005.

[40] Cf. Bernd Faulenbach, Ideologie des deutschen Weges. Die deutsche Geschichte in der Historiographie zwischen Kaiserreich und Nationalsozialismus. München 1980. As times have changed, in turn, this concept has long since been transcended, at least among professional historians.

[41] Interview Horst H., 22. 7. 2003. Broad interest in the November revolution peaked during these years. This interest was both cause and effect of the contemporary seminal historical studies of the revolution, cf. e. g. Peter von Oertzen, Betriebsräte in der Novemberrevolution. Eine politikwissenschaftliche Untersuchung über Ideengehalt und Struktur der betrieblichen und wirtschaftlichen Arbeiterräte in der deutschen Revolution 1918/19, Düsseldorf 1963; Er-

also carefully reread theoretical texts, intensifying their schooling, or indoctrination (Schulung), looking for the right set of instructions. To their renewed dismay, however, it was members of the East German SED, with which the DKP was closely tied, who pushed DKP members to start *anders denken*. That is, SED officials increasingly discouraged talk of revolution altogether. They feared unleashing a West German chaos that might spread eastward, and in turn challenge the DDR state and its own new philosophy of *Realsozialismus*.[42]

The Deutsche Kommunistische Partei (DKP) was the largest of the new, formal political parties to form out of grassroots activist circles, reaching nearly 40,000 members in 1973.[43] Yet a preponderance of West German activists were dubious about *Realsozialismus* even as an intervening model, in light of extensive personal knowledge of and experience with East Germans. This doubt had been only reinforced by the entry of the "revolutionary" Red Army's tanks into Prague in August 1968, indeed a central element in the disappointment of that year.[44] Richard W. remembered the hope that preceded that moment, linking protest across the Cold War divide: "we hoped of course that something would finally move, and we carefully watched every movement," to see if "finally the breakthrough would take place." Thus,

> "The great disappointment was of course Czechoslovakia in '68, of course. That's why I characterized '68 from the start [here] as the beginning of the end. Fundamentally, with the defeat of the Czechoslovak model, the process was broken off, and what came afterward was, in my eyes, forms of decline."[45]

He and others working on the Göttingen alternative newspaper Politikon "really intervened heavily to criticize all these K Groups, and these M[arxist]-L[eninist] parties. That was one of our main impulses" at that point. In turn, Frank Böckelmann recalled his own challenge to the "disciplined cadre work" that the "proselytes" extolled, arguing that this only played into the hands of status quo.[46] The combination of "blind hope and expectation, and blind disappointment, radical direct action, and rapid resignation" were representative again only of outmoded ways of thinking – and feeling – as he saw it. They were "petit-bourgeois forms of reaction. They are reminiscent of the desperate affects that dominate the one who throws or lays a bomb, just to elicit some kind of reaction from the masses."[47]

hard Lucas, Zwei Formen von Radikalismus in der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung, Frankfurt am Main 1976.

[42] Cf. Klaus Ziemer, Real existierender Sozialismus, in: Dieter Nohlen (ed.), Lexikon der Politik, vol. 7, Berlin 2004, pp. 535seq.

[43] Cf. Michael Roik, Die DKP und die demokratischen Parteien 1968–1984, Paderborn/München 2006.

[44] Among others, interview with Sibylle Plogstedt, 26. 6. 2008, in which Plogstedt described agonizing discussion over Soviet tanks in Prague in August 1968 in the Freie Universität chapter of the SDS (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund).

[45] Interview Richard W., 2. 7. 2004.

[46] Interview Frank Böckelmann, 29. 6. 2004.

[47] Frank Böckelmann, Schöner wohnen, in: ibid. (ed.), Befreiung des Alltags. Modelle eines Zusammenlebens ohne Leistungsdruck, Frustration und Angst, München 1970, pp. 28–32, cit. 29 seq.

Böckelmann thus rejected the uses of the particular emotional patterns he saw taking hold in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Contemporary activists made a powerful case themselves for the role, legitimate, certainly in any case unavoidable, of emotion in politics.[48] Further, some activists at least tied emotions themselves to particular political ideas, and to specific forms of understanding change.

By the mid-1970s, disappointed activists within as well as outside the DKP and Maoist groups continued their own processes of rethinking, in the context of disappointment and other emotional influences. By the time of Mao's death in 1976, and even before most activists came to believe the dystopian news reports about the Cultural Revolution in China, their own, direct experience of disappointment brought them to doubt the functionality of this model too. Paul T. became convinced after living and working with factory laborers for several years that, notwithstanding regular, even efficacious small-scale actions, a "workers' revolution" was no longer in the offing in post-industrial Germany, notwithstanding even the recession that now reigned, and disparities of pay between German and "guest" workers. Even after several years of organizing, the workers "would undoubtedly rather have beaten us. There was nothing to be done," Paul concluded.

The standard interpretation of such determinations is that these activists finally came to their senses, and gave up on such silly and even dangerous notions of "revolution" – at least in West Germany. But what KPD/AO co-founder Christian Semler and others came to conclude was arguably slightly more complicated: a challenge both to Marxist-Leninist and to liberal capitalist ("anti-")ideology. Semler came to dispute the idea of an opposition between revolution and reform as characterized by relative speed, and to question both terms altogether. This was another notion, like that of revolutionary violence, that was fixed in a nineteenth-century worldview. Rather, the question of change concerned a degree of radicality, not necessarily a sudden overturning of everything, within a day, or a year. The notion of rapid and all-consuming shifts gave way in Semler's mind to "ebbs and flows" of historical change, requiring indeed a new "emotional" adjustment among activists.[49] Activist Manfred D. put it in terms of his experience with living communities (Wohngemeinschaften) and lifestyle experiments. One was always regularly "disappointed," and, "permanently, someone was moving out."[50] Indeed, he came to understand, there was no magical endpoint. The only thing possible was to try to create change that was meaningful; to move from grand progressions to continuous efforts to ensure that one learned from the past to try to create a better future. Contemporaries' experiences, their disappointment, and their concomitant

[48] See Belinda Davis, Provokation als Emanzipation. 1968 und die Emotionen, in: Vorgänge 42 (2003), pp. 41–49; ibid., Civil Society in a New Key? Feminist and Alternative Groups in 1970s West Germany, in: Karen Hagemann/Sonya Michel/Gunilla Budde (eds.), Civil Society and Gender Justice: Historical and Comparative Perspectives, New York 2008, pp. 208–23. On activists' "management" of and response to their expectations, see also in this volume contributions by Christian Helm and Anna Greithanner, also Konrad Sziedat.

[49] Interview Christian Semler, July 2003.

[50] Interview Hubert V., 23. 6. 2004.

rethinking thus returned them to the belief that there was no "master plan," no necessary path forward, no sense that there was a "forward" in any grand sense. Kommune 2's disappointment led directly to the sense that "we can't believe in such a reason of history anymore, one that effectively gets behind the backs of those who are affected."[51]

A tiny number insisted they could and had to make the moment, even without the working masses. But it was a relatively very few and a diminishing number who saw acts of offensive physical violence as likely to engender a sudden rupture and concomitant total change, even presuming this was a necessary good. Their own experiences told them otherwise. In this regard certainly, emotional response was yet again a powerful and valuable influence. Activists interviewed three to four decades after their contemporary experience with violence wielded toward them often initially dismissed these experiences, making light of them. As Christian Semler "stuck up the first posters" that he distributed across West Berlin in 1967, "'wanted posters' against the Shah [of Iran], I was really scared shitless. I was really afraid. […] I was really afraid," he repeated, then quickly adding, "although really nothing could have happened to me."[52] But his own and others' contemporary experience proved otherwise: the regularized beatings, along with arrests, and threats of future livelihood became a norm well outside of the RAF, and even the KPD.[53] Rainer Langhans claimed that his eye-opening and disappointing experience in the Bundeswehr convinced him already in the early 1960s that physical violence was only a tool of the old system. It could at best "change relations only on the surface," which was "not radical enough."[54] Here too, process was central to a new understanding of change – and the process came back to changing one's own head. Most felt that their experience had simply proven definitively that, for any foreseeable future, physical violence offered no compelling evidence it could bring about any desired apocalyptic revolution, nor did it seem to hold any mystical or "purifying" political power. It was increasingly clear to Katrin M.

"that violence produces only more violence, and, above all, it animates the other side, that is, the state, to declare still further measures along the lines of the emergency laws […], etc. […] That was also really then the tragedy of the '60s and '70s. […] [T]here were still way too many of these old thought structures."[55]

[51] Kommune 2, Versuch der Revolutionierung, p. 9.

[52] Interview Christian Semler, July 2003.

[53] Aside from physical harm, posting the *Steckbriefe* could have earned him eighteen months to two years in jail. Cf. Belinda Davis, Jenseits von Terror und Rückzug. Die Suche nach politischem Spielraum und Strategien im Westdeutschland der siebziger Jahre, in: Klaus Weinhauer/Jörg Requate/Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds.), Terrorismus in der Bundesrepublik. Medien, Staat und Subkulturen in den 1970er Jahren, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2006, pp. 154–86.

[54] "We didn't know how it was going to turn out": Contemporary Activists Discuss their Experiences of the 1960s and 1970s, in: Belinda Davis et al. (eds.), Changing the World, Changing Oneself. Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the U. S. in the 1960s and 1970s, New York 2010, pp. 277–302, here p. 283. Compare too Rainer Langhans, Theoria Diffusa, Munich 1986.

[55] Interview Katrin M., 18. 7. 2002.

This thinking brought in far greater numbers of activists still in the course of the 1970s and early 1980s, and saw an enormous proliferation of the forms of activism. We can see these critical and important *Lernprozesse* too in the responses of those who engaged in the new social movements of the 1970s, and the simultaneous "autonomist" lifestyle experiments. In 1975, long before he joined the SPD, Thomas Schmid wrote in the new alternative newspaper "Autonomie" to reject the meaningfulness of any "totalizing revolutionary organization" altogether, and at the same time to avoid resignation, urging readers rather to focus on building radical change in and through their everyday lives: "the satisfaction of individ[ual] needs, bound up with the polit[ical] struggle, against the sources of their repression," as Kommune 2 styled it.[56] This direction too reflected the lessons of earlier disappointments, and their subsequent rethinking and redirecting, along with their observation of the coterminous experiments of others, like those in the DKP and in the K-Gruppen, with which there was often collaborative practical work. The unhappiness, dismay, and frustration of many women activists in the late 1960s lay as much with their male counterparts as with the failures of revolution: men who, as Teresa found, "had amazingly big mouths," and "comported themselves frequently in gender relations […] like their fathers."[57] This inspired new experiments in forms of popular political organization, such as autonomist, women-only groupings, an early piece of the women's movement in West Berlin/West Germany. This approached the Szene in which Sanders-Brahms's fictional Grischa worked. Yet, was such autonomist action itself "utopian," in the sense that Grischa dismissed?[58] Could such experiments be successful because of their small scale and their exclusivity: a new-age utopian socialism? Could this create some kind of end model, a perfect solution? Sabine M.'s initial experience suggested it could, when she cofounded a women's *Wohngemeinschaft* and magazine collective in West Berlin that brought together her everyday life and her politics, in new forms of political organization. She waxed rhapsodic about the sense of Ganzheitlichkeit that grew out of the experiment, of the type that Grischa sought in the film: bringing together not only the personal, political, and professional, but representing Grenzüberschreitungen too among the cerebral, the emotional, and the physical.

Yet this women-only organization also offered no magic panacea, despite the gender-based paradigm Sanders-Brahms deploys in her film. Sabine eventually found intolerable the "forms of orthodoxy," even among women: indeed, "as if the revolution stood imminently before you, and you had to think twice about

[56] Thomas Schmid, Facing reality: Organisation kaputt, in: Autonomie. Materialien gegen die Fabrikgesellschaft 1 (1975), no. 1, pp. 16–35; Kommune 2, Versuch der Revolutionierung, p. 9. See too Peter Mosler, Was wir wollten, was wir wurden. Studentenrevolte, zehn Jahre danach, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1977; Walter Hollstein/Boris Penth, Alternativprojekte. Beispiele gegen die Resignation, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1980; Lothar Baier et al. (eds.), Die Linke neu denken. Acht Lockerungen, Berlin 1984.

[57] Interview Teresa M., 27. 7. 2006.

[58] Cf. Wolfgang Kraushaar, Autonomie oder Getto?, in: ibid. (ed.), Revolte und Reflexion. Politische Aufsätze 1976–87, Frankfurt am Main 1990, pp. 97–150.

whether you should say something or not," she finished ironically, comparing their own efforts to earlier disappointing experiences concerning revolution.[59] The experience dashed renewed "utopian" hopes, bringing fresh "disappointments."[60] Yet, again, this contributed to an increasingly collective learning experience. As contemporaries came to understand it, none of the political experiments of the time offered the one "right," or "finished" model. Indeed there was and would never be a finished model, activists concluded out of their constant disappointments. But this did not mean that these efforts were worthless: that change was worthless, impossible, or possible only in "tender little reforms" to the larger system.[61] This was no validation of the triumph of modernist reform over revolution, of an end of ideology[62] as simply confirming what was. Change was, activists concluded, all about the process itself. Katharina Rutschky, long-known for her own pragmatic challenge to what she saw as utopian aspects of the women's movement was at the same time deeply "disappointed" by what she found to be the Alice Schwarzer's reformist efforts: "they totally caved in," making the struggle for abortion rights too "a really dark chapter."[63]

In turn, the disappointment itself was not just the unfortunate by-product of constant "trial and error" in political rethinking and action. Constant disappointment was the norm, because there was no perfect solution, there was no single right way that had eluded all of these activists. Disappointment pushed activists to keep working to shape change, with the understanding that change itself was the only norm. These were the sorts of solutions the character Grischa sought, in her quest to merge her "professional and political life" – and the other parts of her life. Collectively and ongoingly, these efforts contributed to a "liberation of everyday life," as Frank Böckelmann wrote of already in 1970.

"[C]ounter-models of living together and fulfilling needs […] are no prognoses […]. They don't purport that their realization is imperative and inevitable [unumgänglich], and they don't incorporate all the developing tendencies. They are to be provocations to think, and to recognize the paralyzing gravitational force of the status quo as arbitrary. They don't mean to distract, but rather to make one unsatisfied."[64]

[59] Interview Sabine M., 14. 7. 2005. Wiebke S., another member of this collective, added, "die Attraktivität der Frauenbewegung am Anfang war nicht unbedingt, dass ich unbedingt gegen den § 218 kämpfen wollte, sondern mehr, dass sich so eine Kommunikation zwischen Frauen ergibt, die ich gar nicht kannte und die mich fasziniert hat. Das war einfach damals so. Was noch kommen würde an Enttäuschungen […], das wusste ich damals noch nicht," she ended laughing ruefully. Interview Wiebke S., 18. 7. 2005.

[60] Such experiments were yet new examples of the "naïve and grotesque" efforts to "put utopias into practice," as Italian contemporary Giuseppina Ciuffreda along with Nicole Janigro rather harshly describe it. Giuseppina Ciuffreda/Nicole Janigro (eds.), Vivere altrimenti. Milano 1997, cited in Luisa Passerini, Memory and Utopia: The Primacy of Inter-Subjectivity, London 2014 (first published 2007), p. 65.

[61] Interview Katrin M., 18. 7. 2002.

[62] Originally, Daniel Bell, The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties, New York, 1960.

[63] Interview Katharina Rutschky, June 2008.

[64] Böckelmann, Befreiung, Frontispiz. The reference in the context of this introductory epigraph is specifically to the alternative possibilities discussed in the book, but the generalized version is consistent with Böckelmann's point.

IV. Disappointment as Liberation from Historical Modernity

The *Befreiung* came in and through the collective process, lasting only as long as the ongoing efforts to pursue it. Böckelmann thus warned precisely against putting too much faith in any single effort – and against seeking an "ultimate" transformation: those who "hoped for everything from the Kommunen," and who already by 1970 claimed that "without transformation of the relations of production, a revolutionization of the forms of everyday life [could have] only a masking effect, […] as they first now understood." This was indeed a problem of the absolute, "contradictory and panicky claims that were imposed on the new lifestyle forms," after the great disappointments in turn of the earlier seemingly imminent revolution in the streets. The answer was in the continual blossoming of the variety of experiments, simultaneous and serial, each drawing on the last, through continued recounting and sharing of efforts. It lay in the "forms of transition" that could represent change that was great and yet not bound by being revolutionary – nor indeed tied to activists' own "capacity for suffering."[65] This was no dismissal of the power of the prevailing economic relations of power. It was rather a challenge concerning the best tools to defy those relations – and a remonstration not to simply get lost in one's disappointment. Böckelmann's own effort in the collection he published was one of hundreds of thousands of such accounts of what disparate groups were trying out, the subject of countless articles, published collections, entire newspapers, collectively demonstrating the enormous scope of the challenge.[66] Böckelmann saw these experiments as having truly radical potential: to challenge the structures of the existing society built to shape the isolated bourgeois individual in the concrete world as in the deepest psychological formation, such that individuals could be entirely removed from their own needs. The experiments were radical too in their very conceptualization and enactment. Older contemporary Hans Magnus Enzensberger asked, of each thing: does it have to be this way? It was about the ability to and insistence on imagining a different future. Yet, he insisted, "I like doubts better than [pretty] sentiments. I have no need of Weltbilder without contradictions. In case of doubt, reality decides," he added, refuting re-

[65] Ibid., p. 29.

[66] As a tiny sample, cf. the seminal Kommune 2, Versuch der Revolutionierung; Häuserrat Frankfurt, Wohnungskampf in Frankfurt, München 1974; Albert Herrenknecht/Wolfgang Hätscher/Stefan Koospal, Träume, Hoffnungen, Kämpfe … Ein Lesebuch zur Jugendzentrumsbewegung, Frankfurt am Main 1977; Klaas Jarchow (ed.), Dörfer wachsen in der Stadt. Beiträge zur städtischen Gegenkultur, Alpen 1980; Herrad Schenk, Wir leben zusammen nicht allein. Wohngemeinschaften heute, Köln 1984; also regular columns and articles in the innumerable contemporary alternative serial publications, like "Pflasterstrand," "Wir wollen alles," "Carlo Sponti," and "Courage"; to more localized and/or singularly focused publications, from "Magazin für KiezKultur," the "Zeitung für Selbstverwaltung," to the "Jugenzentrumsinitiative (JZI) Harburg Wandzeitung" cf. Sven Reichardt, Authentizität und Gemeinschaft. Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren, Berlin 2014.

newed visions of "revolution."[67] Disappointments thus came to feed visions not of a perfect future, but rather, as contemporary Italian activist and historian Luisa Passerini put it, a radical criticism of the present and in changes that had to be begun immediately in the context of one's own situation, a "disrupt[ion of] the existing political sphere, its methods and its aims," and "a challenge to the forms of power in daily life, and thus the discovery of the political dimension of every sphere."[68] As Böckelmann put it, "Blind hope and expectation, and blind disappointment, radical direct action and rapid resignation are […] petit bourgeois forms of reaction."[69]

Böckelmann's and others view of "needs," emotional and otherwise, suggests that Heinrich's enduring disappointment in Sanders-Brahms's film was not necessarily the useless counterpart to Grischa's pragmatic push to the future: it was what allowed contemporary activists broadly to transcend the modernist binary between "reformist" and "revolutionary" change, to imagine oneself completely beyond the iron cage of modern political thought.[70] Furthermore, in his mourning for lost fantasies too, Heinrich may be more than Grischa's negative counterpart. Heinrich's disabling disappointments seem inextricably bound up with his longing for a "utopia." Many activists seemed to agree retrospectively, associating "utopia" with "dogmatism," "intolerance," and "violence." Manfred D. claimed decades after the period that he found the general ideas of the period "right, now as then. Only – one must not take to heart this dogma": in other words, "no utopia."[71] In the early 1970s, as Sanders-Brahms's characters struggled with their disappointments, Thomas Schmid and other Spontis in Frankfurt moved from organizing laborers for revolution in the factories to organizing against the destruction of existing housing in Frankfurt's Westend. "That was […] a movement that had real outcomes in that society, and not rather somewhere on the horizon of utopia."[72] Yet, by the mid-1970s, activists used "utopia" to describe not the reality that never materialized, nor the perfect future that awaited, but rather the very moment when they could imagine a beautiful future.[73]

[67] Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, An Peter Weiss und andere, in: Joachim Schickel (ed.), Über Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Frankfurt am Main 1970, p. 251. Born in 1929, Enzensberger demonstrates the limits of any aged-based generalization of affect.

[68] Luisa Passerini, "Utopia" and Desire, in: Thesis Eleven 68 (2002), p. 21.

[69] Böckelmann, Befreiung, p. 29.

[70] The importance of *Fantasie*, in all senses of the word, and the ability to imagine things as completely different, is well-recognized as an element in early 1968, telegraphed in slogans of the "Paris May," as in "die Fantasie an die Macht," "Traum ist Wirklichkeit," "Es ist verboten zu verbieten," and "Unter dem Pflaster liegt der Strand." Cf. Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, "Die Phantasie an die Macht". Mai 68 in Frankreich, Frankfurt am Main 1995; Sabine von Dirke, "All Power to the Imagination!". The West German Counterculture from the Student Movement to the Greens, Lincoln/London 1997.

[71] Interview Manfred D., July 2004.

[72] Interview Thomas Schmid, 27. 7. 2005.

[73] Compare on this also for the Italian case, Claudio Magris, Utopia e disincanto. Saggi 1974–1998, Milano 1999; Elvio Fachinelli, "La protesta sul lettino," in: idem, Intorno al '68, ed. by Marco Conci/Francesco Marchioro, Bolsena 1988.

V. Disappointment + Imagination

This view of utopia is consistent with Herbert Marcuse's usage in July 1967, shortly after protestor Benno Ohnesorg's execution by police.[74] In this talk at the Freie Universität, Herbert Marcuse insistently related to his distraught audience of thousands a new story of the term. He claimed that critics' charges of activists pursuing "utopia," as signifying wild and risible ends, was itself a function of a late-industrial, consumerist "repressive tolerance." This inspired rather fear, creating narrow limits on what people could dream about and strive for. Many in attendance in the great FU Audimax expressed frustration in the discussion that followed the talk. Some wanted concrete answers from him on the "Utopieproblem": how specifically to move from posing to realizing their fantasies; how to push beyond the elimination of an "empire of need" to an "empire of freedom," as Marcuse had put it, to fulfilling a historical need for happiness.[75] At this moment, it felt difficult to see outside this "Reich der Notwendigkeit," except as an imaginary act. Yet, within two years, young German activists had borrowed the notion of "we want it all" from the Italians. Initially, the expression read "we want it all – and indeed right now." Within the next years, the emphasis on this immediacy of realizing one's demands, producing "total" change, faded away. By the mid-1970s, Carlo Sponti pressed upon their readers not to lose the evolving sense of utopia, in their despair at the mentality of besiegement that dominated over the "RAF Question." In June 1977, the same paper bemoaned insufficient utopia among contemporary activists. A year later, in honor of Marcuse's 80th birthday, and in the aftermath of the German Autumn, writers contrasted the "impossible revolution" with a "revolution of the impossible."[76] In this context, the notion of revolution itself emerged as an expression of fantasy: an idea of something possible that hadn't been before, that which "put everything in question," as Katrin M. put it. It was "normal," thus, Cohn-

[74] Published as Herbert Marcuse, Das Ende der Utopie. Herbert Marcuse diskutiert mit Studenten und Professoren Westberlins an der Freien Universität Berlin über die Möglichkeiten und Chancen einer politischen Opposition in den Metropolen in Zusammenhang mit den Befreiungsbewegungen in den Ländern der Dritten Welt, ed. by Horst Kurnitzky/Hansmartin Kuhn, Berlin 1967. To be sure, Marcuse had published similar characterizations earlier, as had Theodor Adorno, Ernst Bloch, and Peter Brückner, among others. Compare the 1966 notes of Sigrid Fronius, in discussion with fellow members of the Freie Universität's chapter of the SDS, concerning *Entfremdung* and *Utopiewillen*. Archiv "APO und soziale Bewegungen," Freie Universität Berlin, Nachlass Sigrid Fronius, 1965–66 #1. The timing for a broader rethinking of the concept seems to have been important, however.

[75] In the discussion following the presentation, published in Marcuse, Das Ende, here p. 22seq.

[76] Carlo Sponti. Heidelsberg illustre Illustrierte, Nr. 34/35 (6/1977), on the "neue Studentenbewung"; ibid., Nr. 43 (6/1978). Already a decade earlier, Rudi Dutschke described revolution as "nicht ein kurzer Akt, wo mal irgendwas geschieht, und dann ist alles anders. Revolution ist ein langer, komplizierter Prozess, wo der Mensch anders werden muss." Podium Discussion, 24. 11. 1967, Hamburg, with Rudolf Augstein and Ralf Dahrendorf, see at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FlXnmVysQi4 (13. 4. 2020); cf. Gretchen Dutschke-Klotz's description, in: ibid., Wir hatten ein barbarisches, schönes Leben. Rudi Dutschke – eine Biographie, Köln 1996, p. 168 f.

Bendit declared sympathetically in '86, "daß Leute, die ‚alles, und zwar gleich' gefordert haben, zuzüglich der Macht mit und ohne Gewehre," now felt deep "Wehmut" about this past, as had Sanders-Brahms's Heinrich.[77] Cohn-Bendit continued, however, "[i]n my private life as in my political activities, I have always attempted to safeguard a continuity between my convictions from yesterday, my activities in the present, and the future of which I dream." As such, disappointment was no antithesis to fantasy, to imagination. It was rather an important counterpart, the reminder of the nature of change, the "realistic" part of "be realistic, demand the impossible."[78]

Thus, as Daniel Cohn-Bendit concluded a few years later, earlier "revolutionary projections" and focus on the "mythical figure of the professional revolutionary" did not mean the "end of the revolutionary dream." Rather, this was only a moment in the transformation of thought, and of the desire for change that "made possible fundamental changes in thinking as well as a life in revolt."[79] This was an "unfinished reality": but a very lesson of the 1970s and moving forward was that, indeed, this reality would never be finished – nor even necessarily one of "progress." The changes in thinking and corresponding action in this period, promoted by disappointment, were thus not simply a move from magical thinking or "fundamentalism" to realism in the form of reformism. Activists' conclusions in terms of a necessary commitment to continual efforts at experimentation and change were wearing, and the broad extraparliamentary movement as a whole ended in the early 1980s.[80]

These last were arguably simply the next steps in the ever-changing thinking I have tried here to trace. Yet I want to make the case that we dismiss to our loss the period's development of thought, fueled by cycles of disappointment and other feelings, concerning history and agency. In 2008, a series of debates on "Paris-Berlin" appeared on German television; the fifth debate centered on the question "War '68 die letzte Utopie?" The upshot seemed to be that present-day French and Germans had across the board settled with greater or lesser reluctance into a comfortable status quo, alongside a renewed allergy to grassroots politics that was the outsized and inappropriate reaction to "9/11."[81] And yet the earlier legacies of

[77] Cohn-Bendit, Wir haben sie so geliebt, p. 8.

[78] In 1970, author-activist Peter Schneider (like Enzensberger, also born earlier than conventionally defined "68ers") held a fierce debate with journalists over what it was that constituted a "realistic" view of the political landscape and future in the BRD. See the discussion this interaction engendered among activists, in: International Institute for Social History, file "Rote Zellen 1970". Cf. also Peter Schneider, Lenz, Berlin 1974.

[79] Cohn-Bendit, Wir haben sie so geliebt, p. 16. See here also Gotto, Enttäuschung in der Demokratie, p. 355 ff., for a compelling discussion of the relation of disappointment and the "loss of utopia."

[80] See Lauren G. Berlant, Cruel Optimism, Durham 2011. On the APO as a broad but more or less single movement from the early 1960s into the early 1980s, see Davis, The Internal Life of Politics.

[81] See conversely activists who still emphasize a framework of "revolution" versus "reform": as one example, Warren Blumenfeld, "Revolution v. Reform: Beyond '4 Ms' of Queer Politics," published on: The Good Men Project, 28. 6. 2016, http://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/revolution-v-reform-beyond-4-ms-queer-politics-wcz/ (16. 12. 2019).

'68 and its direct aftermath demonstrated more creative and productive lessons drawn from the disappointments of the era than the television panelists described: that radical, violent, popularly-driven change or top-down parliamentary reforms, coupled with narrowly conceived Bürgerinitiativen here or there do not remain the only options for envisioning deep and continuing political change. Contemporary activists challenged this very framework of political modernity, in their thinking and in their acting. Forgotten and especially flattened legacies of the 1960s and 1970s might now rather be better recognized in a broader public, as a number of those present had already helped realize in some fashion. It is a question of *anders denken* and, as Rudi Dutschke suggested already in 1967, of *anders werden*; of telling the story of the past so that one might continue to draw both from disappointment and imagination.