

GERMANY'S 1968: A CULTURAL REVOLUTION?

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University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC)
Institute for Arts & Humanities

Convener: North Carolina German Studies Seminar
and Workshop Series



SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Report by:

- Friederike Brühöfener (UNC-Chapel Hill), E-mail: fbruehoe@email.unc.edu
- Kirkland Alexander Fulk, (UNC-Chapel Hill), E-mail: kafulk@email.unc.edu
- Benjamin Pearson (UNC-Chapel Hill), E-mail: bcpear@email.unc.edu
- Cyrus Shahan (UNC-Chapel Hill), E-mail: shahan@email.unc.edu

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Four decades after the tumultuous events of the late 1960s, a wave of personal memories of the student revolts has taken hold of German public discourse. These often emotional testimonies recorded by veterans of the revolts, who today still identify themselves as either supporters or critics of the rebellion, certainly indicate that “sixty-eight” continues to make a deep imprint upon German generational consciousness. Nevertheless, these many recollections have become overlaid with a patina of myth that both dramatizes and obscures what actually happened. The intertwining of memory and myth has made “sixty-eight” into an iconic term with rather contradictory associations of looming disorder or overdue liberalization.

On April 11-12, 2008, the North Carolina German Studies Series held its first annual Workshop entitled “Germany’s 1968: A Cultural Revolution” in order to investigate the complexities of these contradictions. Bringing together an interdisciplinary group of scholars and graduate students from the United States and Europe, the workshop aimed to reappraise the causes, the course, and consequences of the events commonly associated with the year 1968. At the center of the graduate student workshop and the main conference was the question whether and, if so, how 1968 indicates historiographically a caesura between the cold war of the repressive “long fifties” and the liberating New Social Movements of the 1970s.

The workshop began with a graduate seminar. The first panel of the seminar addressed the topic of “Changing

Politics.” The two papers re-examined the conventional wisdom about the centrality of student radicalism for the political transformation and democratization of postwar West Germany. In his paper entitled “Thinking Globally, Acting (Trans-)Locally: Petra Kelly, Grassroots Opposition to Nuclear Power, and the development of the German Green Movement,” *Stephen Milder* (History, UNC-Chapel Hill) examined the ideas and career of Green Party co-founder Petra Kelly during the 1960s and 1970s. Milder argued that a critical distance to the activities of both American and German 68ers marked Kelly’s conception of “trans-local” political organization. While Kelly was aware of and influenced by these movements, she gravitated toward a more concretely engaged form of political activity, which she found primarily in local, grassroots anti-nuclear and reform organizations. *Benjamin Pearson* (History, UNC-Chapel Hill) followed with a presentation entitled “Changing the Guard? The “Long-1968” at the German Protestant Kirchentag.” In examining interactions with student protesters at the Kirchentag meetings of 1967 and 1969, Pearson argued that the reform program was primarily the result of the work of an older generation of Kirchentag leaders (ranging in age from their thirties to their fifties), not of the younger generation of student protesters. Having only received full control of the organization in the early 1960s, this middle generation of leaders had embarked in a series of programmatic and stylistic reforms. Convinced of the values of dialogue and political pluralism, they worked to draw student radicals into the Kirchentag program. *Axel Schildt* (University of Hamburg) commented on the two papers.

The second graduate panel addressed the “Cultures of 1968.” In her paper “Wie der Ball über die Linie rollte...: Sport and Spectatorship after 1968,” *Rebecca Dawson* (Germanic Languages and Literatures, UNC-Chapel Hill) explored the influence of the culture industry thesis of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer on changing conceptions of “spectatorship” in the cultural aftermath of the student movement. Focusing on Peter Handke’s *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter* (1970), Dawson highlighted the ways in which Handke’s novel presented cinema and soccer spectatorship as forms of liberation from scopoc norms under late capitalism, challenging Adorno and Horkheimer’s dismissal of popular culture as mere entertainment consumed by passive viewers. In her presentation “Wolf Vostell’s Ideal Academy: Mobile, International, and Revolutionary,” *Erin Hanas* (Art History, Duke University) studied the parallels between the artist’s work from around 1968 and the broader cultural revolution of the 1968 movement. By explicating the critical resonances of several of Vostell’s happenings, Hanas argued that Vostell’s concept of the “ideal academy” reflected and underscored a cultural internationalism that has often been overlooked in art historical appraisals of 1968. The commentator for this panel was *Johannes von Moltke* (University of Michigan, Germanic Languages and Literatures & Visual Studies).

The third and final graduate student panel examined “Protest and Movements.” In his paper “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Herbert Marcuse and the German Student Movement,” *Alexander Fulk* (UNC-Chapel Hill, Germanic Languages and Literatures) complicated Marcuse’s image as the philosopher guru of the student movement. Looking closely at the dialectical foundations of Marcuse’s philosophy, which differed markedly from the dialectics of thinkers like Adorno and Horkheimer, Fulk pointed out how Marcuse’s espousal of revolutionary violence was misunderstood by many theoreticians of the student movement. In her presentation “Rethinking Family and Work: The West German New Women’s Movement and Public Debate over the Gendered Division of Labor, 1968-1984,” *Sarah Summers* (History, UNC-Chapel Hill) addressed the relationship between the “establishment” and the autonomous women’s movement that emerged in the late 1960s. Drawing on debates in the magazines *Stern* and *Der Spiegel* about the gendered division of labor, Summers argued that the autonomous women’s movement must be viewed as part of a wider feminist project; practical changes in gender order and social policy were not solely the work of the autonomous movement, but also grew out of the concrete efforts of feminist scholars, journalist, and politicians inside different organizations and institutions. *Dagmar Herzog* (CUNY, Graduate School, History) commented on these papers.

The main workshop opened with a Keynote Address by the prominent German author *Peter Schneider* entitled “Rebellion and Delusion: A Personal Report.” Schneider read select passages from his recently published memoirs *Rebellion und Wahn: Mein ’68* (2008) and reflected extemporaneously on the many personal and cultural legacies of the West German student movement, of which he was a central figure. Among his major points, Schneider considered the complex relationship between history and memory and the tensions between the self-identity of the present-day writer and the beliefs of the young radical—tensions that emerged initially from reflecting on diaries written in 1967 and 1968. Assessing the longer-term legacies of the 1968 student movement, Schneider was particularly critical of the legacy of violence and the intellectual justification of violence. Relating an anecdote about an ill-conceived (and ultimately frustrated) attempt to blow up the Armed Forces Network broadcasting tower in Saarbrücken, Schneider highlighted the naïveté behind much student violence. He also argued that these violent delusions were more widespread and more central than has often been stated. Turning to the fruitful legacies of 1968, Schneider focused on the legacy of broader cultural change, especially in terms of sexual liberation, the transformation of gender politics, educational reform, and the assault on bourgeois social norms. Following Schneider’s presentation, *Siegfried Mews* (UNC-Chapel Hill, Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures) and *Konrad Jarausch* (UNC-Chapel Hill, History) offered reflections on Schneider’s presentation, his most recent book, and his place in the literary and ideological landscape of contemporary West Germany. Both emphasized that 1968 must be understood not as a singular event, but rather as part of a complicated process of social, political, and cultural change in the Federal Republic that had started in the late 1950s and continued well into the 1980s.

Axel Schildt opened the first panel “Generational Rebellion.” In his presentation entitled “68ers against 33rds? Some Remarks on 1968 as a Generational Rebellion,” he challenged dominant representations of 1968 as a primarily generational phenomenon. Schildt argued that 1968 should not be seen merely as an intergenerational conflict. Not all the parents of revolting students had a questionable Nazi past. Schildt thus examined Rudi Dutschke in order to highlight how the student leader realized how fascism was not simply a piece of his parents’ past, but rather was an ideology that continued to permeate everyday life. *Elizabeth Peifer* (University of Alabama at Montgomery, History) probed further the heterogeneity of 68ers that is today grossly obscured by grand narratives of the brief era. In her presentation “Competing Narratives and Symbolic Uses of 1968” she asked how historians can best write the history and the legacies of 1968. How can one understand the narrative of the sixties and distinguish it from

the violent turn in the seventies? Peifer then considered the question of where the “long march through the institutions” ended. Did this strategy reach an endpoint? If so, do Joshka Fischer and the Greens represent its success or are they merely an illusion of power, a delusional relation, continuation, or success of 1968? Dagmar Herzog investigated in her presentation “Postfascist Morality and the Sexual Revolution” the relationship between the sexual revolution of the 1960s in West Germany and the short- and long-term legacies of the Third Reich. Instead of conceiving the sixties as a time which broke with the sexual prohibitions of the older fascist generations, sexual politics in and around sixty-eight must be reframed as part of a larger “trans-generational” liberalizing trend of sexualities. Herzog contended that if the Third Reich’s policy of sex for procreation failed (i.e., the creation of a liberal atmosphere of sex for pleasure was a “gift from the Third Reich”) then the 68ers’ revolt against the sexually repressive Nazi regime was, in part, founded on myth. Herzog argued that the sexual conservatism of the immediate postwar years and the sexual politics espoused by the church were a backlash against the sexual politics of the Third Reich as well as a means of creating distance from such policies.

Detlef Siegfried’s (University of Copenhagen) paper “Lifestyle Politics: Student Movement, Counterculture and the West German Society” opened the second panel “Political Confrontation.” Siegfried tackled the mainstream repercussions of subcultures’ radical politics by asking whether and, if so, how, subcultures of 1968 died only to have their cultural innovations persist and even change the society against which they had originally protested? Is it possible, Siegfried asked, to dissociate the politics of subcultures from their historical context? Subcultures and the power of the state together comprised a symbiotic complex in 1968. Thereafter the subcultures’ many dreams of a different life became representative of society writ large. The countercultures’ real success was, however, to be found in the dissolution of the demarcation between culture and politics. In her talk entitled “When Political Confrontation and Political Consolidation Coincide: 1968 in Germany,” *Helga Welsh* (Wake Forest University, Political Science) considered the fate of the 68er rebellion. By locating the events of 1968 in Germany in the broader context of developments in other industrialized countries, Welsh examined the seeming paradox that at a time when the political system was challenged openly and opposing lines were clearly delineated, critical junctures emerged that helped to consolidate democracy. Both with regard to governance and political culture, important new forms of interactions emerged that shaped the future of German democracy. Rather than interpreting 1968 from the point of view of rebellion vs. political stagnation, Welsh emphasized a nuanced view of the political landscape that highlights various aspects of political change that were already

underway when the student protests took place. *Jeremy Varon* (Drew University, History) discussed in his presentation “‘West Berlin is Saigon’: Globalism and the German Sixties” the specificity of the inter- and transnational moment of 1968 in West Germany. Although the West German sixties were transnational, he argued, they were nevertheless resolutely national in their overall composition. While the degree of transnationalism in West Germany’s sixty-eight is unique, this was not solely due to the labor of 68ers in Germany actively seeking to expand the borders of their protests. Some of the trans-nationalism was part and parcel a product of West Germany’s uniquely trans-national national culture. Conversely, West Germany’s 1968 evinced a distinctly German character, particularly in light of Germany’s fascist past, a fact that clearly distinguished the 1960s in Germany from the 1960s elsewhere. Varon called for a reevaluation of 1968’s globalism. Scholars should see 1968 should as inter- and transnational, while remembering what was truly unique about West Germany’s 1968.

Claudia Mesch (Arizona State University, Art History) opened the third panel “Cultural Transformation” with her paper “The Success and Failure of the Düsseldorf (Art) Student Movement.” Mesch mined the works of Joseph Beuys and Jörg Immendorf which were completed during the student movement in order to demonstrate how the failures of political art sowed the seeds for their post-68 successes. Mesch highlighted the disjunction between the politics of art and the politics of the student protests. This gulf was in large part a discrepancy between theory and praxis, one that students confused and artists acutely discerned as an irresolvable tension. Johannes von Moltke analyzed in his presentation “Structures of Feeling: Film circa 1968” the cinematic “coolness” of the time period. Von Moltke discussed in particular the emergent “structure of feeling” of coolness as exemplified in films by Rudolf Thome and Alexander Kluge. In the midst of the “hot” summer, 68er cinema’s “coolness” signaled a new idiom of detachment that was politically volatile precisely because of this detachment. This coolness also signaled a crucial transitional juncture for the continuation of New German Cinema into the seventies. *Susanne Rinner* (UNC-Greensboro, German Studies) concluded this session with a paper entitled “Towards a Poetics of 1968: Between ‘Berufsrevolution’ and ‘Erinnerungsarbeit’” which engaged specifically Uwe Timm’s 2001 novel *Rot*. Rinner examined the idea of what it still means to remember “sixty-eight” after reunification. How does 1989 affect the eulogy of 68? Rinner’s investigation of Timm’s novel stacked up the memory work of the narrative’s three central figures as a process of self-invention and self-reflection that linked post-1989 memories of 1968 to a larger socio-political continuum of contemporary post-unification Germany. How is 1968 remembered selectively after the

return to normalcy after 1989? How is it possible or why is it even desirable to rewrite, re-remember and reinvent a bygone revolt once the present has become so politically stable?

The workshop concluded with a roundtable discussion entitled “The Legacy of Sixty-Eight,” featuring *William Donahue* (Duke University, Germanic Languages and Literatures), *Dagmar Herzog*, *Matthias Middell* (Duke University & University of Leipzig, History), *Konrad Jarausch*, and *Peter Schneider*. One thread among many focused on the question of whether and to what degree violence played a central role in 1968 and in its legacy. Here Donahue, who also petitioned for a stronger scholarly engagement with Marxist theorizing in 1968, argued that the violence of 1968 is central for understanding the violent events that followed. Schneider argued that a critical engagement with 1968 must, however, distinguish the many different and competing notions of violence in the revolts and carefully historicize these notions before and after 1968. Additionally, Schneider insisted that the most important consequences of 1968 were the changes in gender relations and education, in everyday culture and sexual behavior. Like Schneider, Herzog emphasized the centrality of broader social and cultural change, in particular with regard to questions of lifestyle, sexuality, and social norms, which had started before 1968. Herzog also noted the need to defend these changes against recent conservative political efforts to overturn the gains of the 1960s. Middell drew attention to the very different national and regional perspectives on 1968 not addressed by the speakers. Scholars will never fully grasp the developments in the West German sixties if they ignore concurrent events in the East. Unlike the French revolts, cooperation between West German workers and students was impossible, he added, because of the stigmas assigned to socialism in the Federal Republic. Jarausch addressed the question of how to frame 1968 within the timeline of postwar German history. Is 1968 a caesura? How is it embedded within longer processes of political, social and cultural change ranging from the 1950s to the 1980s?

When taken together, the papers presented at the workshop posed two major sets of questions: how should the legacy of 1968 be viewed within the longer continuum of German history? And how should scholars interpret its legacy in the twenty-first century? Addressing the first of these questions, workshop attendees largely agreed about the need to rethink 1968 as part of a longer and broader movement of social and cultural transformation in West German history. The second question provoked a much wider range of responses and much greater disagreement about the usefulness of 1968 for present-day politics.

Organizers of the workshop, a cooperation between the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University, were: *Karen Hagemann* (UNC-Chapel Hill, History), *Konrad Jarausch* (UNC-Chapel Hill, History), *Richard Langston* (UNC-Chapel Hill, Germanic Languages and Literatures), *Michael Meng* (UNC, History), and *Ann Marie Rasmussen* (Duke University, Germanic Languages and Literatures). The event was made possible by support from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD New York), the Goethe Center Atlanta, the Goethe Institute Boston, the Max Kade Foundation, the Robertson Foundation, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University.

For more information see the website: www.unc.edu/ncgss

CONFERENCE OVERVIEW:

GRADUATE SEMINAR:

PANEL 1: CHANGING POLITICS

STEPHEN MILDER (UNC Chapel Hill): Thinking Globally, Acting (Trans-)Locally: Petra Kelly, Grassroots Opposition to Nuclear Power, and the development of the German Green Movement
BEN PEARSON (UNC Chapel Hill): Changing the Guard? The “Long-1968” at the German Protestant Kirchentag

PANEL 2: CULTURES OF 1968

REBECCA DAWSON (UNC Chapel Hill): “Wie der Ball über die Linie rollte...”: Sport and Spectatorship after 1968
ERIN HANAS (Duke University): Wolf Vostell’s Ideal Academy: Mobile, International, and Revolutionary

PANEL 3: PROTEST AND MOVEMENTS

KIRKLAND ALEXANDER FULK (UNC Chapel Hill): Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Herbert Marcuse and the German Student Movement

SARAH SUMMERS (UNC Chapel Hill): Rethinking Family and Work: The West German New Women’s Movement and Public Debate over the Gendered Division of Labor, 1968-1984

WORKSHOP:

KEYNOTE

- PETER SCHNEIDER: Rebellion and Delusion: A Personal Report

COMMENTS:

- KONRAD H. JARAUSCH (UNC Chapel Hill): Sixty-Eight: Between Memory and Myth
- SIEFRIED MEWES (UNC Chapel Hill): Sixty-

PANEL 1: GENERATIONAL REBELLION

- AXEL SCHILDT (University of Hamburg):
68ers against 33rds? Some Remarks on 1968 as a
Generational Rebellion
- DAGMAR HERZOG (CUNY, Graduate School):
Postfascist Morality and the Sexual Revolution
- ELIZABETH PEIFER (Auburn University):
Competing Narratives and Symbolic Uses of 1968

PANEL 2: POLITICAL CONFRONTATION

- DETLEF SIEGFRIED (University of Copenhagen):
Lifestyle Politics. Student Movement, Counterculture
and the West German Society
- HELGA WELSH (Wake Forest University): When
Political Confrontation and Political Consolidation
Coincide: 1968 in Germany
- JEREMEY VARON (Drew University): “West Berlin
is Saigon”: Globalism and the German Sixties

PANEL 3: CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

- CLAUDIA MESCH (Arizona State University): The
Success and Failure of the Düsseldorf (Art) Student
Movement
- JOHANNES VON MOLTKE (University of
Michigan): Structures of Feeling: Film circa 1968
- SUSANNE RINNER UNC Greensboro): Towards
a Poetics of “1968:” Between “Berufsrevolution” and
“Erinnerungsarbeit”

ROUNDTABLE: THE LEGACY OF SIXTY-EIGHT

- WILLIAM DONAHUE (Duke University,
Germanic Languages and Literature)
- DAGMAR HERZOG
- MATTHIAS MIDDELL (University of Leipzig and
Duke University, History)
- KONRAD H. JARAUSCH
- PETER SCHNEIDER