Detlef Siegfried

'Don't Trust Anyone Older Than 30?' Voices of Conflict and Consensus between Generations in 1960s West Germany

For West German youth, well into the second half of the 1960s, Great Britain was the Promised Land. To some extent this was due to the fact that in Britain young people seemingly found it easier to realize their cultural preferences. In 1967, the German newspaper *Tagesspiegel* declared: 'Indeed, in no country have young people been accepted as a domestic force more than in detached and not exactly passionate England.'[1] Opinion polls confirmed this impression. At the beginning of the 1960s, 32 per cent of Italians, 34 per cent of French, 39 per cent of Germans, 41 per cent of Dutch, but as many as 59 per cent of Britons had a generally positive impression of the young generation.[2] Germans appeared neither particularly friendly nor particularly unfriendly towards their offspring. Nonetheless, German activists in the new and repeatedly contested youth cultures perceived the differences between Germany and Great Britain to be significant. According to Manfred Weißleder, the creator of the Hamburg Star Club, Beat music in England would 'not [be considered as] a kind of rebellion against the civil order', but as an 'accepted leisure habit of the young',[3] while in Germany the 'die-hards' opposed, at times with force, young people's taste in music as well as particular clothes and hairstyles.

Undoubtedly, the 'long 1960s' between roughly 1958 and 1973 in West Germany were also 'golden years' of economic prosperity, increased leisure time, deformalization of societal relations and political liberalization. Many of these developments were substantially advanced by the young generation. Nevertheless, confrontations, at times extremely fierce, even taking the form of organized terrorism, occurred in Germany, and these also had their origins in the young generation. Generational conflict was one of the most significant phenomena that, in the view of contemporaries, marked the 1960s. At the end of the decade, the newspaper *Die Welt* stated: 'Without a doubt, this generational conflict is the greatest surprise of the postwar era, probably the greatest surprise of all the unexpected happenings.'[4]

---

1   *Tagesspiegel*, 22 October 1967.
2   Das Beste aus Reader's Digest (eds), *Sieben-Länder-Untersuchung. Eine vergleichende Marktuntersuchung in Belgien, Frankreich, Großbritannien, Holland, Italien, Luxemburg und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (1963), 21.
3   *Star Club News*, October 1965; next quotation: June 1965.
4   *Die Welt*, 18 May 1969.

The origin of a significant part of the 1960s' dynamism lies in the contra-diction that young people who profited most from the cultural revolution were those who at the same time were most opposed to society. They also happened to be the élite of their generation: students from mainly bourgeois back-grounds.

By the early 1960s, liberal participants in public debates acknowledged that generations reacted differently to the dramatic transformation of social reali-ties. For example, Lilo Weinsheimer, an editor of the regional newspaper *Bremer Nachrichten*, stated:

> [Since its founding,] the Federal Republic has undergone a breathtaking revolution from nothing to everything — a revolution that large parts of society have not consciously registered. Three generations — grandparents, parents and children — are searching for the norm. Often, older people do not want to admit that they too are confused about the present.[5]

Weinsheimer was representative of those older people, and while not totally sympathetic towards young people's new cultural preferences, she none the less reacted to them with tolerance. Her report of a dialogue with young people demonstrates this:

> Recently, I met with Beatles fans, who repeatedly fainted when they listened to the 'Fab Four'. Once they had regained consciousness, we had a conversation and they asked me: 'OK, what did you do when you were our age?' I told them that my generation had to go to war when we were their age. However, I added right away that this was not to our credit — as is so often claimed — it was simply our fate, and that the young people of today had opportunities we never had: to choose and to decide.

Not all adults reacted in this way to young people, nor did all young people like to listen to their elders' war stories. The circumstances under which these people grew up were important for their ability to adapt to a consumer society as well as to maintain an intergenerational dialogue. Scholars have recently argued that the societal reality of the Western world was characterized more by generational consensus than by generational conflict. Young people as well as their elders benefited from the enormous economic growth of the 1950s and the 1960s.[6] In West Germany, the state reacted much more liberally to youth-ful styles than did National Socialism or the East German communist regime — not least in order to dissociate itself from totalitarianism.[7] On the other hand, conflict between the generations in West Germany was much greater than, for example, in Great Britain or the Scandinavian countries.[8] This article

5   Lilo Weinsheimer, 'Kritische Bemerkungen zur Jugendringsarbeit', 8 April 1964, Staatsarchiv Bremen (StAB), Landesjugendring 283.
6   Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties. Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958–c.1974* (Oxford 1998).
7   Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels. Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA and London 2000).
8   Mark Roseman (ed.), *Generations in Conflict. Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in*

will make the case that in Germany the assumption that there was genera-
tional consensus would be as false as the claim that generational conflict
was all-pervading. Instead, a mixture of both elements made up the specific
dynamic of West Germany in the 1960s. The first part of this article will
describe in more detail which generations interacted with each other during
the 1960s. The second section will sketch the transformation of youth culture
from initially playing a marginal role to becoming a dominant feature in West
German culture, which increasingly also drew adults under its spell. The third
section will discuss the question of generational conflict, and the final section
will illustrate the reactions of liberal participants in public debates and the
significance of the nazi past for the generational conflict.

From the latter third of the 1950s, changes in the economic and social life of
the country took place at an increasing rate. Yet attitudes towards political
culture, life styles and moral norms did not keep pace with these develop-
ments. This disjointed evolution was felt particularly by members of the
generations that had grown up during the *Kaiserreich* and who were already
experiencing a third change of political system within their lifetime,[9] amongst
whom were Konrad Adenauer, who was born in 1876 and was German
Chancellor until 1963, and his successor Ludwig Erhard (born 1897). They,
however, withdrew from public life in the mid-1960s. Including them, five
other political generations encountered each other during the long 1960s. The
second generation consisted of those who were born around the time of the
first world war, who grew up during the Weimar Republic and who started
their careers during the 1930s and 1940s. These included Kurt Georg
Kiesinger (1904), Germany's Chancellor from 1966 to 1969, Erich Duensing
(1905), Berlin's police president from 1962 to 1967, the Social Democrat
Herbert Wehner (1906) and the media tycoon Axel Springer (1912).[10] Third,
the long 1960s were shaped by those who were children during the Third
Reich, who experienced the end of the war as youths or very young adults, and
who after the war entered adult life. Because of the great impact that the end

---

Germany 1770–1968 (Cambridge 1995). On generations, see the classic definition by Karl
Mannheim, 'Das Problem der Generationen' in Mannheim, *Wissenssoziologie. Auswahl aus dem
Werk* (Neuwied and Berlin 1970), 509–65.
9   For sketches on the 1960s generations, cf. Axel Schildt, *Ankunft im Westen. Ein Essay zur
Erfolgsgeschichte der Bundesrepublik* (Frankfurt 1999), 181ff.; Ulrich Herbert, 'Liberalisierung
als Lernprozeß. Die Bundesrepublik in der deutschen Geschichte — eine Skizze' in Ulrich Herbert,
(ed.), *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland. Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung, 1945–
1980* (Göttingen 2002), 7–49, in particular 43ff.
10   For information pertaining to the nazi élite, which by and large recruited most of its members
from this generation, cf. Ulrich Herbert, 'Generation der Sachlichkeit. Die völkische
Studentenbewegung der frühen zwanziger Jahre in Deutschland' in Frank Bajohr, Werner Johe
and Uwe Lohalm (eds), *Zivilisation und Barbarei. Die widersprüchlichen Potentiale der Moderne*
(Hamburg 1991), 115–44; Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten. Das Führungskorps des
Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg 2002).

of the war had on their lives, they were called the 'Forty-fiver generation'.[11]
Among this group were such people as the publisher of the weekly news mag-
azine *Der Spiegel*, Rudolf Augstein (1923), the writer Hans Magnus
Enzensberger (1929), the social philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1930), and the
Christian Democrat and later German Chancellor Helmut Kohl (1930). These
men distanced themselves from National Socialism, grasped the new opportu-
nities which resulted from West Germany's democratic form of government
and its international integration, as well as its economic success, and, on the
whole, were important voices during the second half of the 1950s. At times,
they criticized contemporary developments, not least those issues that linked
West Germany to its nazi past. Towards the following generation, which later
became known as the 'Sixty-eighter generation', they initially felt a great deal
of sympathy, because they saw in the younger people allies in their fight for
a political and cultural renewal of the Federal Republic of Germany. The
members of this fourth generation were born roughly between the years 1938
and 1948. Among them were well-known public figures of the student move-
ment such as Dieter Kunzelmann (1939), Rudi Dutschke (1940) and Daniel
Cohn-Bendit (1945). However, there were also public figures within this
generation such as the Social Democrat Peter Glotz (1939), who were sceptical
of their own generation's leaders.[12]

   Within the Sixty-eighter generation, there were also differences in age. As a
general rule, the younger the individuals the more they were open to the bene-
fits of a consumer society. Public figures of different ages functioned as media-
tors of pop culture. Most important, however, were those of the Forty-fiver
generation and those who stood between this and the Sixty-eighter generation:
specifically, the publisher of the magazine *Konkret* Klaus Rainer Röhl (1928),
the aforementioned manager of the Hamburg 'Star Club' Manfred Weißleder
(1928), the concert tour manager Fritz Rau (1930), the editor of the TV show
'Beat Club' Michael Leckebusch (1935), the music commentator Helmut
Salzinger (1935) and the writer Hubert Fichte (1937). By the latter third of the
1960s, the youngest of them were taking on the role of mediator and articu-
lating their interests, such as the writer Rolf Dieter Brinkmann (1940), the
author, festival manager and music producer Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser (1943) and
the journalist Henryk M. Broder (1946). The fifth and youngest generation
drew attention to itself from the early 1970s. The members of this generation
were born during the early 1950s and experienced their political and cultural
coming-of-age during the second half of the 1960s when their older brothers
and sisters were expanding the range of norms in all fields. They were the
adherents of the 'counterculture' as well as the members of the myriad leftist
socialist and communist groups of the 1970s. Within this group were rock
musicians such as Peter Bursch (1949) and Rio Reiser (1950), and political

11   Dirk Moses, 'The Forty-Fivers. A Generation between Fascism and Democracy', *German
Politics and Society*, 17, 1 (1999), 94–126.
12   Heinz Bude, *Das Altern einer Generation. Die Jahrgänge 1938 bis 1948* (Frankfurt 1995).

activists like Thomas Ebermann (1951); there were also members of the so-called 'second generation' of the West German terrorist group Roten Armee Fraktion (RAF) such as Susanne Albrecht (1950).

Obviously, within the five generations there were differences of origin and region, social status and political bias, sex and religious inclination, etc. Nonetheless, there were also pronounced similarities because each generation had adjusted to the accelerated changes in society in different ways. The 1960s' special dynamism of change — as well as the numerous conflicts which were an essential element of this dynamism — derived from the co-existence and competition between these different generations.

In the 1950s, adults in general were rather sceptical of their offspring. This can be explained by the fact that after the disaster of National Socialism, high expectations were placed in the young. The succeeding generation was supposed to do everything better. As a result of these great hopes, there was also anxiety that this new generation could choose the wrong path or that it could be 'misled'. In the various manifestations of the consumer society, people believed they saw symptoms of such mistaken developments. By the beginning of the 1960s, adults complained that young people were succumbing too easily to consumer society's enticements. Roughly 60 per cent of those over 30 years of age thought that the young were too 'keen on pleasure'.[13] However, a significant number of young people themselves, especially among the better educated, roughly one third of the 16– to 29-year-olds, also thought along similar lines. In 1963, a 17-year-old pupil declared: 'I know, how miserable [and] wretched this youth is compared to passionate, spirited, zestful, productive, [and] impatient youth of other generations. I know that this youth is lax, miserable, [and] pitiful and I admit it.'

However, from his perspective, it was the adults who, impotent because of disillusioned ideals, were unable to be anything other than a devastated society steeped in materialism: 'You [the adults] complain about youth's hollowness? Please, take a good look at the adults' hunt for prosperity and pleasure [and] their internal process of becoming shallow within this disgusting economic miracle.'[14]

A 20-year-old clerk agreed with this declaration. Alluding to the successful slogan the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) had adopted during the 1957 federal election campaign, which gave Chancellor Adenauer a landslide victory, he commented: 'No experiments! Prosperity, standard of living, security, conformism! The path has been depicted and outlined to becoming a "young petit bourgeois".'

In these examples, the combination of idealistic objection to consumerism

---

13   *Allensbach-Pressedienst*, no. 36, 1960.
14   Erika Wisselinck, *Volk ohne Traum. Das Lebensgefühl der jungen Generation in Selbst-zeugnissen*, (Munich 1964), 12f., next quotation: 27.

and critique of the political standstill, which by the end of the 1960s set the
tone for the student movement, could already be detected.

   During the late 1950s and the early 1960s, this critique was clearly dis-
cernible, since it was becoming ever more apparent that young people were
absorbing themselves in the bright world of material goods and leisure oppor-
tunities provided by the consumer industry. Initially, this predominantly
involved youths from working-class backgrounds; soon, however, college-
bound pupils and young students joined in. In 1963, the sociologist Friedrich
Tenbruck commented pertinently:

> [Youth] has direct or indirect access to its own publications, events, industries, its own
> meeting points and locations for amusement, its form of fashion and of travelling, its code of
> conduct. That certain typically young occupations and their respective institutions have
> attained such importance within society is connected to this phenomenon. The pop singer,
> the athlete, the movie star, and the TV anchor are examples of this.[15]

At the same time, tolerant educational principles became more accepted by the
older generations. In the vanguard of this development were liberal, sometimes
even modern conservative, teachers, commentators and sociologists such as
the influential Helmut Schelsky and his assistants, as well as, on the local level,
journalists such as the aforementioned editor of the *Bremer Nachrichten*. The
Catholic journalist Walter Dirks was also among this group. During the
1950s, he had rejected the prevalent scepticism vis-à-vis a consumer and
leisure society; during the 1960s he recommended parents to confront their
children not with distrust but with frankness. Moreover, he recommended
parents to discover in their children's behaviour the transformation of society,
to 'realize the new, which is making itself known. And then, one has to ally
oneself with the new.'[16]

   From the late 1950s, young people's cultural styles and patterns of
behaviour were more and more setting standards for society at large. Even
though people were watching the drive to experiment with suspicion, while
initially only a small number of young people, e.g. rock 'n' roll fans such as the
Halbstarken, indulged in the products of the consumer society, adults were
increasingly attracted by the new combination of zest for life and political
awakening which had been developing within this new youth culture since
the early 1960s. In particular, the civilized typography of American mass
culture, with its central figure of the 'teenager', who was being promoted as
the ideal of an eagerly consumerist and vivacious youth, also provided adults
with the positive means of identifying with this new youth culture.[17] In the

---

15   Friedrich H. Tenbruck, 'Väter und Söhne. Das Generationenproblem in neuer Perspektive' in
Georg Böse (ed.), *Unsere Freiheit morgen. Gefahren und Chancen der modernen Gesellschaft*
(Düsseldorf and Köln 1963), 125–39, quotation on 136.
16   Walter Dirks, 'Die skeptischen Kinder' in Richard Strohal et al. (eds), *Autorität — was ist das
heute? Umstrittene Machtansprüche in Staat, Gesellschaft und Kultur* (München 1965), 65–76,
quotation on 72f.
17   Grace Palladino, *Teenagers. An American History* (New York 1997). On 'Americanization'

light of positive reactions by adults towards the 'teenage style', the sociologist Edith Göbel maintained that one could not speak of youth accommodating adults, as Schelsky had postulated in 1957. Instead, she argued that 'on the contrary, adults were accommodating young people's outward presentations because they had attained an especially attractive type of self-presentation of youth'.[18]

By 1962, the sociologist Friedrich Tenbruck was speaking of the 'puerilism of the culture at large', in that 'patterns of behaviour, amusements, reading habits, leisure, morals, language, and customs of adults [were exhibiting] ever more youthful traits'.[19] Indeed, it was above all the young people who were especially creative in experimenting with the new opportunities of consumer society. The codes of conduct of the older generations — in tune with times of want and war, in which they grew up — appeared no longer appropriate as standards of behaviour. In reaction to these developments, the mail order company Neckermann rearranged its selection of goods: whereas in 1966, only 10 per cent of the range of clothes was aimed at the young, in the following year this had increased to 40 per cent, and for the first time the catalogue's cover did not show, as *Der Spiegel* remarked smugly, the 'traditional cover lady sporting a discreet-chic mother-look', but 'two skipping teenagers in a Beat-green overall and orange mini skirt'.[20] A national daily newspaper reflected on the situation as follows:

> To be young is the aesthetic and biological guiding image of our time. The lifestyle of a group, which was previously circumscribed by age, has become obligatory for all age groups. Today it is valid for twenty-somethings as well as for 50- and 60-year-olds. At times, even active old people are engaged in the promotion of 'staying young'.[21]

Taking as an example the TV show 'Beat Club', Germany's first music show for young people, one can ascertain how positively many adults responded to this new youth culture. 'I enjoyed yesterday's show immensely even though I don't belong to the "young folks" anymore, on the contrary, I am already "middle-aged" (41 years).'[22] In the Beat Club's environs, time and again attention was drawn to the adults' positive response to the show and the executive editor Michael Leckebusch overused the example of a Beat enthusi-

---

see Heide Fehrenbach and Uta G. Poiger (eds), *Transactions, Transgressions, Transformations. American Culture in Western Europe and Japan* (New York and Oxford 2000); Alf Lüdtke, Inge Marßolek and Adelheid von Saldern (eds), *Amerikanisierung. Traum und Alptraum im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart 1996); Anselm Döring-Manteuffel, *Wie westlich sind die Deutschen? Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen 1999).

18 Edith Göbel, *Mädchen zwischen 14 und 18. Ihre Probleme und Interessen, ihre Vorbilder, Leitbilder und Ideale, und ihr Verhältnis zu den Erwachsenen* (Hannover 1964), 19f.
19 Friedrich H. Tenbruck, *Jugend und Gesellschaft. Soziologische Perspektiven* (Freiburg 1962), 49f.
20 *Der Spiegel*, 41 (1967), 161.
21 *Handelsblatt*, 27 June 1966.
22 H.K. to 'Beat-Club', 26 September 1965, *Radio Bremen* (RB), BC 1.

ast senior citizen so much that a youth magazine wrote about 'Mike's famous
94-year-old retired person'.²³ In the same way that Beat culture became mass
culture, for numerous adults boundaries of the acceptable were moved far to
the periphery. In 1966, at the height of Beatlemania in West Germany, even
Ruf ins Volk, the rather protective periodical *'für Volksgesundung and
Jugendschutz'* (for public convalescence and protection of youth), struck a
conciliatory tone:

> [The] enthusiasm for Beat music and the Beatles . . . periodically deteriorates into hysterical
> turmoil; however, it certainly should not be considered negatively on principle. In this realm,
> youths find a release from their thoroughly standardized, well-ordered surroundings. The
> older generation has a hard time getting used to the sensation of life that Beat triggers in
> young people so that older people far too easily tend to react with prohibitions and
> protests.²⁴

In 1967, however, the limits of the tolerable were reached once again when
Jimi Hendrix and The Who performed for the first time on German television
and provoked a strong wave of protests. The irritation triggered by Jimi
Hendrix's performance is apparent in the following letter, which the mother of
a 17-year-old from Cologne wrote to Leckebusch:

> Since the television set is in the living room, I happened to watch the broadcast by chance. I
> do not object on principle to beat music. I personally think of the Beatles as having natural
> musical talent and consider it agreeable that the original band, which performed this music
> at first, gives a concert without pranks and gags, and that it achieved worldwide success.
> However, what you have presented to the young audience today . . . , I consider primitive,
> dumb, boring, and beyond what you should present to youths. The 'vocalist', who was
> wearing a strange general's uniform, reminded me of my school and our geography lessons
> when we were studying the original inhabitants of Australia. I personally was disgusted by
> his singing . . . . I am no longer willing to put up with everything without making a personal
> comment and, therefore, I let you know that I was disappointed and indignant.

Behind this indignation was the helplessness of an educated adult viewer, who
had shown a great deal of tolerance, but who, when faced with this latest
development, regarded the limits of the acceptable as having been exceeded.
And yet in the end, she asked the editor: 'What on earth would you as a
modern parent do in such a case?'²⁵

First and most obviously, young people distinguished themselves from their
parents in their dress and leisure habits. Studying the social realities of 14– to
18-year-old girls, the aforementioned sociologist Edith Göbel stated in 1964
that while serious conflicts occurred 'only on rare occasions', nonetheless 'a
pronounced generational consciousness' prevailed, and the girls' lifestyle was
distinct from that of their parents.²⁶ Further social science studies illustrated

23   *Höllenspiegel*, January 1970.
24   *Ruf ins Volk*, 3 (1966).
25   M.W. to Leckebusch, 11 March 1967, RB, BC 18.
26   Göbel, op. cit., 395 and 401.

that adults increasingly regarded young people with their idiosyncratic styles as pioneers in the jungle of the consumer society. The young knew a great deal more than their parents about the icons of consumer modernity such as Beat music, cosmetics, new movies, fashion and cars. In general, the opposite was true for the political realm where young people tended to trust their parents' expertise.[27] An inquiry commissioned by the youth magazine *Bravo* in 1970 scrutinized this phenomenon more thoroughly and concluded that in the ideals they expressed young people and adults were rather close together. The social scientists concluded that

> . . . a more youthful guiding image announced its demands without enabling the adults to join ranks with flying colours. . . . [Adults had] a need to interact with the younger generation, to keep close contact with this generation as well as to communicate with youth so that they could 'remain on top of things'. . . . [The young people, on the other hand, experienced] the importance, which they or rather the guiding image that they were representing increasingly gained, with clear-headedness and self-esteem, without in principle questioning the contact and the relationship to their parents' generation.[28]

While there were a number of areas in which young people's conduct exhibited very different assumptions — for instance, in terms of manners and sexuality — there was a surprisingly lively and harmonious communication in terms of consumption, which formed a progressively more important part of modern life. Parents viewed their children as legitimate business partners and 'dismissed strong criticism of them', in return, young people served as modern culture's mediators for them. Most of the elements of consumer society that affected the large majority of young people in their daily lives did not conflict with what adults understood as modernity. This was the case regarding attitudes towards fashion, holidays and household goods, for which young people were often the stimulus. In terms of cosmetics, athletic goods and technical appliances, including automobiles, adults as well as young people assumed that neither parent had the highest expertise, but their offspring.

In that sense, it is not surprising that adults — despite student demonstrators, with whom the large majority of them were very much in disagreement — were adopting an ever more sympathetic attitude towards their progeny. Responding to opinion pollsters asking them whether they had a favourable or an unfavourable impression of the young generation, in 1950 only 24 per cent gave a positive response, in 1956 the percentage was 38, 44 per cent in 1960 and by 1975 no less than 62 per cent articulated a favourable impression of the young generation.[29]

---

27   Institut für Demoskopie, Allensbach, 'Junge Käufer', February 1967, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Zsg. 132/1391.
28   Contest. Institut für angewandte Psychologie und Soziologie, *Bravo — Meinungsmacher Junger Markt* (Frankfurt 1971), 21f.
29   Elisabeth Noelle and Erich Peter Neumann (eds), *Jahrbuch der öffentlichen Meinung 1958–1964* (Allensbach and Bonn 1965), 200; Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (ed.), *The Germans. Public Opinion Polls, 1967–1980* (London 1981), 53.

The process of generational detachment involved, as is usually the case, fric-
tion which during this period turned out to be more intense than at other
points in time, because, due to the expansion of the consumer society, many
behavioural paradigms had changed fundamentally. Social scientists observed
that young people's critique of their elders was growing more severe, and this
critique was expressed not only by youth at the fringe of society, but by the
majority of young people.[30] While during the 1950s there was little evidence of
widespread generational conflict, the situation rapidly changed until 1967,
when the student revolts broke out.

   Many young people utilized the numerous opportunities made available by
the consumer society in a rather matter-of-course fashion. In the same way,
they demanded acceptance of emerging communitarian styles. However, they
thought that this demand was rejected, or accepted too rarely. In 1966, a 15-
year-old *Realschul* pupil (typically vocationally inclined) declared:

> Since we live in a democracy, I hold the view that everyone can do what he wants and that
> the 'adults' are not always right. However, there are also teachers in school who hold a
> negative opinion of the young generation and who consider themselves as something better
> and think that one should act according to their will. A number of teachers don't like it when
> schoolboys have long hair and they would like to see these pupils expelled from school.
> However, this is a wrong attitude because it is not them who have to walk around with long
> hair but these schoolboys, and a number of teachers have themselves the weirdest haircuts
> and it is usually them who complain about long hair. The majority of adults still has to learn
> to understand today's youth and to see things from their side.[31]

   Many young critics well understood that a large number of adults had a
hard time adapting to the consumer society's new behavioural paradigms.
These adults had grown up during times of war and times of crisis and the
standards they were passing on to successive generations could hardly be
applied to the conditions of the 'affluent society'. In 1968, a newspaper com-
mented on the intergenerational problems of understanding in the following
way: 'This sense of security, which the affluent society provides, is hard to
describe, particularly hard to describe to those who had to endure inflation,
unemployment, and crisis.'[32]

   The contrast between the life experiences of parents and children was
hardly greater at any time than during the long 1960s. Numerous testimonies
of young people depict how severely the ordinary transmission of experiences
between the generations was disturbed. An 18-year-old vocational-school
student from Nuremberg wrote the following in answer to the question 'What
do think of your parents?'

---

30   Thilo Castner, *Schüler im Autoritätskonflikt. Eine empirische Untersuchung zu der Frage
'Was halten Schüler von der älteren Generation?'* (Neuwied 1969), 45.
31   Ibid., 32.
32   *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 18 September 1968.

> They always bring up their youth and think that they can influence us. However, they don't consider that the times have changed, that the economy has advanced, that today we are living in times of so-called prosperity. After all, they are probably envious that they could not experience such a youth, because they grew up during years of war. They abide by their old methods and customs. We are supposed to adapt to them, however, that *they* could move forward does not occur to them.[33]

A number of years before, in 1962, a female 17-year-old middle-school student depicted the conflict this way:

> When I want to go out at night, be it to watch a movie or to go dancing, they say: 'We were not allowed to go out when we were young.' Thus, I have to stay at home, too. Or, for instance, I would like to have a record player. Then they say: 'We did not have one either'. Thus, I do not get one.

Some four years later, a 14-year-old *Realschul* schoolgirl portrayed her situation in a rather similar way:

> Because our mothers had to wear brown lace-up shoes with their Sunday dresses, we too have to wear shoes like that, although we would prefer to wear black suede-leather shoes. Because our parents, when they were fourteen years old, had not been to a foreign country, we too do not need to go that far away. Because in the good old days children did not get any pocket money even when they were 18 years old, why then should 14-year-olds get any now. . . . It is a blessing that by now it has become less often that they shower us with these or similar sentences.[34]

In her last remark, the schoolgirl alluded to the ongoing transformation of the conditions and — at least in her assessment — to the fact that adults were less frequently taking the material dearth of their youth as a standard for the behaviour of their offspring. This is an interesting observation because it indicates that adults' gradual accommodation to affluence contributed to the relaxation of intergenerational relations. Nonetheless, sceptical statements such as those cited were very prevalent. Probably, such statements did not mirror the actual conduct of adults in every case; nevertheless, they portrayed the young's typical perception. A discussion between parents and pupils held at a school pertinently illustrates two fundamentally opposite positions:

> A number of young men suggested that parents should lazily hang around a whole day with them, dance, have fun, 'relax', or debate radical political alternatives. 'But this is impossible', a father protested to silent approval of the other parents, 'I have to go to the office.' Once the students suggested he should skip work, he became agitated. Then he would be dismissed and who would earn the money? That they had such a good life was due to him. . . . [It was striking, the reporter added to his account] how cheerlessly and without real confidence the father said it, and that by and large all parents present were of the opinion that toil and drudgery were the sacrifice that one had to endure for oneself and one's progeny.[35]

---

33 Castner, op. cit., 40. Next citation in Göbel, op. cit., 309.
34 Castner, op. cit., 36.
35 Dieter Baacke, *Jugend und Subkultur* (Munich 1972), 31f.

On the one hand, there was enjoyment of life, on the other, execution of duty. In this scenario, two fundamental outlooks, which resulted from very distinct upbringings as well as situations in life, became very pronounced. They were, even prior to any political dissonances, opposite poles that brought about the paradigmatic latent tensions between generations.

Despite the fact that this relationship was indeed full of tensions, it is important to distinguish between the intergenerational relations within families and the social intergenerational relations on an abstract level within society at large. During the early 1960s, sociologists focusing on young people noticed that within families intergenerational relations 'had settled down' and that young people were showing a great deal of trust in their parents.[36] Responding to questions about their personal role models and trusted individuals, young people ranked their parents above any other alternative — friends, siblings, public figures — at the very top of the list.[37] In 1970, 92 per cent of all parents and 87 per cent of all young people acknowledged having 'good relations' with each other. Nevertheless, one could not speak of intra-familial relations between the generations as 'largely harmonious without problems', as a well-known youth sociologist did.[38] A study undertaken during 1966/67 revealed that just about one half of all young people questioned declared that their parents had cared for them compassionately. However, almost one third declared that, while their parents did indeed care for them, they 'did not understand them on a number of important issues'.[39] Another poll, taken in 1967, indicated that as many as 60 per cent of the 16- to 25-year-olds were of the opinion that in general the older generation did not understand the younger generation — i.e. a considerably higher proportion than for those young people who maintained that the same was true for their own families. In 1973, this proportion increased even further to 64 per cent.[40] On the whole, until the middle of the 1970s, the overall picture underwent only minor changes: young people maintained a trusted relationship with their parents, while simultaneously, different social realities co-existed, whose incompatibility was, above all, impeding intergenerational communication, and also, to a considerable degree, communication within families. Young people were aware of this, but acknowledged it without the intransigence which the media

36   Cf. Tenbruck, op. cit., quotation on 136.
37   For 1964, this is confirmed by Viggo Graf Blücher, *Die Generation der Unbefangenen. Zur Soziologie der jungen Menschen heute* (Düsseldorf and Köln 1966), 100ff.; for 1966/67 cf. Bundesministerium für Familie und Jugend, *Aufbereitung und Analyse von Ergebnissen aus der Basisstudie zur Situation der Jugend in Deutschland*, 1968, Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart (HStAS), EA 2/008/850, vol. III; Castner, op. cit., 74f. By 1975, however, these rankings had changed slightly: in particular, members of 'peer groups' became more trusted than before, without, however, getting anywhere close to the parents' primary position; cf. Jugendwerk der Deutschen Shell (ed.), *Jugend zwischen 13 und 24. Vergleich über 20 Jahre,* vol. 3 (Hamburg 1975), 32. The following figures in Contest, op. cit., 19.
38   Blücher, op. cit., 120.
39   Castner, op. cit., 62f.
40   DIVO, no. 4, October 1967; Allensbacher Berichte, no. 15, 1973.

often assigned to them. In 1964, Edith Göbel found 'in young people a remarkably tolerant and understanding attitude [towards adults.] . . . They judge the — from their point of view — negative patterns of behaviour of adults with a certain leniency.'[41]

Even ten years later, little had changed. 'Don't trust anyone older than 30' — this catchphrase, which the West German media liked to spread as youth's alleged slogan, in no way reflected their attitude. In 1975, 70 per cent of West German youths considered this statement to be predominantly or totally false, and among young people with a college education as many as 89 per cent disagreed with it. Nevertheless, this did not mean that an uncritical, or harmonious understanding of intergenerational relations was predominant among young people at the end of the long 1960s. Only 43 per cent of them considered the assertion 'there are unbridgeable opposites between young and old' to be predominantly or totally false, 18 per cent considered it to be predominantly or totally true, and still another 37 per cent considered it to be partially true.[42] There was no lack of conflicts between young people and adults; however, these conflicts neither had to be nor should have been settled within families, not least because young people spent most of their leisure time separate from or outside their families, and also because parents came to see training their children to be independent as more and more important.

Between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s, basically nothing changed regarding young people's satisfaction with parental involvement or detachment. Altogether, 75 per cent of the young were content with the way parents involved themselves in or refrained from meddling in their affairs.[43] However, during this period, adolescents' room to move, and, in particular, the amount of time they were not under parental control, increased tremendously. In 1966, for example, only 2 per cent of boys and 1 per cent of girls between the ages of fifteen and nineteen were allowed to come home whenever they wanted to. Ten years later this proportion had increased to 48 per cent of boys and 42 per cent of girls.[44] This significant shift indicates that, on the whole, parents were adjusting to the transformation in young people's lifestyles; however, this shift also suggests that young people valued the opportunity to organize their leisure time independently — and if possible in their own, and above all, parent-free spaces. A poll taken of young people patronizing dance halls confirmed this impression. Barely 40 per cent of them disapproved of the presence of older work colleagues in the dance halls; however, 66 per cent objected to the presence of teachers, and as many as 82 per cent to the presence of their parents.[45]

---

41 Göbel, op. cit., 273.
42 Jugendwerk der Deutschen Shell (ed.), op. cit., vol. 2, 140f.
43 Ibid., vol. 3, 35.
44 Peter Carlberg, 'Die McCann-Jugendstudie umfaßt die Geburtsjahrgänge 1947 bis 1966' in *Zeitschrift für Markt-, Meinungs- und Zukunftsforschung*, 25/26 (1982/83), 5655–81, for these figures cf. 5661.
45 C. Wolfgang Müller and Peter Nimmermann, *In Jugendclubs und Tanzlokalen* (Munich 1968), 130.

Well into the 1960s, voices were clearly heard expressing the view that rock 'n' roll, enjoyment of consumer goods, new trends in fashion and long hair were indications of the demise of the *Abendland* (the West). On the other hand, large parts of the political class emphasized that youth, by and large, had readily integrated with society, and that even unusual styles should be treated with tolerance. The political class was thus distinguishing itself from National Socialism and the state socialism of the German Democratic Republic, which had suppressed unconventional styles.[46] A study on youth issues from 1964, which provided the basic framework for the federal government's first official report on youth, confirmed the impression that the generations were adjusting to the consumer society without any fundamental conflicts.[47] Such general assertions, however, ignored both the fact that considerable numbers of young people themselves expressed criticism and that a number of subcultures had already evolved, which made use of consumer society's opportunities in very different ways and which, at times, severely criticized the older generations. Therefore, the federal government's report on youth of 1965, which attested that young people were accommodating to societal norms without criticism and that intergenerational relations were basically conflict-free, came under frequent criticism. The *Bundesjugendkuratorium* (a federal board of trustees for youth issues), for example, declared:

> Certainly, it is legitimate to sketch a primarily positive picture of youth to challenge the grounds for numerous prejudices of adults. On the other hand, it is legitimate to ask whether one should not use as a basis for future youth policies a less uncritical report on youth.[48]

The fact that some of the young generation's behaviour was controversial had to be included in any sober analysis of the situation. Between the years 1965 and 1967, so-called *Gammler* — the West German version of hippies — were causing concern to sections of the public. Long-haired youths were meeting in public places in West Germany's metropolitan cities and spending their time making music and doing nothing. The German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard from the conservative CDU became tremendously agitated about this marginal phenomenon, declaring: 'As long as I govern, I will do everything to eradicate this mischief.'[49] The extreme right Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD), which during this period enjoyed unexpected success, demanded measures 'to solve this problem radically and for the benefit of the wholesome *Volksempfinden* (people's sentiments)'. However, confrontation with public opinion was less serious than the assertions of Erhard or the NPD

---

46   This phenomenon has recently been studied using the *Halbstarken* as a case study by Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, op. cit.
47   Blücher, op. cit., 393.
48   Kurzprotokoll des Bundestagsausschusses für Familien- und Jugendfragen, 13 April 1967, HStAS, EA 2/007 850.
49   *Der Spiegel*, 39 (1966), 72.

suggest, and also less serious than the subcultures themselves liked to make the public believe. Above all, reactions such as these did not reflect the attitudes expressed by the leading national outlets of public opinion. Contemporary sources, by and large, did not adopt an aggressive tone in their reports on this phenomenon and, moreover, many of the leading political figures repudiated the federal Chancellor's insistent verbal onslaught. Responding to a demand for a report on the potential dangers of the *Gammler*, Lower Saxony's Secretary of the Interior, for example, declared that the whole issue had been 'absurdly exaggerated'; and the national conference of secretaries of the interior unhesitatingly deleted the issue from its agenda.[50] Frequently, the state agencies made their case along very basic lines: a democracy had to make room for such unconventional styles. While the calm attitude of a majority of leaders of opinion did not reflect the people's sentiments, it, nonetheless, signalled that cultural deviancy in West Germany could count on political tolerance.

This did not mean, however, that the somewhat unconventional political ambitions of young people could flourish within the existing framework. In particular, the creation of the coalition government of the two large parties — the CDU and the SPD — in 1966, which initiated the transition from a period dominated by the CDU to a stage of co-operation between the Social Democrats and the Liberals (FDP), strengthened the impression of a hermetically sealed political system in which there was no actual opposition. The Außerparlamentärische Opposition (extra-parliamentary opposition), with which young people particularly engaged, was a notable example of this conflict.[51] Thus, the paradoxical situation arose that the more educated of the young generation, in their battle for increased political influence, targeted a social system which was in the process of becoming more relaxed as well as diversified, and which, culturally, provided young people with increased opportunities of influence.

During this period of escalation, there were frequent confrontations, in particular between young intellectuals and 'Cold War Liberals'.[52] Many liberals, especially those of the 'Forty-fiver generation' such as Günter Grass, Jürgen Habermas and Uwe Johnson, distanced themselves from their younger counterparts when the student movement grew more radical and began to align itself with Castroism, Leninism and Maoism. On 3 December 1967, during a TV interview with Rudi Dutschke, the journalist Günter Gaus, who actually sympathized with his guest, highlighted this fundamental difference:

> The difference . . . between your generation and the generation of today's 40- to 50-year-olds seems to be that you, the younger people, do not possess the understanding which was

---

50   Ibid., 80.
51   Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany. A Social History of Dissent and Democracy* (Oxford and New York 2003).
52   This phrase was coined by Uta G. Poiger; cf. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, op. cit.

gained during recent decades that ideologies are used up. You are *ideologiefähig* [capable of believing in ideologies].[53]

The nazi past played a major role in the internal and external definition of the generations, and evolved into a ubiquitous instrument in the battle of the generations. For example, the future RAF terrorist Gudrun Ensslin declared: 'You can't talk to people who created Auschwitz'.[54] However, there were also diametrically opposed comments such as this one from 1961:

> We can't, even though we didn't have anything to do with the persecution of the Jews, distance ourselves from this. If we had lived back then, probably we would have fallen for Hitler's propaganda just as our parents did. The period's circumstances play a role. We have no right to condemn our parents' generation for their past attitudes.[55]

As a matter of fact, young people almost without exception rejected National Socialism, without, however, dealing with it intensively or having faith in their ability to assess it properly. The special importance of the issue for the present — for example, the continued presence of antisemitic attitudes and people with a nazi past in positions of power — was most likely to be understood by high-school pupils or college students.[56] These students, more than anyone else, admonished the — in terms of political power — established generations for having been implicated in National Socialism either actively or passively. Especially widespread, however, was the general claim that older Germans could not demand leading roles in present-day society because of the special imprint that 12 years of nazi rule had left on them. This general claim targeted all those who were born before 1945, in particular the members of the Forty-five generation, who came of age during the nazi era. A 19-year-old high-school pupil put it this way:

> If I had to make an objection to democracy — in particular here in West Germany — it would be that, while the theory is quite good, there are people, and specifically our parents' generation, who are not yet ready for democracy because there is still too much authoritarian education — which they experienced as children — in them. Moreover, they don't understand what democracy is all about. For example, they want young people, who are not yet of legal age, to be frequently reminded: 'You're not yet ready and you're not yet supposed to have your own opinion, therefore, you shouldn't express it.' These people, as already said, are imprinted with this kind of education through and through. During the Third Reich,

---

53 'Rudi Dutschke zu Protokoll. Fernsehinterview von Günter Gaus' in Rudi Dutschke, *Mein langer Marsch. Reden, Schriften und Tagebücher aus zwanzig Jahren*, ed. by Gretchen Dutschke-Klotz, Helmut Gollwitzer and Jürgen Miermeister (Reinbek 1980), 42–57, quotation on 49.
54 Klaus Briegleb, 'Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart' in Briegleb and Sigrid Weigel (eds), *Gegenwartsliteratur seit 1968* (Munich 1992), 73–115, quotation on 91.
55 Walter Jaide, *Das Verhältnis der Jugend zur Politik. Empirische Untersuchungen zur politischen Anteilnahme und Meinungsbildung junger Menschen der Geburtsjahrgänge 1940–1946* (Berlin 1963), 100.
56 Cf. Detlef Siegfried, 'Don't Look Back in Anger. Youth, Pop Culture and the Nazi Past in the West German Sixties' in Philipp Gassert and Alan Steinweis (eds), *Coming to Terms with the Past in West Germany. The 1960s*, forthcoming.

when they were my age, they were constantly confronted by slogans such as '*Ruhe*' (silence/peace), '*Ordnung*' (order), or '*Ruhe ist die erste Bürgerpflicht*' (silence/peace is the citizen's prime duty). And that is why they put up with everything without criticism.[57]

The nazi past became a ubiquitous context for arguments about the present. Newspapers viewed the demonstrating students as a new SA (nazi storm troopers) and television, time and again, showed agitated older citizens who told reporters that under Adolf Hitler something like this would not have occurred, that one should cut the demonstrators' hair, burn them and throw them over the wall into East Berlin.[58] By the same token, assertions made by students were used to discredit an opponent and, as a 23-year-old clerk put it in 1963, 'to reduce adults during debates to silence or to invalidate a possibly personal rebuke'.[59] The rebuke 'You and your Yankee-hooting [*Ami-Gejaule*]" was followed by the reply 'And you and your Hitler'. Through the use of a very simple device, young people could gain an overwhelming advantage: 'All we needed to say was Dachau . . . to make them feel insecure.'[60] On the whole, adults reacted to such comments less unforgivingly than one might have expected. Older people's more or less clear awareness of their implication with the nazi past reinforced their widespread inclination to follow the example of the young generation, who for many older Germans epitomized their hope of being set free from the nazi past by entering into open alliances with them. However, a number of older people criticized this behaviour as being exaggerated accommodation. In 1961, the journalist Hans Habe, a former emigrant, had identified the cause of the older generation's 'masochistic readiness . . . to accept the younger generation without criticism . . . [as] our sense of guilt'. For this reason, adults allowed themselves 'to be led by youth, mimicking them, adoring them'.[61]

Even while opponents of sexual imagery in the media, long hair, mini skirts and pop music frequently played a major role in the media and expressed their opinions forcefully, they were not able to impede the increasing liberalization of public life. In 1969 and 1970 many of them gave up the struggle, not least those police agencies that had dealt with *Jugendschutz* (protection of youth), who realized that the traditional perception of *Jugendschutz* had been undermined by the evolution of young people's behavioural patterns as well as by public opinion. When they carried out raids on bars, cinemas and dance halls, their reports indicated that organizers, adult guests as well as parents, were showing 'steadily less understanding', and the *Landeskriminalamt* (state

---

57   Dieter Baacke, op. cit., 36.
58   For the use of nazi analogies in West German newspapers and media, cf. Stuart J. Hilwig, 'The Revolt against the Establishment. Students versus the Press in West Germany and Italy' in Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert and Detlef Junker (eds), *1968. The World Transformed* (Washington, DC and Cambridge 1998), 321–49.
59   Wisselinck, op. cit., 49.
60   An eyewitness made this assertion in retrospect. Cited in Kaspar Maase, *BRAVO Amerika. Erkundungen zur Jugendkultur der Bundesrepublik in den fünfziger Jahren* (Hamburg 1992), 82.
61   Hans Habe, 'Ich, Hans Habe, ich kann diese Jugend nicht leiden' in *Twen* (1961), 5: 46–9.

criminal investigation department) of Baden-Württemberg concluded: 'A reasonable execution of *Jugendschutz* is no longer possible because the regulations still in existence have been made partially obsolete by the transformation of public perceptions.'[62]

On the whole, it is entirely correct that during the 1960s 'measured judgment' (in Arthur Marwick's phrase) was coming to the fore. By the end of the decade, many adults had come to agree with what the institute for opinion polls Allensbach had recommended at its beginning:

> Apparently, it is nothing but a symptom of aging when anyone thinking about 'today's youth' is seized by a sense of disappointment or by discontent. In one's own interest and in the interest of youth, one should follow the small group of parents and grandparents who are already associating cordially with young people.[63]

The proliferation of this awareness was tied to young people's role as paradigms for the handling of consumer society's opportunities. Moreover, young people were advocating the expansion of democratic ways as well as the practice of tolerant patterns of behaviour. This awareness, however, was spreading under conditions which, at times, led to heated conflicts with sections of the older generation — above all, within the lower-middle class and in rural areas.[64] For these groups took longer than town-dwellers or intellectuals to change patterns of behaviour, learned during times of war and crisis, or at least to accept new ways of behaving.

Detlef Siegfried
is Associate Professor of Modern German History at the University of Copenhagen and Research Fellow at the Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg. He is the author of *Der Fliegerblick. Intellektuelle, Radikalismus und Flugzeugproduktion bei Junkers 1914 bis 1934* (Bonn 2001) and co-editor of *Dynamische Zeiten. Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften* (Hamburg 2000) and *Between Marx and Coca-Cola. Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960–1980* (Oxford and New York 2005). His book on consumption and politics in 1960s West Germany will be published in 2006.

---

62   Cf. the reports of the Landeskriminalamt for 1969 and 1970, sent to Baden-Württemberg's Secretary of the Interior, 13 July 1970 and 24 June 1971, HStAS, EA 2/302/59.
63   *Allensbach-Pressedienst*, no. 36, 1960.
64   Tenbruck, op. cit., 137.