

REICHARDT, SVEN. *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft. Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren.* [Wissenschaft 2075.] Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin 2014. 1018 pp. € 29.00. doi:10.1017/S0020859015000607

In his opening pages, Sven Reichardt points to the existence of four political milieus arising – in the Federal Republic of Germany, but not only in Germany – in the wake of the protest culture generated in and around 1968. These were: (1) the terrorist and proto-terrorist milieus which, in West Germany, never attracted more than 1,000–2,000 supporters, but which have spawned a hugely disproportionate wave of book-length publications in recent years; (2) the Far Left, in Germany mostly Maoist, which at its highpoint may have directly affected the outlook of 100,000 individuals, and which in recent years has finally begun to benefit from at least a modest degree of attention by historians; (3) the more moderate forces of the 100-per-cent Moscow-oriented German Communist Party, with at the most 40,000 members, and the radical groupings on the left flank of German social democracy – between 1964 and 1973 the SPD could point to 700,000 (!) new recruits – with precious few serious studies devoted to this phenomenon; and (4) what Sven Reichardt calls the “left alternative milieu”, which may have had a hard-core membership of 300,000–600,000 individuals by the late 1970s, and which could count on a vast mass of sympathizers of up to 5.6 million, according to public opinions polls of that time. This quantitatively most significant spectrum of radical political opinion in West Germany has received the least amount of serious attention in academia. It is this fourth spectrum which forms the object of Sven Reichardt’s 900-page (not counting the 100-page bibliography) pioneering work.

No-one will be able to ignore this massive and incredibly informative volume for years to come. In an amazingly detailed series of chapters, the author describes and analyses the various political organizations and/or social movements associated with this ideological and lifestyle orientation. The press products of these currents, the economic projects associated with these trends, the sudden vogue for various forms of collective and cooperative living arrangements, the squatters’ movement, the spatial arrangements of networks linked to the left alternative scene (pubs, bookstores, clubs, women’s centres); the body and sexuality; anti-authoritarian educational experiments; as well as new spiritualities and therapies related to this milieu – all receive erudite and sometimes encyclopedia-like attention. Any single one of these chapters published independently would have established Reichardt as a leading authority in this field. The combination and integration of all these elements shape this study into a future classic.

It is obviously impossible to do justice in a book review to all the various facets of these (sub)topics, and the interested reader may be referred to the relevant chapters for further plentiful detail. Instead, I wish to discuss in some detail the most prominent red thread in Reichardt’s narrative: the author’s critical assessment of the main stereotyped images (both among followers and detractors) of this milieu – the supposed penchant for tolerance, the alleged affinity to the unusual and even eccentric, and the much-vaunted heterogeneity of alternative lifestyles assembled in this multi-dimensional, apparently largely structureless multitude.

This quest for “authenticity and community” – the title of the book – is analysed with a refreshingly sceptical view, as is the self-proclaimed openness of this milieu towards the toleration of a great variety of experiences which, outsiders might very well assume, would likely have been characteristic of this left alternative environment. In reality, Sven Reichardt points out, this milieu, like any other, established a series of norms which were just as

effective at imposing new rules, forms of interaction, sartorial markers, etc. as is generally regarded to be the case in other, more traditional environments. Rather than liberating sympathizers of the left alternative scene from all constraints, a new set of behavioural regulations merely replaced older forms of conformity. And, Reichardt suggests, in some respects these new norms were even more treacherous than the ones they replaced, as the new guidelines for appropriate behaviour and action were largely unstated and, in fact, nominally contradicted by the official “ideology” of the left alternative scene, which pretended to tolerate literally everything.

Reichardt has the great gift of lifting relevant citations from reports by former members of the scene to demonstrate his thesis of the new conformities arising – seemingly paradoxically – out of this milieu: “Who does not submit to this demand for ‘spontaneity’, ‘the emphasis on pleasure’ and ‘direct action’, in accordance with subcultural conventions and etiquette, is cast off” (p. 236; all translations are mine). Or, in the words of a former member of the editorial board of an alternative city magazine, *De Schnüss*: “Openness vis-à-vis new faces? Forget it! Disinterest is what all those get to taste who come to *De Schnüss* to take a quick glance at what’s going on, in order to help out, or just to observe. Sometimes, during general assemblies, there is indeed some newcomer present who tries to figure out what is happening. It would be absolutely sensational if he or she would even just simply be asked for their name” (p. 287). Or, in the author’s own words: “What was initially conceived as a mechanism for liberation in the face of traditional forms of domination produced its own rules for the exercise of domination, clad in the garb of a collective and supposedly unrestrained consensus” (p. 445). The author is absolutely correct to point out the stultifying consequences of the absence of traditional forms of decision-making, coupled with the mantra-like fixation on establishing unanimity via consensus: “The principle of consensus, which constrained all forms of discussion, functioned as a self-regulating mechanism, forcing each participant to internalize and accept the new norms” (p. 447).

So far so good. The repeated emphasis on contradictory mechanisms at work in left alternative milieus is well-taken and wholly conforms to similar analyses made in different political and socio-geographic contexts by authors such as Jo Freeman, whose 1970 speech to the Southern Female Rights Union, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness” (first published officially in *The Second Wave*, 2 (1972), p. 20) was a brilliant summary of the nefarious consequences of the absence of structure and clearly defined mechanisms of decision-making in certain self-styled alternative political environments. But, in the eyes of this reviewer, Sven Reichardt goes at least one bridge too far. Yes, on a few occasions, the author makes some qualifying remarks, as when he notes that “it is obviously unnecessary to add that” (p. 644) not everyone within the relevant subculture conformed to the new unwritten rules. Yet Reichardt relentlessly hammers home his key insight throughout his chapters: “Self-exploitation replaced exploitation by others. Self-restraint via permanent exposure to the voyeuristic gaze of others in their milieu became the absolute framework for living one’s life. The inner logic and contradictions between individual desires and constant considerations of the views prescribed by these milieus determined thought as much as actions. Expectations substituted for repressive techniques” (p. 888). Was this really almost everywhere the case?

I wonder. Thankfully, the wealth of empirical data included in this volume often furnishes material for divergent conclusions. And, in fact, as hypocritical and contradictory as some of the features of this alternative culture may rightly come across, the left alternative scene did offer elements of a qualitatively different – some might say “better” – way of life than offered by more mainstream cultures. Two observations may suffice.

First, Sven Reichardt reports that the “gender relationships and interactions in this alternative culture were more well-balanced than in any other contemporaneous youth culture” (p. 46). This is by no means an unimportant conclusion. Second, Reichardt points out, in the context of his discussion of the role of sexuality in this milieu, that it was precisely women who benefited the most from the less rigid standards prescribing sexual behaviour in the left alternative scene, certainly at the movement’s highpoint in the late 1970s and early 1980s. And so it was with many other features described at great – sometimes excessive – length by Reichardt. Yes, there were countless hypocrisies and contradictions which marked this milieu like any other. But is this really so surprising? And, above all, did the negative features outweigh – or evenly balance with – the positive contributions made? I suggest not. Still, it is one of the great accomplishments of Sven Reichardt to provide ample evidence – or at least massive hints at – alternative ways of interpreting the accomplishments and contradictions of the environments under review.

One final comment: for a tome of this size to have a mere 18-page conclusion is a major disappointment. Moreover, 10 pages of this meagre conclusion are a mere summary of the preceding 870 pages. The actual 7-page “substantive” conclusion mostly repeats Reichardt’s thesis, assessed by this reviewer in the preceding paragraphs. The conclusion does include one additional observation by Reichardt, the author’s firm belief that, “in the last analysis”, the “history of the left alternative milieu” forms an integral part of the longer story of the emergence of the “post-modern self” (p. 888). “They were on the one hand critics of the pluralist media society and culture of consumption – but they formed just as much a part thereof” (p. 890). Yes, indeed. Of course. How could it have been any different? As a conclusion to a path-breaking work of empirical scholarship, such a final assessment is decidedly underwhelming.

Gerd-Rainer Horn

Département d’Histoire, Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris (Sciences Po)
27 rue Saint Guillaume, 75337 Paris CEDEX 07, France
E-mail: gerdrainer.horn@sciencespo.fr

HARVEY, KYLE. *American Anti-Nuclear Activism, 1975–1990. The Challenge of Peace.* [Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements.] Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2014. xii, 221 pp. Ill. £60.00; € 91.95. doi:10.1017/S0020859015000619

The late 1970s and the 1980s constituted a time of worldwide public protest against nuclear weapons. Appalled by the revival of the nuclear arms race and loose talk by government officials about nuclear war, people around the world staged a major revolt. Western Europe was convulsed by massive anti-nuclear demonstrations, as was North America, Asia, and the Pacific region. Protest, although on a much smaller scale, also broke out in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and even in Soviet-dominated eastern Europe. With polls showing large majorities of the public in most nations supporting the protest campaigns, political parties and politicians fell into line. Public policymakers tempered their nuclear ambitions and turned, instead, to fostering nuclear arms control and disarmament while avoiding further talk of nuclear war.