

West Germany and the Global 1960s: The Antiauthoritarian Revolt, 1962–1978.
By Timothy Scott Brown. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2013. x + 397 pp.
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Rudi Dutschke in Prague, Daniel Cohn-Bendit in Frankfurt, Tariq Ali at the International Vietnam Congress in West Berlin, and Herbert Marcuse hovering always above—these are the images most often conjured up to connect ‘transnational 1968’ to West Germany. Timothy Scott Brown has gone another route, one which emphasizes cultural history and helpfully expands discussion in English on the topic.

Given the abundance of literature in German on ‘1968’, it is remarkable how few English-language books address the West German case in detail. Apart from Nick Thomas’ 2003 monograph, the field has mostly been left to international overviews and edited volumes (some very good, many very bad). Brown draws on all this work, but, following recent historiographic trends, focuses on how West German experiences were part of global entanglements. In doing so, he offers an incisive critique of many supposedly ‘transnational’ studies published in the last decade, focused as they are on agentless processes, prominent ‘veterans’, or the additive accumulation of disconnected national case studies. Relying primarily on German-language sources, Brown tells a story about ‘the intersection of global vectors across one local terrain’ (p. 5), bringing into focus the actions of a wide range of protagonists that include drop-outs (*Gammler*), pupils, ‘hip capitalists’ and students.

Brown begins by situating German experiences of the global 1960s in ‘Space’ (Chapter 1) and ‘Time’ (Chapter 2). West Germany’s 1968 was exceptionally transnational because of the country’s Cold War front line status, but also because the Nazi erasure of competing political traditions forced the Left to look abroad for ideas. That erasure, compounded by perceived SPD abandonment of left-wing traditions, led to a specifically German preoccupation with ‘history’ and to the parading of prewar icons (Lenin, Luxemburg, Liebknecht) alongside Third World heroes (Che, Ho Chi Minh). The German past and the foreign present were thus complementary ‘source material’ that coloured the ideas and images of West Germany’s antiauthoritarian revolt.

After thus setting the scene, Brown turns his attention to cultural production for the book’s central chapters (‘Word’, ‘Sound’ and ‘Vision’). Like Jeremy Varon, he argues that ‘1968 in West Germany was a revolt of texts’ (p. 153), but Brown is not principally concerned with intellectuals and their oeuvres. Rather, key ‘texts’ were also found in the critical journalism

of *konkret* and *Pardon*, in underground newspapers from the radical *agit 883* to the counter-cultural *Ulcus Molle*, and in books from both established publishers and alternative presses (März, Voltaire). The divergent perspectives of liberals, radicals, student intellectuals and hippie drop-outs within this readership proved complementary in building an alternative public sphere (*Gegenöffentlichkeit*), even if concrete political cooperation declined rapidly after May 1968.

Music, images and ideas of course circulated globally, but Brown is particularly interested in the ‘active transnational’: those within West Germany who imported impulses from abroad. For example, the music journalist Rolf Ulrich Kaiser helped organize the *Internationale Essener Songtage* as a ‘European answer to the Monterey Pop Festival’—but with a more ‘explicitly political’ bent than the original (pp. 155–6). Like the writer Rolf Dieter Brinkmann (who helped bring London’s international underground to Cologne) or the Lithuanian-American artist George Maciunas (associated with Fluxus in New York and Düsseldorf), Kaiser was an agent of cultural transfer who brought foreign, mostly Anglo-American influences to West Germany and adapted them.

Whether imported or domestically produced, art and articles of consumption were infused with political meaning in ‘the global 1960s’. In some cases (such as the Rolling Stones), those meanings were projections that went well beyond any intrinsic political content. However, choices about consumption reflected the adoption or rejection of particular values, signified oppositional belongings, and ‘served above all a *political* function’ (p. 232). To the many who took symbols of protest seriously, commercialization represented a very real threat: advertisements hawking ‘Marcuse-red’ and ‘Mao-yellow’ jackets were not merely an affront, but could bring about ‘the death of the project’ that lay behind them (p. 226).

Brown’s closing chapters on ‘Power’, ‘Sex’ and ‘Death’ carry the narrative into the 1970s. Following the failure of the campaign against the Emergency Laws, ‘the dream of a revolutionary mass movement [was] exposed . . . as a fiction’ (p. 329), leaving its different fragments to develop along their own trajectories. As in most other studies, the emphasis here is on feminism and ‘terrorism’, but Brown adds valuable new material that shows how impulses associated with 1968 persisted thereafter and reached other corners of society: grassroots groups (*Basisgruppen*) composed of student-theoreticians and potentially revolutionary workers experimented with new organizational models, secondary school pupils found their own voice in the movement within the schools (*Schülerbewegung*), and alternative infrastructure expanded through squatting (*Häuserkampf*) in the cities and the back-to-the-land movement. The example of the drug self-help group Release—which also supported up-and-coming musicians and ran its own hostel, restaurant and publishing house—demonstrates how seemingly ‘single-issue’ groups in the 1970s maintained ‘a broader mission . . . to create an alternative to capitalist society’ (p. 261).

The events that structure most chapters (the Kommune 1, the International Vietnam Congress, Sigrid Rürger's *Tomatenwurf*, the Buback obituary, and so on) will be familiar to most readers of German and many students of 1968. The strength of Brown's book is that he does not limit himself to these, but adds real depth to the discussions they open through additional primary sources that he has selected and analysed with great care. The book's transnational claims do not always fare as well: for all his spot-on critique of the existing literature, Brown's 'transnational' is overwhelmingly unidirectional, based on a transfer/diffusion/influence paradigm that tells us much about how Germans drew on 'the global' but very little about how they contributed to it. However, Brown shifts the emphasis from passive to active reception, looks for transnational agents beyond the usual suspects, and includes occasional comparisons to the GDR. Throughout the book, he shows a nuanced

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understanding of his protagonists (with the sole exception of the flat and undifferentiated *K-Gruppen*), and he lucidly analyses controversial matters such as the interface between politics and culture, tensions within the extra-parliamentary opposition, and the motivations behind 'terrorism'. This book does not constitute the final word on 1968, but it makes an important and positive contribution to ongoing debates about it.

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