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Attraction and Aversion in Germany's '1968': Encountering the Western Revolt in East Berlin

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Abstract

This article uses oral history interviews and archival sources to investigate the entanglements between East and West German activists of 1968. Cold War Berlin remained an important zone of exchange between East and West after the border closure of 1961; the study focuses on what a particular group of young East Berliners with oppositional leanings, who engaged in different forms of political and cultural experimentation in the late 1960s, and who took their ideas from both Eastern Socialist reformers and Western New Leftists, made of their direct encounters with the Western revolt. The article shows that the connections between East and West around 1968 were indeed striking, but contends that these produced ambiguous results; both attraction *and* aversion marked the exchanges and personal interactions of Eastern and Western activists in this period. Engaging with the broader literatures on the 'transnational 1960s' and the 'asymmetrical entanglement' of the two Germanies after 1945, this research suggests that the two German states represent a fruitful case to study the meaning of transnationalism around 1968 for the opposite reason of what one may intuitively expect. Encounters between the Socialist East and liberal capitalist West could be facilitated with relative ease, because of the geographical proximity of the two states and the shared language, but, far from spelling ever-greater convergence, increasing connections and closeness could actually foster a greater sense of difference.

Keywords

1968, Berlin, East Germany, oral history, political protest, transnational history

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'1968' is often described as a transnational moment *par excellence*, a period uniquely defined by a political and cultural radicalism that challenged institutions and ways of thought in countries across the globe and saw the emergence of multiple networks of activism that transcended the borders of the nation state.¹ While scholars had long focused on connections between the protest movements in the countries of Western Europe and the United States of America,² more recently, there has been a rising interest in political protest and cultural upheaval east of the Iron Curtain and in transfers 'across the blocs' in particular.³

In this context, scholars have identified divided Germany as a particularly rich case to investigate how elements of the global 1960s (such as New Left thought, anti-imperialist critiques and the counter-culture) manifested themselves in two connected but separate spatial locations with starkly contrasting ideological settings. As Timothy S. Brown, amongst others, has argued, the close proximity, shared history and language, and Eastern access to Western media, make the two Germanies ideal – and in some ways unique – case studies to examine the extent to which ideas and practices were able to transcend the Cold War divide in '1968'.⁴ This article, which investigates some of the hitherto little-studied personal connections between activists from the Socialist German Democratic Republic and the liberal democratic Federal Republic, seeks to contribute to this emergent literature.

Some of the recent works that have sought to incorporate Eastern–Central European perspectives into accounts of the international 1960s have portrayed '1968' as a joint European moment, a time when the bipolarity of the Cold War era was undermined by the simultaneous rebellion of young Europeans on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Some studies have explicitly connected 1968 to 1989, arguing that the protest movements of the late 1960s anticipated the growing

1 See, for example, J. Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA 2003); the special issues on 'The International 1968' of *The American Historical Review* 114, 1 and 2 (2009); and the recent overview: T.S. Brown, '1968. Transnational and Global Perspectives, Version: 1.0', in *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 11 June 2012, available at: <https://docupedia.de/zg/1968?oldid=84582>, (accessed 1 December 2012).

2 A. Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, 1958–1974* (Oxford 1999); G.-R. Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976* (Oxford 2007); M. Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton, NJ 2009); 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, NY and Oxford 2010).

3 R. Gildea, J. Mark and A. Warring, *Europe's 1968, Voices of Revolt* (Oxford 2013); M. Klimke, J. Pekelder and J. Scharloth (eds), *Between Prague Spring and French May: Opposition and Revolt in Europe, 1960–1980* (New York, NY and Oxford 2011); V. Tismaneanu (ed.), *Promises of 1968: Crisis, Illusion, and Utopia* (Budapest and New York, NY 2011); A. von der Goltz (ed.), *Talkin' 'bout my Generation: Conflicts of 'Generation Building' and Europe's '1968'* (Göttingen 2011); P. Major and R. Mitter (eds), *Across the Blocs: Cold War Cultural and Social History* (London 2004).

4 T. Brown, "'1968" East and West: Divided Germany as a case study in transnational history', *The American Historical Review* 114, 1 (2009), 69–96; on the uniqueness of the German case in trans-bloc social movement research, R. Roth and D. Rucht (eds), *Die sozialen Bewegungen in Deutschland seit 1945: Ein Handbuch* (Frankfurt am Main 2008), 30; also A. Schildt, D. Siegfried and K.-C. Lammers (eds), *Dynamische Zeiten: Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften* (Hamburg 2000).

together of the divided continent after the collapse of communism two decades later.⁵ Richard Ivan Jobs, for one, described the young activists of '1968' as vanguards of European unity. Their increased mobility enabled manifold encounters across borders, which, he argued, led to the emergence of a shared political culture in East and West as well as the formation of a common and enduring European identity.⁶

This article contends that this reading of what '1968' meant takes the inherently unifying impact of transnational encounters for granted. This is particularly relevant when investigating the two Germanies where the 'temptation to read backwards from the telos of unification in a fashion that turns Germany's dual history into a single one in disguise' may be particularly tempting, yet problematic.⁷ The article takes its cues from a literature that has problematized the implicit assumption of many transnational studies 'that through border crossings and transnational encounters, borders break down'.⁸ These more reflective transnational approaches are only slowly being incorporated into the study of '1968', which remains dominated by explorations that celebrate the 'progressive' character of transnational exchange in this period.⁹

This piece takes a closer look at encounters between East and West German activists and asks specifically whether, for those Easterners who participated in them, '1968' indeed represented a moment of German–German convergence. It focuses on what a high profile group of young East Berliners, who engaged in different forms of political and cultural experimentation in the late 1960s, and who took their ideas from both Eastern Socialist reformers and Western New Leftists, made of their connections to the Western revolt over time. The individuals

5 Cf. Mark and von der Goltz, 'Encounters', in Gildea et al., *Europe's 1968*; studies that frame '1968' in this way include M. Dülffer, '1968 – eine europäische Bewegung?' (25 March 2008), available at: <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-geschichte/68er-bewegung/51992/1968-in-europa> (accessed 15 September 2013); J. Danyel, *Crossing 68/89* (Berlin 2008); P. Gassert, 'Narratives of democratization: 1968 in postwar Europe', in M. Klimke and J. Scharloth (eds), *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977* (Basingstoke 2008), 307–24; E. Neubert, 'Die Teilung Europas in den Debatten der ostmitteleuropäischen Dissidenz', in H.-J. Veen, U. Mähler and P. März (eds), *Wechselwirkungen Ost-West: Dissidenz, Opposition und Zivilgesellschaft 1975–1989* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna 2007).

6 R.I. Jobs, 'Youth Movements: Travel, Protest, and Europe in 1968', *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009), 376–404. Ute Kätzel's work on East and West German women activists of 1968 is framed in a similar way. See her *Die 68erinnen: Porträt einer rebellischen Frauengeneration* (Berlin 2002).

7 T. Hochscherf, C. Laucht and A. Plowman (eds), *Divided, but not Disconnected: German Experiences of the Cold War* (New York, NY and Oxford 2010); C. Klessmann, 'Das Jahr 1968 in westlicher und östlicher Perspektive', in *Historische Literatur*, 1, 1, (2003), 39–45; generally also K. Jarausch, 'Beyond the national narrative: Implications of reunification for recent German history', *German History*, 28, 4 (2010), 498–514.

8 P. Clavin, 'Defining transnationalism', *Contemporary European History*, 14, 4 (2005), 421–39, here 423.

9 Some studies have begun to critique the notion of a hegemonic 'sixties culture' that transcended national boundaries with ease, see P. Bren, '1968 in East and West: Visions of Political Change and Student Protest from across the Iron Curtain', in G.-R. Horn and P. Kenney (eds), *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989* (Oxford 2004), 119–36; von der Goltz, *Talkin' 'bout my generation*; A. Gorsuch and D.P. Koenker (eds), *The Socialist 1960s in Global Perspective* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN 2013), especially the piece by Nick Rutter, 'Look Left, Drive Right. Internationalisms at the 1968 World Youth Festival', 193–212; see also the wide-ranging study of British and West German protest repertoires, H. Nehring, *Politics of Security: West German and British Protests against Nuclear Weapons and the early Cold War, 1945–1970* (Oxford 2013).

investigated here did not belong to an oppositional group with a clearly defined membership structure (such groups were still extremely rare in the GDR in the 1960s), but were part of an extended friendship circle with oppositional leanings that included the children of leading Socialist functionaries and well-known dissidents. As a result, the East German regime eyed their activities with the upmost suspicion, and they found themselves under the surveillance of the state security service, the Stasi, from early on. Almost all of them took part in the relatively widespread acts of protest against the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968,¹⁰ and several of them were tried and sentenced for protesting against the invasion in a series of high-profile trials in the autumn of 1968.¹¹ In 1969, four members of this group set up the GDR's best-known experiment with communal living, East Berlin's 'Kommune 1 Ost'.¹² All these activists – defined here as individuals who invested considerable time and energy into finding ways of effecting political change over a sustained period of time – considered '1968' a significant moment in their political socialization; all were based in the East German capital, which remained an important zone of exchange between East and West even after 1961; and all had ties to the West. The lives of the individuals investigated here thus transcended the East–West divide; they represented the avant-garde of transnationalism in East Germany's '1968'. A micro-study of this circle and of the dynamics of their encounters with the West offers an important corrective to the dominant historical narratives of '1968' as a moment of East–West convergence and of '68ers' as forerunners of European – or indeed German–German – unity.¹³ As we will see, the individuals, whose voices are the basis of this piece, testified to a highly ambiguous relationship to the Western revolt. While the Western movement exerted a powerful fascination and some Easterners courted Western activists with fervour, encounters between the two sides could be fraught with difficulty. Easterners also frequently rethought their engagement with the West over time.

The analysis draws on a number of published and archival sources, such as letters young Easterners wrote to the communards of West Berlin's 'Kommune 1', as well as Stasi surveillance reports, but largely builds on 13 oral history interviews (with 10 men and three women) taken from a larger sample of interviews that the author conducted between 2008 and 2011 for a collaborative,

10 For details of these protests see M.-D. Ohse, *Jugend nach dem Mauerbau: Anpassung, Protest und Eigensinn, DDR 1961–1974* (Berlin 2003); S. Wolle, *Der Traum von der Revolte: Die DDR 1968* (Berlin 2008); B. Gehrke, '1968: Das unscheinbare Schlüsseljahr in der DDR', in B. Gehrke and G.-R. Horn (eds), *1968 und die Arbeiter* (Hamburg 2007), 103–30; I.-S. Kowalczyk, "'Wer sich nicht in Gefahr begibt...'" Protestaktionen gegen die Intervention in Prag und die Folgen von 1968 für die DDR-Opposition', in K.D. Henke, P. Steinbach and J. Tuchel (eds), *Widerstand und Opposition in der DDR* (Cologne 1999), 257–74.

11 See the report in the SED mouthpiece *Neues Deutschland*, Berlin edition (15 November 1968), 2; also Wolle, *Traum von der Revolte*, 168–73.

12 T. Brown, 'A Tale of Two Communes: The Private and the Political in Divided Berlin, 1967–1973', in Klimke et al., *Prague Spring and French May*, 132–40; Kätzel, *68erinnen*.

13 On the fruitfulness of studying the micro-dynamics of cross-Iron Curtain encounters, see B. Walker, 'Moscow human rights defenders look west: Attitudes toward U.S. journalists in the 1960s and 1970s', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, 4 (2008), 905–27.

pan-European project about activism around 1968.¹⁴ Oral history interviews do of course not give us unfiltered access to past experiences.¹⁵ Interviewees package their memories in relatively well-ordered stories that make sense to themselves and the interviewer.¹⁶ As Socialist citizens, Easterners had been brought up to define their political identity with reference to the West; the rejection of West German 'imperialism' had been one of the most important touchstones of political loyalty in the GDR. Interviewees' frequent references to encounters with the West German '1968' thus have to be understood, at least in part, as the product of a socialization in which one's relationship to the West had always loomed large.¹⁷ At the same time, contemporary experiences and concerns shape what interviewees recall about the past, what they revise, and what they leave out of their autobiographical accounts. Significantly, the individuals interviewed for this piece were asked to relate their experiences two decades after the unification of the two German states in 1990. They thus recalled political activism in a state that had ceased to exist and did so in a setting, in which the commemoration of the achievements and failures of the West German '68ers' had long dominated the public debate.¹⁸ This, in turn, also helps to explain why their relationship to the Western revolt featured so prominently in their accounts.¹⁹ Comparing and contrasting their experiences with political activism in the West allowed Easterners to write themselves into the historical record while carving out a place distinct from the West. Stories about encounters with the Western revolt were important staging posts to show that, in spite of being sealed off behind the 'Iron Curtain', East Germany had been part of the international 1960s. And yet, by highlighting instances of misapprehension and disagreement between East and West interviewees emphatically rejected the idea that the Eastern 1968 could be easily subsumed under the Western narrative. The widespread critiques of a unification process which, as was felt by many, particularly on the left, marginalized East German voices, no doubt fed this desire to emphasize difference in interviews. One should not mistake this as a mere back-projection of present-day concerns, however, for life stories are determined at least as strongly by past experiences as present agendas. The fact that interviewees

14 The interviewees were identified at commemorative events, based on publications, and by snowball technique. For details see Gildea et al., *Europe's 1968*.

15 A. Portelli, 'Philosophy and the facts', in A. Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison, WI 1997), 79–80.

16 P. Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), 65–93.

17 On citizens of Eastern bloc countries defining their identities with reference to the West, see P. Bren, 'Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall... Is the West the Fairest of Them All? Czechoslovak normalization and its (dis)contents', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, 4 (2008).

18 See further A. von der Goltz, 'Making sense of East Germany's 1968: Multiple trajectories and contrasting memories', *Memory Studies* 6, 1 (2013), 53–69; A. von der Goltz, 'Generations of "68ers": Age-related Constructions of Identity and Germany's 1968', *Cultural and Social History*, 8, 4 (2011), 473–91.

19 The Eastern '1968' did not feature nearly as prominently in interviews with Western activists, however, which points to the 'asymmetrical entanglement' of the two German states, which was also reflected in memories of German division. C. Klessmann (ed.), *The Divided Past: Rewriting Post-War German History* (Oxford 2001).

linked their memories of misapprehension between East and West around '1968' to debates about cultural differences between Easterners and Westerners after 1990 does not mean that they simply read the present back into the past.²⁰ Written sources from the period, in fact, equally convey both the Easterners' attraction to the Western revolt and instances of misapprehension and aversion. The sources used here thus shed light on the nature of East-West encounters in '1968' and on the subjective meaning with which Eastern activists invested such encounters over time.

The article begins by discussing the possibilities for cross-Iron Curtain exchanges after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. It shows that, despite being walled in in the 1960s, many of those who would become active in the late 1960s considered themselves hybrids for whom the fusion of Eastern and Western cultural and political influences seemed quite natural. The second part of the article traces the attraction West Berlin's 'Kommune 1' held for these young East Berliners and shows that some of them emulated the practice of communal living. Following the Eastern communards more closely, the article then charts how most of them came to reject the Western revolt as a meaningful model when they decided to 'march through the institutions' of the Socialist state. The final section highlights that such disenchantment with the Western revolt was not limited to those who chose to pursue change through regime structures; those who embraced dissidence and eventually emigrated testified to a similarly complex relationship to Western activists.

In the late 1960s, East Germany was in many respects the least open of the Eastern bloc countries when it came to permitting Western influences and travel to and from the West. Whereas Western culture was much more accessible in countries such as Hungary, with its 'Windows to the West' policy, or Czechoslovakia, which permitted 'vacationing hordes of ordinary citizens' to travel West after 1965,²¹ the East German Socialist Unity Party (SED) had severely limited the possibilities for exchanges across the Iron Curtain with the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961.²² The first few years after the border closure were characterized by a relative internal openness and witnessed artistic experimentation and a thriving youth culture, but the SED introduced a large-scale cultural clampdown that would last until the early 1970s at the 11th Plenum of its Central Committee in 1965. The East German authorities began to ban Western-inspired music bands, such as Beat groups, films, theatre plays, and books.²³ Because East Germany was located furthest to the West of all the Eastern bloc countries, and because Germans shared a language

20 C.f. on the 'authority of past experience' T. Kohut, *A German Generation: An Experiential History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT 2012), 13–14 and 241; and A. von Plato, 'The Hitler youth generation and its role in the two post-war German states', in M. Roseman (ed.), *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany 1770–1968* (Cambridge 1995), 210–26.

21 Bren, 'Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall...', 836.

22 C. Ross, 'East Germans and the Berlin Wall: Popular opinion and social change before and after the border closure of August 1961', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39, 1 (2004), 25–43.

23 U. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley, CA 2000), 217; M. Rauhut, *Beat in der Grauzone: DDR-Rock 1964 bis 1972 – Politik und Alltag* (Berlin 1993).

and were bound by extensive kinship ties, Western influences nevertheless continued to seep into the GDR. In spite of being walled in, the GDR never became a hermetically sealed society, and East Berlin remained an especially important transmission belt. Visits by Westerners to the Eastern half of the city may have been severely restricted between 1961 and 1972, when the Four Power Agreement took effect; the long-standing ties between Western and Eastern inhabitants, however, were not severed entirely in the 1960s, thanks to various travel permit agreements that provisioned for family visits on a limited scale and enabled the exchange of ideas via texts, books, records, and other goods that visitors often brought with them. In addition, the majority of East Germans could receive Western television stations and radio channels. By 1971, 85 per cent of GDR citizens owned a television and viewing Western programmes was extremely common.²⁴

Although they were mostly too young to remember the period before the division of the foundation of the two German states in 1949, the young East Berliners who became active in the late 1960s were thus exposed to the West in myriad ways. What is more, they had grown up at a time when the inner-German border had been even more porous. During their childhood and teenage years, the strong osmotic tendencies between East and West had made Western culture a regular feature of daily life, especially in the East German capital. Many interviewees portray themselves as East–West hybrids, who, far from ‘discovering’ the Western revolt only around ‘1968’, had always taken their ideas from both sides of the Iron Curtain.²⁵ Under pressure by the socialist regime to define themselves in opposition to the West, laying claim to such a hybrid identity enabled Easterners with oppositional leanings to undermine the communist assertion of having successfully constructed a superior model of modernity.²⁶ As Thomas Klein, who would set up one of the small, heavily conspiratorial, and theory-focused discussion circles with Trotskyist leanings that existed across the GDR in the 1970s,²⁷ explains:

I was born in 1948. . . . as a Berliner, I internalized both Eastern and Western experiences, which probably applies to many members of my generation. . . . As a child I spent as much time in West Berlin as in East Berlin.

24 P. Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall: East Germany and the Frontiers of Power* (Oxford 2010), 193.

25 This mirrors the ways in which West German activists talk about their internationalism, particularly with reference to the US, see B. Davis, ‘A whole world opening up: Transcultural Contact, Difference, and the Politicization of “New Left” Activists’, in B. Davis et al., *Changing the World*, 255–76. Such East German self-descriptions also chime with Michael Lemke’s observations on daily life in Berlin before 1961. He describes the inhabitants of the city as living in a ‘hybrid’ society that blended Eastern and Western elements. M. Lemke, *Vor der Mauer: Berlin in der Ost-West Konkurrenz 1948 bis 1961* (Cologne Weimar Vienna 2011), 21.

26 ‘Passing through the Iron Curtain’, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, 4 (2008), 703–9.

27 B. Gehrke, ‘Die neue Opposition nach dem Mauerbau’, in L. Ansorg et al. (eds), *Das Land ist still – noch! Herrschaftswandel und politische Gegnerschaft in der DDR 1971–1989* (Cologne 2009), 203–26.

This later made him equally susceptible to both Eastern and Western political ideas, he contends:

It was . . . the time when Prague '68 happened, the New Left in the West, the student revolt, the SDS and the first attempts to re-discover the dissident Marxist literature of the 1920s and 1930s that had been banned in the East and forgotten in the West. And therefore I . . . belong to the GDR 68ers for whom the Paris May and Prague Spring were the key moments of their political socialization.²⁸

Gerd Poppe (b. 1941), who was some years older but part of the same broad friendship circle in the late 1960s, describes the political and cultural influences of his childhood as a similar amalgam of East and West. Until he was 20, he went to West Berlin at least once a week:

I saw all the Nouvelle Vague films, early Godart, Truffaut and so on. This was all before the wall was built and therefore I still had these opportunities that those people who were a little younger no longer had. . . . There was a palpable Western influence, the music scene, a particular clothing style, all young people wanted Levis and they had these parkas. . . . Many ran around in those, grew their hair.²⁹

Long hair, parkas, and jeans were indeed *de rigueur* among young East Berliners with oppositional leanings in 1960s East Berlin.³⁰ In 1968, the Stasi reported that this group of friends 'engaged in speculative transactions of studded jeans, parkas [*Amikutten*], and shoes that are being supplied by contacts from West Berlin . . . Cigarettes, records, and Western printed goods are being imported via the same channels and traded among the youths.'³¹ Frank Havemann (b. 1949), whose father was the physical chemist and philosopher of science Robert Havemann, perhaps East Germany's most famous dissident,³² recalls that he and his friends indeed favoured the same attire as the Western student movement:

Of course we wore the same uniform as the [West German] Extra-Parliamentary Opposition, parkas [*Amikutte*] and jeans and so on . . . We didn't mind one bit that the Americans actually waged the war in Vietnam in these. We wore them much as the American and West German hippie movement . . .³³

28 Interview with Thomas Klein, Berlin, 28 June 2010; on this dual political socialization see also E. Jesse, 'DDR: Die intellektuelle Formierung der Opposition seit den 1970er Jahren', in Veen et al., *Wechselwirkungen Ost-West*, 72.

29 Interview with Gerd Poppe, Berlin, 11 June 2008.

30 The regime later 'domesticated' jeans. C.f. R. Menzel, *Jeans in der DDR: Vom tieferen Sinn einer Freizeithose* (Berlin 2004).

31 See the Stasi files included in Robert Havemann's private papers: MfS, ZAIG, 1454, 15, in Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft, file RH280.

32 C. Vollnhals, *Der Fall Havemann: Ein Lehrstück politischer Justiz* (Berlin 2008).

33 Interview with Frank Havemann, Berlin, 29 April 2011.

Much like Thomas Klein and Gerd Poppe, Havemann's close friend Hans-Jürgen Uszkoreit (b. 1950), who grew up in a family of Socialist functionaries, portrays his growing disenchantment with the GDR as a product of both Eastern and Western political and cultural stimuli. He claims that his family had sought to imbue him with a strong 'revolutionary idealism' since his infancy, but that he began to question the system once he was exposed to daily life in the Socialist state beyond the confines of his sheltered existence. He argues that these nascent political impressions then fused with the budding Western-inspired pop and rock culture:

this reality check ... and on the other hand the influence of the rock and pop movement ... led us to rebel ourselves. You start growing your hair, you listen to different music, you do all the things that older people don't like. ... During this time, well-behaved schoolboys like us from pro-regime homes got to know totally different youths. Long-haired rock fans for example ...³⁴

Like most of their friends, Uszkoreit and Havemann were gripped by the wide-ranging political and economic reforms introduced by the new leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party from January 1968 onwards, which were captured by the evocative slogan 'socialism with a human face'. Although Uszkoreit admits that they 'didn't know all that much about Prague', the information that seeped into the GDR suggested that what went on there was promising.

It was very, very important for us. Because until then all the sceptics ... would say: 'socialism and freedom cannot be combined'. But we actually wanted a socialist society. ... And what happened in Prague was grist to our mills, because we hoped that ... revolutionary idealism ... could be combined with a more libertarian society, where the individual has space for creativity, one that doesn't just guarantee the freedom of opinion, but also ... enables freer relationships between people and so forth.³⁵

Havemann explains that this search for meaningful ways to introduce more libertarian elements into a socialist system that had become ideologically stale and sclerotic, mirrored Marxist-inspired Western critiques of the 'affluent society' that had supposedly buried man's natural desire for a free and creative human existence under a rampant and highly destructive materialism.³⁶ The shared premise of critiques of advanced industrial societies on both sides of the Iron Curtain fed the sense that Eastern and Western protesters around '1968' were pursuing a common project. As Frank Havemann explains,

34 Interviews with Hans-Jürgen Uszkoreit, Berlin, 25 and 26 June 2010.

35 Ibid.

36 As argued, for instance, by Herbert Marcuse, in 'Liberation from the Affluent Society' (1967 lecture in London), in D. Cooper (ed.), *The Dialectics of Liberation* (Harmondsworth and Baltimore, MD 1968), 175–92.

We hoped that in the West the workers, who had been corrupted by wealth, would become more revolutionary, a little bit more critical of the system. It may not have been the workers, but at least the students led a left-wing oppositional movement there, and we were of course delighted. And then in '68 the reform movement in Czechoslovakia gave us great hope. It all seemed to fit together: the anti-Vietnam War movement . . . in America, Western Europe, and West Berlin. We felt connected to this movement.³⁷

For many in this friendship circle, this sense of connectedness to the West German movement was not just fed by the apparent convergence of political analyses, but could also build on long-standing personal ties to activists in the West – an important feature of '1968' in a divided country that had seen a massive exodus from East to West in the 1950s, a phenomenon that had in many ways strengthened the kinship ties between the two German states.³⁸ Thomas Klein's one-time partner Claudia Wegner (b. 1942), then a nursery teacher in East Berlin, for one, had a cousin in West Berlin who was involved in one of the experimental *Kinderläden* set up around 1968. Through her, Wegner was kept up-to-date about anti-authoritarian childrearing methods popular amongst New Leftists in the West, as well as about ideas of communal living.³⁹ Gerd Poppe, in turn, was bound to the West German Socialist German Student League (SDS) by Jürgen Holtfreter, a childhood friend from his native Rostock, who had emigrated to the West in the 1950s and with whom he had stayed in close touch. After the Warsaw Pact's invasion in Czechoslovakia on 21 August 1968, they went to the Czech Embassy in East Berlin with about eight other young East Germans to declare their solidarity with Alexander Dubček.⁴⁰ Around this time, Holtfreter (b. 1937), who had first got involved in the leftist scene in Stuttgart, lived in the SDS headquarters on West Berlin's Kurfürstendamm. He knew Rudi Dutschke and the other SDS leaders well and was the chief graphic designer of the radical left-wing paper *Agit 883*. His brothers had stayed in the East and, once Holtfreter had settled in West Berlin, he became the go-to-guy for a number of different East German groups. When he had young children, Holtfreter ferried books, brochures and newspapers in their nappies.

Those were the days of the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition in West Berlin and it was exactly their [the Easterners'] thing. . . . The atmosphere from West Berlin at the time reached East Berlin every day, via the media, TV and radio and so on. They were keen to lay their hands on it all, anything one could smuggle over. And that's what I did for a long, long time. I was their smuggler-in-chief.⁴¹

37 Havemann interview.

38 On this exodus see Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall*, Ch. 3.

39 Interview with Claudia Wegner, Berlin, 24 June 2010.

40 Poppe interview; interview with Jürgen Holtfreter, Berlin, 25 June 2010.

41 Holtfreter interview; also the interviews with Burkhard Kleinert, Berlin, 27 April 2010 and Franziska Groszer, Berlin, 7 October 2008.

Beyond such familial ties and long-standing friendships with émigrés that provided Easterners with organic linkages to the Western New Left, some of these young East Berliners courted the stars of the movement on the other side of the Berlin Wall. Throughout 1967 and 1968, two young women from this East Berlin circle sent numerous letters to Rainer Langhans and Fritz Teufel, two members of West Berlin's 'Kommune 1', an offshoot of the West German SDS and the first political commune that had been set up to overcome the bourgeois nuclear family in early 1967. The Western communards shot to international fame when their plot to attack the visiting US Vice President Hubert Humphrey with pudding was thwarted in April 1967. Through a series of provocative leaflets and protest acts they quickly became Western media stars and were also covered in the Eastern press, which, though sceptical of the communards' radicalism and the fact that students, rather than workers, drove the West German demonstrations, nevertheless welcomed the Western protests as evidence of the longing for a socialist alternative in the FRG – at least prior to the Soviet intervention in Prague.⁴²

The communards visited the Eastern part of the divided city on a number of occasions, not least to gain access to the Chinese Embassy where they obtained the German-language *Peking Rundschau* and copies of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (the 'Little Red Book'), their key sources of information about the Cultural Revolution.⁴³ On these occasions, they were hosted regularly by the Eastern dissident circle that clustered around Robert Havemann, the singer Wolf Biermann, and the sculptor Ingeborg Hunzinger. The young letter writers, who were friends with the teenage Havemann children, had been particularly impressed with Langhans, whom they considered 'something between a genius and a madman'. He had sent one of the women a photograph of himself, which she promised to 'put up on the wall next to [the Cuban Socialist leader Fidel] Castro'. She also asked for a photograph of Fritz Teufel and added 'Please bring a picture of this Che Gevarra [sic] (correct?) as well'.⁴⁴ While many of the letters convey the women's disappointment that the communards were often slow to respond and seemed fairly disinterested in their Eastern counterparts ('Have fewer orgies and respond', one letter pleaded⁴⁵), it is clear that they modelled themselves on the Westerners and looked for guidance from these icons:

Under your leadership we have to set up a commune (or something similar) here in the East. All my friends are enthusiastic and want to be in on it. . . . But before we can

42 M. Witkowski, *Die SED und die APO: Rezeption der Studentenbewegung in der Presse der DDR* (Oldenburg 2007).

43 Q. Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC 2012), 175.

44 B. to Teufel, n.d., *Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (HIS)*, Sozialistisches Anwaltskollektiv, no. 130, 03: Korrespondenz der Kommune 1, Ostberlin/DDR, n.p.; cf. A. Reimann, *Dieter Kunzelmann: Avantgardist, Protesler, Radikaler* (Göttingen 2009), 198 and 344–5, footnote 398.

45 A. and B. to Teufel and Langhans, n.d., *HIS*, Sozialistisches Anwaltskollektiv, no. 130, 03: Korrespondenz der Kommune 1, Ostberlin/DDR, n.p.

print leaflets we need to have a firm view. We need you for that. . . . I will do everything you think is correct!⁴⁶

After meeting Langhans, Teufel, as well as SDS figurehead Rudi Dutschke in East Berlin in January 1968, another young woman from this circle pleaded with them to come back soon, to supply further leaflets and information about Kommune 1, and urged them to be patient with the Easterners for whom public protests designed to provoke the authorities were more difficult to enact:

Please don't put your next visit off for too long, because if something is meant to happen here, then, I think, we need your guidance. Don't expect us to pull off a big one overnight. . . . Real enthusiasm has broken out amongst our friends.⁴⁷

In contrast to the youngsters' evident enthusiasm, the Stasi, which had an informant at the meeting, reported that the discussions with the older dissidents had been marked by disagreements about the means of effecting political change in East and West. Easterners and Westerners agreed that a Socialist society that differed from the authoritarian and bureaucratized Soviet model was the ultimate goal, but had trouble envisioning joint ways of bringing this about. While Ingeborg Hunzinger, in particular, was impressed by the communards' 'verve', both parties had been sceptical about finding political repertoires suitable for left-wing activists on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Whereas the Westerners had pondered ways to seize power in West Berlin by means of a revolutionary struggle against the liberal democratic order, the Easterners were sceptical of employing such radical measures in a state Socialist setting. The Westerners repeatedly emphasized the importance of building a mass following through publicly visible acts of protest, but the Easterners cautioned that 'such methods as demonstrating against specific political decrees of the party leadership do not make sense [in the GDR], because people would be arrested for even the smallest attempt'.⁴⁸ What is more, the Easterners were reluctant to discuss any tentative plans they might have had for illegal oppositional activities with their first-time guests, for fear of Stasi informants planted amongst them. As a result, the Western visitors were unimpressed by their hosts' timidity and 'frequently expressed their disappointment in the helplessness, passivity, and lack of inspiration and in what they perceived as petty bourgeois ideas . . .'. Robert Havemann, who had cut his teeth in the anti-Nazi resistance, for his part, thought that the Western students lacked a firm 'scientific base' and the 'necessary political know-how and experience'.⁴⁹ The Easterners nevertheless decided to invite

46 B. to Teufel, n.d., *HIS*, Sozialistisches Anwaltskollektiv, no. 130, 03: Korrespondenz der Kommune 1, Ostberlin/DDR, n.p.

47 See the letter attached to the Stasi report marked MfS, ZAIG, 1454, in *Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft (RHG)*, file RH 280.

48 See the Stasi report of 26 February 1968 about the meeting held on 27 January 1968 marked HA XX/1 in *RHG*, file RH 280, 8.

49 See the Stasi report about the meeting held on 27 January 1968 marked MfS, no. 276/68, in *RHG*, file RH 280, 8.

the communards back in intervals of four to five weeks.⁵⁰ The two groups also discussed techniques pioneered by students in Budapest that seemed potentially quite fruitful in a state socialist setting. The Hungarians, it was said, had 'combined participation in a demonstration in favour of [North] Vietnam with the accusation of insufficient activities by their own government in this regard'.⁵¹

The idea of using the war in Vietnam, which the GDR officially opposed, as a stick with which to beat the Socialist regime resonated with some of the young East Berliners present, among them Robert Havemann's teenage son Frank. According to his younger brother Florian, he became convinced that,

One had to take those things on which one basically agreed with the [Socialist Unity] Party and the government, ... one just had to introduce a different tone, to act in a different style, not as dull as the party, ... more enthusiastically Socialist.⁵²

While both brothers boycotted official solidarity events for the North Vietnamese at their school, Frank turned up at an event to mark the new GDR constitution of 1968 with a poster that read 'Break the solitude of Vietnam'.⁵³ Both brothers also attempted to organize their own Leninist 'subbotniks' – voluntary unpaid shifts in their work places – to collect money for the North Vietnamese struggle. Florian used the collectively earned money to buy a bicycle that he donated to the Vietnamese Embassy in the hope that it would end up loaded with weapons on the Ho Chi Minh trail.⁵⁴

Following the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia on 21 August, Frank Havemann, along with some of his closest friends, was arrested and tried for painting pro-Dubček slogans on walls in East Berlin. He was imprisoned, and, after his release, began to think more seriously about communal living in the East German capital. In early 1969, he set up what would become East Germany's best-known commune, an apartment in Berlin Friedrichshain that housed two couples – Gert Groszer and his wife Franziska, and Frank Havemann with his partner Erika Berthold – and their young children.⁵⁵ This arrangement, which was fairly exceptional in East Germany with its state-controlled housing allocations, soon became the preferred meeting place of the wider friendship circle. Informally dubbed 'Kommune 1 Ost', Havemann admits that it had been inspired directly by the Western communards: 'The models were certainly Kommune 1 and Kommune 2 in the West. But the motive was perhaps somewhat different, at least for me. Of course one motivation was that we needed an apartment'.⁵⁶ He and Berthold were expecting their first child and had found only a temporary refuge in his father's

50 See the report from HA XX/I of 26 February 1968, in *RHG*, file RH 280.

51 See the Stasi report about the 27 January 1968 meeting, marked MfS, no. 276/68, in *RHG*, file RH 280, 9; on the repertoires of Hungarian students see Mark and von der Goltz, 'Encounters'.

52 F. Havemann, *Havemann: Eine Behauptung* (Frankfurt am Main 2007), 790.

53 See the Stasi's notes on Frank Havemann in *RHG*, file RH 173, 337.

54 Havemann, *Havemann*, 792; on his take on the Vietnam War also 774–5 and 788ff.

55 Kätzel, *68erinnen*; Brown, 'A Tale of Two Communes'.

56 Havemann interview.

two-bedroom flat. The Groszers found themselves in a similarly difficult situation. They were married and had two children quickly after finishing school, but soon encountered problems in their relationship, which they hoped to overcome by adopting a communal lifestyle.⁵⁷

Before long, however, a breach opened up within the commune and the wider friendship group. Whereas the end of the Prague Spring is commonly identified as the death knell of reform socialism and the starting point of Eastern leftists' return back to the West,⁵⁸ this was the very moment when the East Berlin communards began to sharply demarcate their own activities from the Western revolt. Frank Havemann attributes this political change of course to his confrontation with fully-fledged, pro-Western opponents of the Socialist regime during his incarceration and his encounter with workers with pro-Western and 'reactionary views' during his subsequent punitive stint in industrial production. As someone who sought to improve socialism rather than abolish it, he came to the conclusion that 'It could only work, if one went into the system'.⁵⁹ The fact that the Cuban leader Fidel Castro, a long-standing alternative Socialist icon of these young oppositional Easterners, had come out in support of the Soviet invasion in August 1968 fuelled this change of course. As Klaus Labsch (b. 1948), a close friend of the communards, who lived in the successor collective, recalls:

Of course we were all unbelievable [Fidel] Castro fans, Castro and [Ernesto] Che Guevara were gods for us. And initially we were really shocked that Castro was one of those who supported the Soviet army's invasion... in Czechoslovakia. ... And then we said: '... if a man like Castro supports this invasion explicitly, ... then we'll have to think about it.' And perhaps it had really been a counter-revolution. And what role had the CIA played? And what had been the real goals of the movement of the Prague Spring and should the Russians just have watched?'⁶⁰

Gert Groszer's brother Reinhold explains: 'At this point an ideological change occurred within the group. ... From opposition to the state towards something like a pro-movement'.⁶¹ Franziska Groszer, who rejected this new pro-regime course 'became an enemy of the state in my own house. ...'⁶² She left the commune with her children, engaged in more visible forms of dissidence and eventually emigrated to West Berlin in the mid-1970s.

57 Franziska Groszer interview.

58 See, for example T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York, NY 2005), 447; other studies have begun to question this narrative: P. Apor and J. Mark, 'Mobilizing Generation: the Idea of 1968 in Hungary', in von der Goltz, *Talkin' 'bout My Generation*, 99–118.

59 Havemann interview; cf. von der Goltz, 'Making sense of East Germany's 1968'.

60 Interview with Klaus Labsch, Berlin, 26 April 2010; Brown, '1968 in East and West'.

61 Interview with Reinhold Großer [sic], Berlin, 9 May 2011. The Groszers/Großers use different spellings of their name.

62 Franziska Groszer interview.

The remaining communards' change of political direction went hand in hand with a lasting rift with their older dissident mentors. Wolf Biermann and Robert Havemann had encouraged them to promote their cause in Western publications, but the communards rejected this idea. Things came to a head when Robert Havemann invited a Western journalist to the commune for an interview.⁶³ The communards banned Havemann and Biermann from the premises, and Frank Havemann broke off contact with his father for many years.

As they began to embark on the Eastern version of a 'march through the institutions', the communards generally re-thought their take on the Western movement: 'The West took on a different role the more we entered the GDR system', Frank Havemann explains.⁶⁴ In delineating their own endeavours sharply from the one-time Western model, however, they still inadvertently mimicked those members of the increasingly splintered Western movement that set up the overly dogmatic and tightly knit Maoist or Trotskyist 'K Groups' that made a mockery of the libertarian streak of '1968' in the 1970s.⁶⁵ Much like these radical Westerners (in West Germany and elsewhere in Western Europe), the East Berliners now 're-enacted the 1950s in the commune',⁶⁶ something Frank's brother Florian, who fled to the West in 1971, Havemann would later term the 'post-Stalinist reconstruction of Stalinism on a voluntary basis'.⁶⁷ The communards, who had once been spurred on by their rejection of the socialist regime's bureaucratization and authoritarianism and dreamt of a more open society with greater freedom of expression, now proceeded to shut out dissenting voices and to create rigid rules for life in the collective. This included 'burning Western books that we still owned. Horrible things.'⁶⁸ Says Gert Groszer: 'At the time we thought that these books are of no use to us. "It's not right, it doesn't fit the party line, so what should we do now? Giving them away is out of the question, so we burn them." And then we destroyed them.'⁶⁹ While he is now profoundly embarrassed by the Nazi connotations of this 'book burning', Klaus Labsch elaborates that it was intended as the symbolic severing of Western ties:

This book burning was based on the idea that we wanted to cut off contact with people from the West.... [We] wanted to make it official: '... We aren't a GDR offshoot of Kommune 1.'... We no longer wanted to protest against the GDR, but we wanted to become an integral part of the GDR, a sort of germ cell.⁷⁰

63 Interview with Gert Groszer, Berlin, 29 April 2010.

64 Havemann interview.

65 A. Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne: Die Lebenswelt der K-Gruppen in der Bundesrepublik der 70er Jahre* (Frankfurt am Main 2005).

66 Frank Havemann interview in R. Land and R. Possekel, *Fremde Welten: Die gegensätzliche Deutung der DDR durch SED-Reformer und Bürgerbewegung in den 80er Jahren* (Berlin 1998), 222.

67 Havemann, *Havemann*, 797.

68 Havemann interview in Land and Possekel, *Fremde Welten*, 222.

69 Gert Groszer interview.

70 Labsch interview.

Instead of seeking inspiration from Socialist icons beyond the Soviet-controlled Eastern bloc, they now set themselves ambitious targets to study the classic texts of Marxism-Leninism.

Within three weeks you have to read Lenin and make excerpts. And we made wall newspapers and all that. Others said: 'You are crazy. Are you enacting the Free German Youth [East Germany's official Socialist youth organization]?' But we did it voluntarily.⁷¹

'In the beginning we read Guevara and such things', Gert Groszer explains, 'but then we said: "No, let's not get distracted, now we're going straight to the sources." And because we engaged with Lenin . . . we introduced an element of party discipline . . . We even drew up a statute for the commune' that regulated anything from the washing-up rota to who was to be granted access to the communal library.⁷²

In 1970, the three remaining communards and their friend Klaus Labsch moved into a larger flat in Berlin's Mitte neighbourhood, but no longer 'called it a commune, because that was something Western'.⁷³ They went to considerable lengths to explain their changed convictions to the authorities and to advocate the promise of what they now termed the Socialist 'Living Collective'. In programmatic statements sent to the authorities, they appropriated the regime's official discourse and its emphasis on rejecting the Western system as an important act of Socialist citizenship; criticizing the Western commune movement, they now repented for their erstwhile attraction to it. West Berlin's 'Kommune 1' had never posed a real threat to bourgeois-capitalist society and their embrace of it had thus been flawed, they argued: '[S]ome youths in the GDR felt compelled to copy this lifestyle' because of the 'manipulation of radio broadcasting and television'.⁷⁴ The members of the collective now portrayed it as their task to counter any Western influence forcefully, which was of particular urgency in the German-German context, they explained:

Because the GDR is the Socialist state that is geographically furthest to the West, has a state next to it that is one of the most aggressive of Imp[erialism], in addition the influence of broadcasting, television, and the press of this very state is especially dangerous, precisely because we are all Germans, because the antagonistic contradictions are easier to blur along the lines of "We are all German!", this means that the delineation has to be very tough and sharp.⁷⁵

71 Reinhold Großer interview.

72 Gert Groszer interview.

73 Ibid.

74 K. Labsch, 'Wohnkollektiv, Notwendigkeit oder Notlösung?', *RHG*, RH 098, 37.

75 M. Trautmann and G. Großer [sic], 'Unsere Absage an Havemann und Biermann', *RHG*, RH 098, 34.

The communards took on this task with conspicuous fervour. Much like those Westerners who set up the 'K-Groups', the Easterners also expressed their changed politics and attitude in corporeal and aesthetic terms.⁷⁶ While he had formerly proudly donned Western attire, Frank Havemann now channelled the ordinary worker. 'No more jeans, no parka, orderly short hair.'⁷⁷ The Stasi, which monitored the group's changing political stance closely, duly noted its approval of the Living Collective's 'outwardly progressive development'.⁷⁸

The visually proletarianized members of the collective spent a considerable amount of time agitating in their workplaces. They voluntarily left their 'petty bourgeois' professions in favour of jobs in industrial production where they sought to counter traces of capitalist influence, particularly the pull of consumerism. Labsch portrays these activities in rather comical terms: 'I always really disliked the fact that workers in the GDR – of all people – ran around with plastic bags from the West, with adverts on them, these were considered chic.'⁷⁹ When the East German authorities produced bags with the official logo of the World Youth Festival of 1973, Labsch and his friends collected these and tried to trade them in at their factories, telling their colleagues: 'Listen, we have brand new, beautiful plastic bags, we will give you two bags if you give us one of your old battered Nestlé bags.'⁸⁰

When the Gartenstraße Living Collective had been dissolved and its members lived separately again, they nevertheless continued their quest to affect change through official Socialist institutions. They belatedly joined the Free German Youth and were eventually granted membership of the Socialist Unity Party. Labsch, for one, joined the SED in 1975, studied philosophy, wrote his doctoral dissertation, and landed a job as a teaching and research assistant in the department of Marxism-Leninism of Berlin's Humboldt University. As was perhaps to be expected in a regime with a surveillance rate unparalleled in the history of repressive regimes, the Stasi tried to recruit all members of this converted group as informal collaborators.⁸¹ While Labsch emphasizes that, since 1989, he has come to regret the part he played in the regime's apparatus of repression, he explains that being recruited had actually bolstered his faith in the system. Seen from his perspective at the time, it had signified the regime's flexibility – proof that 'really existing socialism' provided space for young activists who had dabbled in oppositional activities, but essentially sought to infuse the socialist project with new enthusiasm,

76 For a brilliant case study of how changing political attitudes manifested themselves in corporeal terms, see Aribert Reimann's biographical investigation of West German communist-turned-Maoist 'K Group' activist Dieter Kunzelmann, Reimann, *Kunzelmann*.

77 Havemann, *Havemann*, 796.

78 Einschätzungsbericht, Berlin, 20 May 1971, *RHG*, RH 098.

79 Labsch interview; cf. K. Krampitz, 'Jugendrevolten in der DDR: "Mehr Bier, Mann!"', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (2 October 2010).

80 Labsch interview.

81 Cf. von der Goltz, 'Making sense of East Germany's 1968'.

The hard core of the commune... was persuaded to cooperate with the Stasi, including myself. ... I don't know if it's just embarrassing or if one can understand it somehow – ... it seemed to us to be the final token of trust that these people who had been on our case for years, who controlled us, always, around the clock, and who mistrusted us enormously – partly rightly so – that these same people now came to us and asked whether we wanted to join them. That really knocked our socks off.⁸²

These accounts offer a novel perspective on the journeys of young oppositional Easterners, who had engaged closely with the Western revolt in '1968'. Rather than choosing to 'drop out' of socialism or adopting more open forms of dissidence, they began to engage with the regime on its own terms and, in this process, conspicuously demarcated themselves from the Western model of political activism that had once so inspired them.⁸³

While the fact that those activists who had entered Socialist institutions after '1968' later emphasized their rejection of the Western model can be explained in ideological terms, it was striking that the disenchantment with the Western revolt also featured prominently in the accounts of those East Berliners, who had left the GDR for a life in the West or embraced more open dissidence in the 1970s and 1980s.

Bettina Wegner (b. 1947), a budding singer-songwriter in the late 1960s, for instance, had been close to the Havemann brothers in '1968'. Like Frank Havemann, she was tried and imprisoned for protesting against the Warsaw Pact's intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Like those of her peers, Wegner's imagination was not just captured by what was going on in Prague, but she also followed the West German movement with a 'burning heart'. She is adamant, however, that she soon found out that West German activists were 'self-centred' and oblivious to the ideas of reform socialists in the Eastern bloc. For Wegner, who in 1983 was forced out of the GDR against her will because of her outspoken criticism of the regime, this realization seemed to have foreshadowed the Western indifference towards the plight of Eastern dissidents that she would later experience in exile. She invokes an incident that looks like a prime example of activist cooperation across the Iron Curtain, but was one, she insists, that left her deeply disaffected. After having watched West German demonstrators being beaten by policemen on television, her partner, the writer Klaus Schlesinger, raised some money and bought a large lot of helmets from a local construction business to help the Western comrades. Like so many other Easterners, Schlesinger had contacts in West Berlin and word spread that anyone who wanted a helmet could come and pick it up in the East; Wegner recalls that future Red Army Faction leader

82 Labsch interview.

83 Even East Germany's myriad oppositional groups in this period should not be mistaken as 'pro-Western'. Particularly those based in East Berlin overwhelmingly advocated left-wing Socialist positions, which distinguishes them from oppositional groups elsewhere in Eastern Europe, see further: Jesse, 'Die intellektuelle Formierung der Opposition', 72.

Gudrun Ensslin was among those who turned up.⁸⁴ Speaking in the West Berlin house that has been her home since the 1980s, she conveys her anger at the Westerners' lack of gratitude for this imaginative act of Eastern solidarity in '1968',

They could have made contact and said: 'We'll come visit you more often, invite a few people, we'll exchange ideas.' Noooo! They could have come and said: 'We thought it was great that you got us the helmets.' ... No, nothing. ... We were with them in our hearts and in '68 we experienced that to our great disappointment they didn't give a shit about us.⁸⁵

In his controversial family memoir published in 2007, Florian Havemann, Frank's younger brother who fled to the West in 1971, conveys a similar sense of disillusionment and describes a growing awareness of the gulf between Eastern and Western '68ers'. His encounters with the remnants of the movement in West Berlin, with 'people whom [...] he] had little use for (it was the same the other way around)', made him reflect on whether or not '1968' in East and West had been the same thing after all.⁸⁶ He became convinced that real political and cultural differences separated Eastern and Western intellectuals in this period. While their first-hand experiences with political repression and censorship had made Easterners prize openness and free debate, Westerners were unwilling to listen to differing points of view, he argued.⁸⁷ Havemann arrived in West Berlin just as many Western left-wing groups stepped up their efforts to rally the working class, the 'true revolutionary subject'. As someone who had just escaped from the 'Workers' and Peasants' State' and who clung to the idea that meaningful change had to be instigated by young intellectuals, he was highly sceptical of this 'proletarian turn'. This meant that 'nothing could come of me and the Western left', he concluded.⁸⁸ Havemann also invoked his encounters with SDS icon Rudi Dutschke to contrast his intuitive sense of connection to the Western revolt with the palpable differences that face-to-face encounters could lay bare: 'There was immediately something akin to love between us, a very great closeness ... The love lasted, but the problem with Dutschke was that he only talked nonsense, leftist, stupid 68er nonsense', Havemann wrote. 'Why did he always go out of his way to sniff out world revolution everywhere?'⁸⁹ Havemann interpreted Dutschke's jargon-laden statements as symbolic of the ills and increasing doggedness of the West German revolt, which, by the 1970s, seemed to have lost much of its original libertarian impulse.⁹⁰

84 Schlesinger, on the other hand, states that RAF members Astrid Proll and Holger Meins had turned up. W. Engler, *Die Ostdeutschen: Kunde von einem verlorenen Land* (Berlin 1999), 311–12.

85 Interview with Bettina Wegner, Berlin, 2 May 2010.

86 Havemann, *Havemann*, 861.

87 Ibid., 862.

88 Ibid., 865; on Western activists' efforts to rally workers in this period, see Timothy S. Brown, *West Germany and the Global 1960s* (Cambridge 2013), 234–84.

89 Havemann, *Havemann*, 882ff, here 886–7.

90 Ibid., 889; The biography of Dutschke written by his wife equally highlights his communication problems with Easterners. G. Dutschke-Klotz, *Rudi Dutschke. Wir hatten ein barbarisches, schönes Leben* (Cologne 1996), 193–4.

Other young East Berliners from this circle, who initially remained in the GDR, also encountered Dutschke when he visited the East German capital in the 1970s, and their impressions chimed with Havemann's.⁹¹ Rupert Schröter, a close friend of ex-communard Franziska Groszer's, recalls meeting Dutschke in a friend's flat. 'It was a giant palaver. He explained to us why in the West the SPD [Social Democratic Party] now had to split by all means.' But there was still something about him that attracted Schröter. 'The scorching voice – I took a lot from it.'⁹² Franziska Groszer concurs that what he talked about had nothing to do with her own ideas:

It was awful chatter and it touched neither my ideas about changing the world nor about the direction in which we were moving. And, I have to say that I only understood half of it. But I still liked him.⁹³

Her acquaintance Jürgen Holtfreter, who facilitated many of these meetings, remembers that others Westerners he brought over from the SDS were even worse at building bridges to Eastern activists, because, unlike Dutschke who had grown up in the East, they knew little about life in the GDR.

I was often embarrassed by what they said. . . . They had just been politicized and had these ideas and said while in the GDR: 'We want this, too, a Soviet-style republic!' And all sorts of other things that made the East Berliners go: 'Oh, my God, what's wrong with them?' I was embarrassed. And I stopped taking people over, or at least doing it so frequently. They had just read Lenin and other things that just didn't go down very well with the East Berliners. . . . [There were] many misunderstandings.⁹⁴

The gulf widened still further in the 1970s, Holtfreter recalls. As an eastern activist, who still hoped to construct a less authoritarian, more humane socialism, but who had been burnt badly by the violent repression of the Prague experiment, he found the Westerners' political trajectory hard to fathom.

In the early 1970s, the so-called anti-authoritarian movement in West Berlin disintegrated into very authoritarian sects of Communist or Maoist parties, the complete opposite [of what they had once represented]. A moment ago they had been anti-authoritarian and then they were conspiratorially authoritarian. . . . Secret sects that called themselves parties. There was no way of explaining any of this to the East Berliners. I didn't understand it myself.⁹⁵

91 Details of his visits can be found in: *HIS*, RUD 140, 03, 'Stasi-Unterlagen Rudi Dutschke: Besuche in Ost-Berlin'.

92 Interview with Rupert Schröter, Berlin, 4 January 2010.

93 Franziska Groszer interview; see also Annette Simon cited in Brown, '1968 in East and West', 88.

94 Holtfreter interview.

95 Ibid.

Hans-Jürgen Uszkoreit, who had painted pro-Dubček slogans on buildings in East Berlin in August 1968 together with Frank Havemann and fled to the West with Frank's brother Florian in 1971, had similar difficulties in finding his political footing in West Berlin at a time when the Western movement seemed very different from how he had perceived it from the other side of the wall in the late 1960s. After escaping in 1971, he shared a flat in West Berlin with another Easterner who had been imprisoned for protesting in 1968 and some Western Communists with ties to the Western Branch of the SED. 'We all agreed that we wanted a different country, we had all been influenced by the '68 movement, and we all wanted something Socialist.' These broadly shared political goals and cultural tastes meant that Uszkoreit initially thought that it was quite obvious with whom he ought to spend his time. Soon, however, he found that, politically, he had little in common with his Western lookalikes. Their shared dress sense and musical taste had merely masked divisions that seemingly ran much deeper.⁹⁶

that was precisely where the split was, that precisely those to whom one felt drawn because of their dress, the music, their way of life, their diet, their interests, that there was a glass wall when it came to questions of how one viewed society... [W]e had these gruelling discussions, because we always thought: 'It can't be, we have to converge!' But we didn't converge... Anyone watching from another planet would have thought that culturally – because we wore the same clothes, lived the same way – we were the same. But we were entirely different... When we were in the East we felt more connected to the alternative types and the lefties [in the West] than we did later on, when we were there and realized that they had a very different relationship to what 'being on the Left' meant.⁹⁷

Uszkoreit had paid a high price for trying to affect change in the GDR and arrived in the West deeply sceptical of anyone who claimed that constructing a more humane socialism merely required a redistribution of power. He thought that none of the socialist regimes of the time provided a model that could simply be imported to Germany. The Western Maoists, who preached the blessings of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, seemed absurd to him. Many of the Western activists he encountered skirted the most difficult questions raised by the wide-ranging problems within existing socialist regimes, he recalls:

Nobody tried in earnest to solve the central social puzzle, namely: 'why are the workers in the West quite well off and there is greater workers' participation than in the East? Why does the society that values equality more highly offer less to its people than the society that tolerates blatant inequality in economic terms...?' I thought that if you really wanted to have a utopia of the future you had to solve this puzzle... Without [solving] this puzzle you cannot combine socialism and democracy...⁹⁸

96 This chimes with Gorsuch and Koenker's observation that 'Popular culture may have flowed across borders, [but] politics did so much less easily'. Gorsuch and Koenker, 'Introduction', in Gorsuch and Koenker, *The Socialist 1960s*, 9.

97 Uszkoreit interviews.

98 Uszkoreit interviews.

While he had some sympathy for the nascent green movement and other grassroots political groups, he came to the conclusion that the West German left in general did not have the right answers.

To someone who came from the East, to me at least, it was clear that I wouldn't find anything there. There is nothing that connects me to them. What keeps me occupied and what I want to know and discover is foreign to them. And if, God forbid, one of them were to obtain power, I would have to leave the country immediately.⁹⁹

Even without a revolutionary overthrow of the Federal Republic, he jumped at the chance to study in the United States of America when the opportunity presented itself and did not return to Germany until the mid-1980s. Uszkoreit was not able to translate the political and cultural affinity he had felt towards the Western movement in '1968' into a productive political dialogue once he found himself on the other side of the Berlin Wall in the early 1970s.

This article has examined the idea of '1968' as a meaningful moment of East-West convergence from the perspective of young East Berliners who encountered the Western revolt in the East German capital and later on in West German exile. A close look at the micro-dynamics of these encounters and the meanings Easterners ascribed to them over time reveals ambiguous perceptions of the Western '1968'. The Western revolt was a powerful reference point in autobiographical accounts, in which Easterners often portrayed themselves as East-West hybrids, thus turning the Socialist regime's discourse, which had required loyal GDR citizens to reject the West, on its head. As we have seen, many of the East Berliners had long-standing familial and friendship ties to West Germany, including to members of the New Left, and others courted the protagonists of the Western student movement. Images of West German communards adorned Eastern teenagers' bedroom walls next to pictures of other Socialist icons from beyond the Eastern bloc, such as Castro and 'Che' Guevara. Some members of the circle investigated here explicitly looked to West Berlin's 'Kommune 1' as a suitable model of how to effect change by making the personal political in a state socialist setting. And yet, as this article has demonstrated, what makes the 'Kommune 1 Ost' and its successor collective so relevant is not just that it was modelled on Western-style activism and therefore offers powerful proof of transnational contagion in '1968', but that the communards soon re-assessed their pro-Western stance, burned the Western books that had previously inspired them, and vehemently rejected the idea of being a 'GDR offshoot of Kommune 1'. Their case, in particular, illustrates that the nature of '1968' as a meaningful cross-Iron Curtain event was contested and that the Western movement meant different things to Eastern activists at different times.

99 Uszkoreit interviews.

Such a conspicuous anti-Western stance (which nevertheless mirrored the trajectory of sections of the Western movement towards sectarianism) was particularly pronounced amongst those who entered the institutions of 'really existing socialism', but their former friends, who later emigrated to the West or veered towards more open forms of dissidence within the GDR, testified to a similarly complicated relationship to the Western '1968'. Not only were they put off by what they perceived as Western indifference towards Eastern dissidents, they also found themselves speaking a different political language. By the 1970s, when the majority of those Easterners who had been disillusioned by the end of the Prague Spring arrived in Western exile, many factions of the Western left seemed to have lost much of their original spontaneity and libertarian impulse. Easterners like Florian Havemann and Hans-Jürgen Uszkoreit became convinced that the Westerners they encountered idealized the working class, sought a mere redistribution of political power, stifled open debate, and evaded the difficult issues raised by the poor performance and repressiveness of existing socialist regimes. Both had imagined themselves as part of the same broad political movement and cultural rebellion as the Westerners, but began to question the extent to which '1968' had really meant the same in East and West once they were exposed more fully to the Western movement. The (political) gulf between the two now seemed much wider than it had done from the other side of the Berlin Wall. The post-unification debates about persistent cultural differences between East and West – about the proverbial 'wall in the heads' – have no doubt given added shape to these stories. By highlighting their informed and considered rejection of many elements of the Western revolt, Eastern activists dismiss the idea that the Eastern '1968' is easily contained within West German commemorations of the 1960s. And yet, the consistency and frequency with which Easterners with vastly different trajectories highlight misapprehension between Eastern and Western activists suggests a common structure of experience and language and a shared perception of the West German '1968' as something rather different after all.

These findings imply that the two Germanies are indeed rich cases to study the meaning of transnationalism and cross-Iron Curtain encounters in '1968' – but rather than providing sole evidence of a shared political culture that easily transcended the Cold War divide and fed a German–German activist identity,¹⁰⁰ this case illustrates the limitations to a meaningful and lasting political exchange across the blocs. Encounters between the Socialist East and liberal capitalist West could be facilitated with relative ease, especially in East Berlin, but, far from spelling ever-greater convergence, increasing connections and exchange between activists from the two German states could actually foster a greater sense of difference.¹⁰¹

100 As suggested, for instance, by Jobs, 'Youth movements'; and Kätzel, *68erinnen*.

101 This chimes with Edith Sheffer's findings in her *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans made the Iron Curtain* (Oxford 2011), 11; cf. also Jesse, 'Die intellektuelle Formierung der Opposition', 75.

Biographical Note

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