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## “THE GERMANS MEET THE UNDERGROUND”

The Politics of Pop in the Essener Songtage of 1968

### Introduction

In September 1968, the Ruhr Valley city of Essen hosted a cultural spectacle the likes of which Europe had never seen before. At the Essener Songtage [Essen Song-Days] dozens of musical acts from all over the world performed over a five day period to an audience estimated at upwards of 40,000. With light shows, experimental films, open mic sessions and a psychedelic happening, the festival put on display for a European audience all the exciting new wares of the sixties cultural revolution. Billed as “Europe’s first great festival of folklore, folksong, chanson and good popular music”<sup>1</sup> (note the distinction regarding popular music, to which we shall return) the Songtage were explicitly conceived of as a European answer to the Monterey Pop Festival which had taken place in California only a little over a year before.<sup>2</sup> At Monterey, where Jimi Hendrix concluded his sexually-charged performance by setting fire to his Fender Stratocaster guitar, beckoning to the flames like an Indian snake-charmer as feedback moaned through stacks of Marshall amplifiers, the link between the new youth culture and the revolutionary potential of popular music was solidified for a mass audience. In importing this revolution to West Germany, the organizers of the Essener Songtage bridged not only continents and cultures, but musical and artistic genres. Top American acts like the Mothers of Invention and the Fugs shared billing with well-known figures of German political song like Franz Joseph Degenhardt and Dieter Süverkrüp; English performers like Julie Driscoll and Pink Floyd with jazz musicians like Gunter Hampel and Peter Brötzmann. Most strikingly of all, the festival showcased the new crop of German experimental rock bands – Amon Düül, Can, Tangerine Dream and others – marking the breakout of German performers onto the world stage. Showcasing both international and local performers, attended by fans from throughout Europe and beyond, the festival represented a key transnational moment of the late-sixties, signaling the birth of an international youth culture with popular music as its soundtrack. At the same time, the festival represented the dovetailing of the new youth culture with the new politics associated with the student left. Conceived by its organizers – and received by its detractors – as an explicitly political event, the festival helped crystallize debates

1 *Internationale Essener Song Tage (IEST 68) veranstaltet:* (Press Release – English Version) Sammlung Uwe Husslein, Dokumentationszentrum für Popkultur, Köln.

2 *Information Nr 1*, Sammlung Uwe Husslein.

about the relationship between the mainstream and the “underground” (the buzzword of the festival, as we shall see) between art and commerce, and – above all – between popular music and politics. An examination of the festival thus offers us a chance to examine and unpack the mutual interpenetration of politics and popular culture in the ‘revolutionary year’ of 1968.

### Pop and Politics in West Germany: A Brief Excursion

It is only in retrospect that the left-wing extra-parliamentary opposition in West Germany and the new popular music can be seen as natural bedfellows. The student movement in 1960s West Germany exhibited little official interest in popular music. This was in part a matter of timing: the high period of the Socialist German Student League (SDS) – an organization which reached its high point by 1968 and disbanded the following year – predated the massive interest in, and politicization of, popular music which would mark the period from 1968 on.<sup>3</sup> More fundamentally, however, the serious and highly-theoretical orientation of the movement’s leaders left little room for a consideration of the potential emancipatory power that would be ascribed to rock and roll a few years later.<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that these leaders ignored popular culture – Rudi Dutschke, the SDS firebrand, was sufficiently impressed by the Louis Malle film *Viva Maria* – a lightweight revolutionary sex farce that suggested to Dutschke how Marxism and anarchism might be combined in importing Third World revolution to the metropole (!) – that he named his working group within SDS after it.<sup>5</sup> Dutschke also occasionally paid lip service to popular music, in one essay citing “the Stones and Aretha Franklin” as important harbingers of revolution alongside Malcolm X and Franz Fanon.<sup>6</sup> But straddling as he did the transition between Old- and New Left – attempting to rescue the emancipatory potential and traditions of early Marxism and the pre-1933 working class movement while embracing the possibilities offered by Third World anti-colonialism – Dutschke never quite understood the appeal of the new youth culture organized around popular music.<sup>7</sup>

3 See Wolfgang Seidel, *Scherben...*, in: *Scherben. Musik, Politik und Wirkung der Ton Steine Scherben*, ed. by Wolfgang Seidel, Mainz 2005, pp.°69–114.

4 “In the Socialist German Student League,” writes Detlef Siegfried, “Beat Music as mass culture was looked at skeptically, because, as Theodor W. Adorno postulated in connection with the Beatles, it ‘represented in its objective form something backward;’” Detlef Siegfried, *Unsere Woodstocks: Jugendkultur, Rockmusik und gesellschaftlicher Wandel um 1968*, in: *Rock! Jugend und Musik in Deutschland*, ed. by Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Zeitgeschichtliches Forum Leipzig, Berlin 1995, pp.°52–61, here p.°53.

5 Alexander Holmig, ‘*Wenn’s der Wahrheits(er)findung dient...*’ *Wirken und Wirkung der Berliner Kommune I (1967–1969)*, Magisterarbeit, Humboldt Universität, August 2004.

6 Rudi Dutschke, *Die geschichtlichen Bedingungen für den internationalen Emanzipationskampf (1968)* in: *1968. Eine Enzyklopädie*, ed. by Rudolf Sievers, Frankfurt am Main 2004, pp.°252–262, here p.°260.

7 Wolfgang Seidel observes: „Rudi Dutschke war nach dem Attentat auf ihn nach London gezogen und besuchte dort das Abschiedskonzert für Brian Jones in Hyde-Park. In seinem Tagebuch berichtet er ganz verständnislos von Tausenden junger Leute, die sich da sammelten, obwohl ‚die Band doch gar keine politische Botschaft‘ habe. Er konnte diese Begeisterung wohl nicht verstehen, weil es zwischen ihm (und

Although the SDS – above all the anti-authoritarian wing headed by Dutschke – contained the seeds of a cultural-revolutionary transformation; the most spectacular actions involving the student organization – those which did the most to escalate conflict between the students and the authorities – were instigated not by any governing body of SDS, but by the provocateur-clowns of the so-called Kommune I, a West Berlin ‘commune’ adept in scandalizing the petit bourgeoisie with (mostly staged) incidents of sexual revolution and anarchist terror.<sup>8</sup> With the goal of making the revolution fun, the media-savvy communards blurred the boundaries separating politics from other areas of existence, seeking to erase the distinction between public and private, between art and life. The most notorious members of the Kommune I – Fritz Teufel and Rainer Langhans – became something very much like pop stars at a time (1966–1967) when West Germany had yet to produce any actual pop stars of its own.<sup>9</sup> Fantasy figures of anti-authoritarian revolt, profiled in countless features in both the mainstream and left-wing press, Teufel and Langhans received voluminous fan mail from frustrated young people throughout the Federal Republic and beyond.<sup>10</sup> Langhans and his girlfriend, the model Uschi Obermaier – who was also, unsurprisingly, a member of Amon Düül, one of the new German experimental rock groups which performed at the Essener Songtage – became darlings of the media, poster boy and girl for the new lifestyle revolution.<sup>11</sup> In the second phase of the Kommune I beginning in late summer 1968, the communards took over a building in the Berlin Stephanstrasse – the “KI Fabrik” – where they retreated from the public sphere to delve inward using drugs and music as tools of personal and group exploration. Loose plans to form a band involving Langhans came to naught,<sup>12</sup> and the Kommune I was never important for its relationship to music *per se*; but in helping to expand the field in which activist politics could be pursued – into the realm of the personal, the subjective – the communards helped open the ground for the use of personal lifestyle and appearance for the creation of political identity. It was in this politicization of the personal that the greatest emancipatory potential of popular music would later be seen to lie.<sup>13</sup>

den Protagonisten des SDS) und den jungen Arbeitern, die plötzlich die Demonstrationen zu Massenveranstaltungen anschwellen ließen, einen sozialen Unterschied, aber auch einen Altersunterschied gab” (Wolfgang Seidel, *Berlin und die Linke in den 1960ern. Die Entstehung der Ton Steine Scherben*, in: *Scherben. Musik, Politik und Wirkung der Ton Steine Scherben*, ed. by Wolfgang Seidel, Mainz 2005, pp.°25–50, here p.°44).

- 8 On the Kommune see Ulrich Enzensberger, *Die Jahre der Kommune I. Berlin 1967–1969*, Köln 2004; Gerd Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt. Unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution 1967–1977*, Köln 2001, p.°149–182.
- 9 Thomas. Hütlin, *Die Tage der Kommune*, in: *Der Spiegel*, June 30, 1997, p. 100; see also Seidel, *Berlin und die Linke in den 1960ern*, p.°34.
- 10 Collected in *Korrespondenz der Kommune I, 1967–1968*, Hamburg Institute for Social Research/HIS-Archiv, SAK 130.03.
- 11 See Gerd Conradt, *Starbuck. Holger Meins. Ein Porträt als Zeitbild*, Berlin 2001, p.°99.
- 12 Antje Krüger, interview with the author, October 5, 2006.
- 13 Klaus Weinbauer, *Der Westberliner ‘underground’. Kneipen, Drogen und Musik*, in: *agit 883. Bewegung Revolte Underground in Westberlin 1969–1972*, ed. by rotaprint 25, Berlin, 2006, p.°73–84, here p.° 82.

Not everyone in the SDS approved of the Kommune I's style of politics – many saw the flirtation with the mainstream media as selling out, the instigation of conflict with the authorities as both a distraction and a threat;<sup>14</sup> but by the time the communards were ejected from the student organization, it was too late to put the genie of cultural-provocation-as-politics back in the bottle. The tension between political and cultural versions of the revolution exacerbated by the notoriety of Kommune I mirrored a split in the extra-parliamentary opposition, a split which came to the fore from the end of 1968. In the wake of the attempted assassination of Rudi Dutschke in April of that year, the remains of the student movement split (speaking rather schematically) into 'political' and 'countercultural' wings. Many young activists joined the profusion of new Marxist-Leninist and Maoist parties – the so-called K-Gruppen [Communist Groups], while others retreated from formal political organization into a highly-politicized 'freak' subculture organized around urban squats.<sup>15</sup> Here drugs, music, and – increasingly – anti-state violence combined with all the *accoutrement* of Anglo-American hippie culture to form a potent anti-authoritarian brew. Rock music and rock music culture played a key role in this scene as a means of transmission for anti-authoritarian ideas and style codes (sartorial and otherwise).<sup>16</sup> Yet popular music also became a battleground over which the relationship between popular art and popular politics was fought out, a struggle which was foreshadowed in the Essener Songtage of 1968.

“The greatest thing of its kind that has ever existed in Europe”

In a way typical of an era of high expectations and boundless optimism, the organizers of the Essener Songtage conceived of their project in grandiose terms. The festival was to be “the greatest thing of its kind that has ever existed in Europe,” a total event bridging musical and artistic genres while staking a claim for the political and social relevance of popular culture.<sup>17</sup> The leading light of the festival was a 25-year old music journalist from Cologne named Rolf Ulrich Kaiser. A pop-cultural renaissance man who first came to appreciate the social significance of popular music in connection with the annual folk song festivals at Burg Waldeck, Kaiser played a role in the debates around the political function of the festival during the mid-sixties. In 1967 he published a book on the international folk scene featuring interviews with leading American figures like Joan Baez and Pete Seeger. In 1969,

14 See Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany*, Oxford and New York 2003, p.°103.

15 See Michael Baumann, *How it all Began*, Vancouver 1977; Ralf Reinders and Ronald Fritsch, *Die Bewegung 2. Juni. Gespräche über Haschrebellen, Lorenzentführung, Knast*, Berlin and Amsterdam 1995; Enzensberger, *Die Jahre der Kommune I*, chapter 13; see also the essays in *agit* 883.

16 See Weinbauer, *Der Westberliner 'underground'*; on sartorial codes see Kathrin Fahlenbrach, *Protest-Inszenierungen, Visuelle Kommunikation und Kollektive Identitäten in Protestbewegungen*, Wiesbaden 2002.

17 *Internationale Essener Song Tage (IEST 68) veranstaltet:* (Press Release – English Version) Sammlung Uwe Husslein. See the photos and press excerpts on the festival in *1968 am Rhein: Satisfaction und ruhender Verkehr*, ed. by Kurt Holl und Claudia Glunz, Köln 1998.

he co-founded the *Ohr* record label which became home to many of the new experimental German rock groups who appeared at the Songtage. With his hand in radio, production, promotion, and publishing<sup>18</sup> – he wrote some dozen books on popular music and underground culture between 1967 and 1972 – Kaiser was an indispensable organizational and intellectual talent behind the rise of the nascent German rock scene for which British music journalists coined the term “Krautrock”.<sup>19</sup> The rise of this new German scene was connected with a reevaluation of the value of popular music. No longer simply entertainment directed at teenagers – no longer just ‘Beat Music’, as the music associated with the original British invasion was known in Germany – popular music was now to be recognized as a serious artistic and social force in its own right. This reevaluation was carried forward in the new West German music periodicals like *Sound* and *Song*. The decision of the latter in 1967 to begin covering pop and rock as ‘serious music’ alongside jazz and folk was indicative of the new direction.<sup>20</sup> A key goal of the organizers of the Essener Songtage (which alongside Kaiser included Martin Degenhardt und Thomas Schröder) was to transmit this new evaluation of the worth of pop music to a mass audience.

This assertion of worth – regarding not just popular music but also the broader culture of lifestyle and artistic experimentation with which it was connected – was expressed by the organizers of the Songtage through the idea of the ‘underground’, a term gaining a new currency in the 1960s as it was applied to aspects of the cultural explosion (e.g. ‘underground film’). The Songtage marked one of the first times that the idea of ‘the underground’ was systematically propagated as an antidote to the artistic and spiritual deficiencies of the ‘mainstream’. “Die einen erschauern oder bekreuzigen sich,” read the festival’s press release, “die anderen wittern subversive Umtriebe [sic], viele denken an die Metro, einige an die Revolution, die meisten wissen mit dem Begriff nichts anzufangen: underground. Was das ist, underground oder Untergrund, das werden die Internationalen Essener Song Tage, IEST ’68, vom 25. Bis 29. September zeigen. IEST ’68 wird nicht nur Europas erstes großes Festival für Folklore, Chanson, Folksong und populäre Musik, sondern auch eine Mammut-Untergrund-Fete, ein Fest dessen, was kluge Leute von McLuhan bis Scheuch die Subkultur nennen.”<sup>21</sup> The use of terms like “subculture” and “underground” – and the citing of scholars like Marshall McLuhan and Fritz Scheuch – was an attempt to legitimate the festival and the youth revolution it claimed to represent, a focus also evident in the organizers’ trumpeting of the ‘Brain Trust’ of experts involved in choosing acts for the festival and the inclusion of panels and seminars during the

18 Uwe Husslein, ‘Heidi Loves You!’ in *Knallgelb–oder: Psychedelia in Germania*, in: *Summer of Love. Art of the psychedelic Era*, German edition, Stuttgart 2006; Kaiser’s books include *Protestfibel. Formen einer neuen Kultur. Mit einem lexikographischen Anhang von Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser*, Bern, 1968; *Zapzapzappa—Das Buch der Mothers of Invention*, Köln 1969; *Bist doch ein Scheißer. Das Beste aus der deutschen Untergrundpresse*, Düsseldorf 1969; *Das Buch der Neuen Pop-Musik*, Düsseldorf 1969; *Underground? Pop? Nein! Gegenkultur!*, Köln, 1970.

19 The term retains currency to the present day. For a treatment of Krautrock in English see Julian Cope, *Krautrock Sampler*, London 1995.

20 Husslein, ‘Heidi Loves You!’

21 *Internationale Essener Song Tage (IEST 68) veranstaltet:* (Press Release – German Version) Sammlung Uwe Husslein.

festival to discuss the social significance of popular music.<sup>22</sup> “[The] choice of artists shows,” argued the organizers, “that this festival does not shut out [popular music], but...makes a definite [distinction] between tearjerkers and hit-songs.”<sup>23</sup>

The assertion of popular music’s artistic merit complimented the attempt to establish its political credentials. The two were intimately linked, indeed, for the claim to rock music’s artistic significance (and the attempt to connect rock music with a lineage embracing folk, jazz, and political song) were part of a larger attempt to establish and legitimize a sphere of cultural activity autonomous from traditional spheres and producers of culture.<sup>24</sup> This autonomous sphere of culture—the “underground”—was not a sphere of “conspiracy and criminality,” but rather, argued the organizers, a sphere in which it was possible “to produce...without worrying about the commercial potential, that which is fun, which corresponds to one’s own convictions, which the established producers can’t and don’t want to do, and which is therefore not available in the [mainstream] market.”<sup>25</sup> The idea of the underground was linked, in short, with the right to produce an alternative culture from below, a right linked with the assertion of artistic and social worth; the goal was “to advance and expand [through] ownership of the means of production, that which is created with the intention, not to entertain, but to enlighten, to agitate, to provoke, to develop awareness.”<sup>26</sup>

Many of the performers at the festival were, accordingly, chosen both for artistic and political merit. The political aspects of performers like the Mothers of Invention and the Fugs, the German agit-rock group Floh de Cologne and the political singer-songwriters like Wolf Biermann, were emphasized in the festival’s press releases. One entire segment of the festival – »Seht Euch diese Typen an!« – was dedicated to protest singers.<sup>27</sup> The title, which mocked a leading West German politician’s well know cry of exasperation over the shaggy appearance of left-wing protesters, was clearly aimed at solidifying the link between underground culture and New Left politics.<sup>28</sup> Acts like Floh de Cologne and the Fugs did not disappoint, the latter parading a porcine presidential candidate on stage during a performance featuring Vietcong flags and posters likening American vice president Hubert Humphrey to Adolf Hitler.<sup>29</sup> Such provocations had the desired effect of scandalizing

22 Each day of the festival included a morning seminar on “The song as a means of expression in our time” (*Internationale Essener Song Tage (IEST 68) veranstaltet*: (Press Release – English Version), Sammlung Uwe Husslein.

23 *Information Nr 1*, Sammlung Uwe Husslein.

24 Frank Gingeleit, *The ‘Progressive Seventies’ in South Western Germany: Rock in the Rhein-Neckar Area. Nine Days’ Wonder, Kin Ping Meh, Twenty Sixty Six and Then*, Tritonus, in: *Aural Innovations*, Nr. 21, 2002, <http://www.aural-innovations.com/issues/issue21/issue21.html>.

25 *Internationale Essener Song Tage (IEST 68) veranstaltet*: (Press Release—German Version) Sammlung Uwe Husslein.

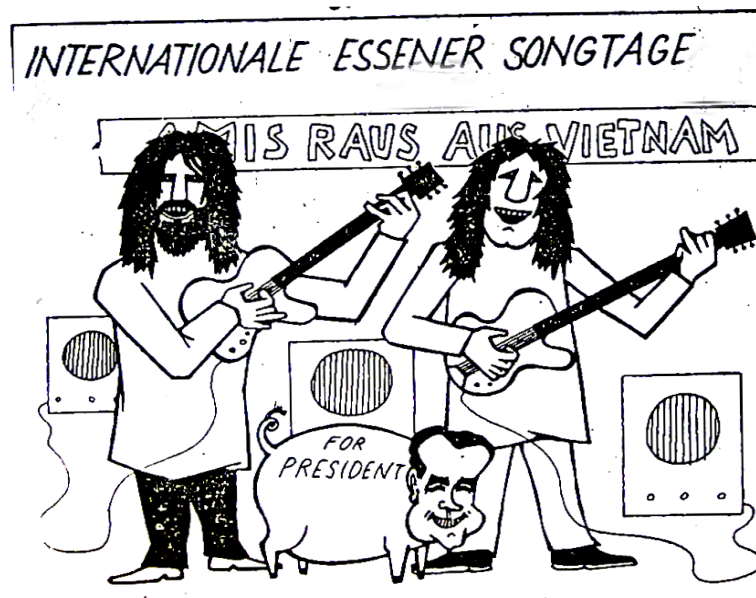
26 *Ibid.*

27 The concert took place on Thursday afternoon in the large hall of the Essen youth center (the Youth Welfare Office of Essen was a co-sponsor of the event) and was repeated the following day in a different venue (cf. “Diese Typen,” *Sammlung Uwe Husslein*).

28 The leading West German politician was Klaus Schütz of the SPD.

29 (No author given), *Sex Show mit Vietkong Fahne*, in: *Hellweger Anzeiger*, September 27, 1968.

West German opinion (see below); but such explicit political displays represented only one face of the link between politics and music in the Essener Songtage. As important as the explicit anti-authoritarianism of many of the new performers was the perceived consonance between the experimental thrust of much of the new music – freer form, longer compositions, more eclectic instrumentation, the use of the new sonic possibilities offered by electronic amplification in general and the electronically-amplified guitar in particular – which differentiated it from the more-or-less blues-based, more-or-less derivative compositions of Beat Music. In marking out “German Rock as a musical-political-psychedelic experimentation field”, the Songtage helped to solidify a new linkage between musical experimentation and cultural-political experimentation.<sup>30</sup> This linkage was carried forward in the festival’s attempt to recreate, on West German soil, the psychedelic ‘happenings’ of San Francisco and New York. The Saturday night blow-out in Essen’s Grugahalle – entitled “Take a Trip to Asnidi,” or as festival co-organizer Thomas Schroeder preferred to call it, “Take a Trip to *Hashnidi*”,<sup>31</sup> accomplished this in grand style.<sup>32</sup> With 10,000 fans in attendance, light and strobe effects, continuously-running underground films, musical performances on two stages (often simultaneous) and Frank Zappa of the Mothers of Invention shouting “freak out” to the stoned masses, the event was meant to signal the full-scale arrival of the psychedelic revolution in West Germany.<sup>33</sup>



The Fugs performance at the Essener Songtage caricatured in the *8-Uhr Blatt*, Nürnberg, October 10, 1968

30 Gingeleit, *The 'Progressive Seventies'*; Siegfried, *Unsere Woodstocks*, p. 55.

31 Thomas Schroeder, (no title given), in: *Song-Magazine der IEST*, 1968, no page numbers given.

32 The Saturday night “Happening” at the Grugahalle figures in a recent novel by Bernd Cailloux; see Bernd Cailloux, *Das Geschäftsjahr 1968/69*, Frankfurt am Main 2005.

33 Husslein, ‘Heidi Loves You!’

“Where were the critical youth?”

This unwelcome prospect was received with predictable alarm by the establishment. Press accounts of the festival, although not uniformly negative, emphasized its chaotic aspects while questioning its claims of political and social relevance. The condescending and sarcastic tone of much of the coverage was in part a product of the unprecedented tensions of the previous few years between members of the extra-parliamentary opposition and defenders of the status quo; but it also reflected an attempt by the establishment to come to grips with the way that the two previously more-or-less separate foes of pop music and political protest seemed to be dovetailing together and morphing into some new as-yet-poorly understood but vaguely dangerous animal. The impression of a ‘revolutionary’ popular culture, and the conflation of the rhetoric of left-wing extremism with the rhetoric of youth cultural revolution, was a product not just of the festival organizers’ grand pronouncements, but was, as Detlef Siegfried has shown, heavily reinforced in the music advertising of the period.<sup>34</sup> The link between pop and revolution forged by the Kommune I also played a role, and indeed, numerous press reports before the event speculated that members of Kommune I were traveling from Berlin to take part in the festivities.<sup>35</sup> In the aftermath of the festivals, journalists deplored the ‘dirty hippies’ who had descended on Essen. Many papers chose to publish the same photograph, of two hippies asleep on a park bench, the filthy bare feet of one inches away from the greasy hair of the other, and expressed outrage at the “obscene” performances by groups like Floh de Cologne and the Fugs. Special outrage – and much coverage – was reserved for an incident in which Mayor Wilhelm Nieswandt was jeered and pelted with beer coasters by “members of the extra-parliamentary opposition.”<sup>36</sup> Whether disapproving a case of “Sauerei in einem Schweinestall,”<sup>37</sup> lamenting “Obzönitäten und Krawalle”<sup>38</sup>, or blaming the festival’s problems on “eine aggressive Minderheit” of “kranke Jugend”<sup>39</sup>, press coverage of the festival sensationalized the events surrounding it and questioned whether a repeat event should be allowed.

Significantly, some of the most biting criticism was reserved for the intellectual and political claims of the festival organizers. A number of writers juxtaposed the intellectual claims of West Germany’s “critical youth” – based in a commitment to the ‘critical theory’ of the Frankfurt School and exemplified in the founding of a “Critical University”<sup>40</sup> in West Berlin in late 1966 – with the politics of cultural

34 Siegfried, *Unsere Woodstocks*, p. 55. See also Detlef Siegfried, *Time is on My Side. Konsum und Politik in der westdeutschen Jugendkultur der 60er Jahre*, Hamburg 2006.

35 (No author given), *Kommune auch dabei*, in: *Siegener Zeitung*, September 26, 1968. See also Peter W. Schröder, *Auch ohne Teufel war der Teufel los*, in: *Wormser Zeitung*, September 26, 1968.

36 Peter W. Schröder, *Den OB machen wir fertig*, in: *Augsberger Allgemeine*, October 6, 1968.

37 F.P., *Das war Sauerei in einem Schweinestall*, in: *Essener Tageblatt*, October 3, 1968.

38 Rüdiger Knott, *Irre Orgien. Kleister, Sex und Hitlerreden bei den Essener Song-Tagen*, in: *Rhein Zeitung*, October 3, 1968.

39 Thilo Koch, *Die Kranke Jugend*, in: *NRZ am Rhein und Ruhr*, October 10, 1968.

40 On the Critical University see Tilman Fichter and Siegwald Lönnendonker, *Kleine Geschichte des SDS*, Berlin 1977, p. 112–114.



provocation on display at the festival. One writer concluded that young people who applauded an “obscene” performance by Floh de Cologne renounced any claim to possessing a critical intelligence: “Zwanzig Minuten auf der Bühne waren ausgefüllt mit einem gegenseitigen Bekleistern mit brauner Farbe, Zeigen von obszönen Bildern und tierischen Urlauten. Dennoch war auch ihnen der Beifall wie allen sicher. Die Kritikfähigkeit der ‘kritischen Jugend’ strafte sich selber Lügen.”<sup>41</sup> The West German television journalist Thilo Koch, writing in *Die Zeit*, described Floh de Cologne’s performance as a “Pseudo-Orgie in orangefarbenem Licht. Playboy-Nackedeis werden an die Bühnenwand projiziert”.<sup>42</sup> Glee over the alleged failure of young smart-alecs to live up to their bold rhetoric – “critical youth asleep in Essen” was a fairly typical putdown – fairly leap off the pages of the press coverage of the festival.<sup>43</sup> The concept of the ‘underground’ – as in “culture bums from the underground” – was the object of sarcastic attention.<sup>44</sup> “Underground,” as one writer put it, was nothing but “a code word for the frustrated of every stripe.”<sup>45</sup> In a piece published even before the festival had begun – “New Magical Formula for the Uninhibited? The Germans meet the Underground” – the *Bayer-Kurier* worried about what Germany should expect from an “underground” imported from the United States, a leading “hotbed of new religions for the frustrated [and the] neurotic.”<sup>46</sup> With rather more sophistication, *Die Zeit* put its finger on the paradox of an “underground” placed on sale for mass consumption. “Den Eintritt in den Underground,” the paper wryly observed, “war nicht frei.”<sup>47</sup> Many commentators, in a somewhat similar, if slightly disingenuous vein, tried to imply that the festival had somehow not been political enough – that is, that its claims to social-political relevance had been sabotaged by its fall into the subcultural gutter. In addition to complaining of the “hippie camp” established by festival-goers on the shores of the Baldeneysee, the *Handelsblatt Düsseldorf* questioned the social relevance of the festival, arguing rather disingenuously that the festival’s association with the idea of “subculture” cancelled out its association with the idea of “revolution.”<sup>48</sup> The “Happening” in the Grugahalle, far from inspiring acts of liberation, rendered its participants into mere passive spectators. The festival promoters’ alleged failure of vision was conflated with the alleged sheep-like passivity of the masses of camped-out concert-goers sleeping off the party after the festival, with the sarcastic jibe “even revolutionaries need down-time” appearing in more than one press account of the event.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, the claim of passivity made in much of the newspaper coverage was echoed by some nominal supporters of the festival. “Anyone who came to the Ess-

41 Rüdiger Knott, *Auch Revoluzzer mögen Mußestunden*, in: *Neckar und Enzbote*, Sep 30, 1968.

42 Thilo Koch, *Lustverzicht*, in: *Die Zeit*, October 18, 1968.

43 (No author given), *Die kritische Jugend schlief in Essen*, in: *Rheinische-Merkur*, Oct 1, 1968.

44 Kurt Unold, *Unter-, vorder-, hintergründig. ‚Kultur Bums‘ aus dem Untergrund bei ‚Essener-Song Tagen‘*, in: *5-Uhr Blatt*, October 1, 1968.

45 Hans Vongerichten, *Ferkeleien mit Stadt-Mitteln*, in: *Bayer Kurier*, October 19, 1968.

46 (No author given), *Neue Zauberformel für Hemmungslose?*, in: *Bayer-Kurier*, September 9, 1968.

47 Manfred Sack, *Underground an der Oberfläche*, in: *Die Zeit*, Nr. 40, October 4, 1968, here p. 14.

48 Jochen Schumann, *Subkultur statt Revolution*, in: *Handelsblatt Düsseldorf*, date illegible.

49 (No author given), *Die kritische Jugend schlief in Essen*, in: *Rheinische-Merkur*, Oct 1, 1968.

ener Songtage to analyze the social function of the political song and to convert artistic protest into direct action”, observed the *Bochumer Studenten Zeitung*, “came away disappointed.”<sup>50</sup> Complaining that the festival presented a “consumerism without discussion”, the article criticized the festival’s failure to more fully analyze the role – musical, political and otherwise – of the subculture it claimed to represent.<sup>51</sup> Other sympathetic publications similarly questioned the extent to which the festival had succeeded in achieving a truly critical, truly political effect.<sup>52</sup> Such criticisms hardly detracted from the success of the festival, which even many of its critics grudgingly acknowledged; but they did identify an unresolved tension at the heart of the festival’s attempt to combine music with politics, art with commerce, a tension that would become more pronounced in the years to follow.

### Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Songtage, Rolf Ulrich Kaiser answered charges that the festival had failed in its aims by underlining the vital link between culture and politics. He argued that by “present[ing], in all its diversity, the other culture that until now lived [only] in the underground,” the festival had helped prepare the way for the elimination of taboos in television, radio and the recording industry. This emancipatory impulse, he argued, could not but have positive political consequences.<sup>53</sup> Yet the idea of subculture connected with the festival – and the easy relationship between consumerism and revolution it assumed – became a point of heated contention as the psychedelic hippie era of optimistic experimentation began to turn, in West Germany, into a highly politicized and bitter struggle between denizens of the subculture and the rest of society. Even as consumer capitalism became more adept at commodifying youthful rebellion, rock music came to be seen as the “property” of the extreme left.<sup>54</sup> The anarchist underground press in West Germany tended to treat bands according to the seriousness with which they were believed to represent the interests of ‘the revolution’.<sup>55</sup> The American group Grand Funk Railroad, for example, was dismissed as “the prototype of a capitalist pop group”<sup>56</sup>, while other performers like Jimi Hendrix, the MC-5, and the German group Ton Steine Scher-

50 (No author given), *IEST: Verpopt, verpatzt, und bald* [illegible], in: *Bochumer Studenten Zeitung*, Nr. 30, October 10, 1968.

51 Ibid.

52 (No author given), *Waldeck ohne Wald*, in: *tatsachen*, Nr. 41/68, October 12, 1968.

53 (No author given), *Songtage waren Hoffnung für die ‘Kultur aus dem Untergrund,’* in: *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, Nr. 229, October 1, 1968.

54 Detlef Siegfried, *Unsere Woodstocks*, here p.°56.

55 Weinbauer, *Der Westberliner ‘underground’*, p.° 81.

56 “Falls Grand Funk Railroad jemals nach Berlin kommt, werden wir ihnen auf alle Fälle das Geschäft versauern” (no author given), *Fizz*, Nr. 1, reprinted in *Fizz Re-Print 1–10*, Berlin, 1989).

ben<sup>57</sup> were held up as praiseworthy examples of radical art.<sup>58</sup> The music industry was criticized for exploitation of bands and fans.<sup>59</sup> In the leading West Berlin radical paper 883, the possibilities of liberation through popular music and subculture were the subject of ongoing debate.<sup>60</sup> While recognizing that popular music and subcultural identity could play a role in freeing consciousness and strengthening resistance to capitalism's demands at the level of daily life, the paper also criticized the role played by hippies in the commercialization of the underground.<sup>61</sup> Members of the West Berlin radical scene – the ‘Blues’ scene as it was known to its members (note the musical connotation of the name) – took this critique a step further, attacking the Berlin premier of the musical *Hair* for its alleged role in paving the way for the destruction of the true Berlin subculture. “We are well aware,” read a flier distributed in connection with the action, “that ‘Hair’ only appears in the guise of the subculture in order to gratify capitalist demands”.<sup>62</sup> Rolf Ulrich Kaiser came face to face with this sort of criticism when he appeared, in December 1971, on the WDR television program “Ende offen...” to take part in a round table discussion on “Pop und Co—Die andere Musik zwischen Protest und Markt.” Also on the panel was Nickel Pallat, manager of the radical rock group Ton Steine Scherben. After abusing Kaiser for several minutes—“du arbeitest für den Unterdrucker und nicht gegen den Unterdrucker”—Palet attacked the studio table with an axe (for some 45 seconds!), and was only hussled away by shocked personnel after he began stuffing the studio's microphones into his pockets.<sup>63</sup> In claiming the right of the underground to define itself from below, such attacks hit upon a major contradiction, one that lay at the heart of the Essener Songtage. Probing at unresolved tensions – between passive consumerism and active self-invention, between the ‘underground’ and the ‘mainstream’, between art as entertainment and art as revolution – they pinpointed dichotomies that the festival, conceived in the heady days of sixties optimism, had attempted but failed to bridge.

57 On the Scherben see Kai Sichtermann and Jens Jöhler, *Keine Macht für Niemand*, Berlin, 2000; Rio Reiser, *König von Deutschland. Erinnerungen an Ton Steine Scherben und mehr*. Erzählt von ihm selbst und Hannes Eyber, Berlin, 2001; Seidel, *Berlin und die Linke in den 1960ern*, here p.°48.

58 See (no author given), *Ton Steine Scherben*, in: 883, Nr. 73, 24.12.1970; *Scherben machen auch Musik*, in: 883, Nr. 83, 3.7.71, reprinted on DVD in *agit 883*.

59 See (no author given), *Stones, Spooky-Tooth, Broughton etc.: Macht Schluss mit der Ausbeutung der Veranstalter!*, in: 883, Nr. 71, 15 October 1970, in *ibid*.

60 See Weinbauer, *Der Westberliner ‘Underground’*, here pp.°82–83.

61 See (no author given), *Sind Hippies Kulturrevolutionäre?*, in: 883, Nr. 35, 9 October 1969, in *agit 883*.

62 See (no author given), *Ist ‘Hair’ Subkultur?*, in: *Gefunde Fragmente 1967–1980*, ed. by Die Umherschweifenden Haschrebellen et al., Berlin 2004.

63 See Sichtermann, *Keine Macht für Niemand*, here pp.°66–69. Also present at the roundtable discussion were the music theorist Heinz-Klaus Metzger, the journalist Wolfgang Hamm, and Conny Weit, a member of the group Popol Vuh.