

1968 and 1989

Caesuras, Comparisons, and Connections

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Taken as such, one-nine-six-eight and one-nine-eight-nine are merely four-digit numbers without any particular significance. But when considered as years, they can stop conversations by provoking unexpectedly emotional responses because they evoke extraordinary memories: The word "sixty-eight" conjures up images of student protests, occupied buildings, confrontations with the police, or flower children making love not war. References to "eighty-nine" produce associations of harried refugees, courageous dissidents, and powerless Stasi, as well as the overwhelming joy of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The vividness of such pictures implies that these moments possess an emotional charge that has etched them into collective memory beyond the pale recollections of normal existence. But what do these two dates have in common, other than that the number "68" stood on its head makes "89"?¹

One answer might be that both years signify key caesuras of development after World War II that are especially pronounced in Central Europe. In private conversation, many people date developments in their own lives in reference to these startling events, whether they approve of their consequences or not. In the grand narrative of postwar history, both sixty-eight and eighty-nine mark significant interruptions, places where the story line ruptured, the plot intensified, and the direction altered. As the cliché of "turning points" indicates, such dates are used as shorthand for important and lasting changes that propel events onto a previously unlikely course. In twentieth-century Germany most historical periodization has focused on

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Transformed. Washington DC: The German

Historical Institute, 1998

¹ See the cover of Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolutions of '89 Witnessed in Moscow, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague* (New York, 1990).

the world wars and regime collapses of 1918, 1933, and 1945.² Despite their profound impact, 1968 and 1989 feel somehow out of place in this enumeration, suggesting that they might possess a different quality.

Perhaps a systematic comparison between these postwar caesuras can help illuminate their peculiar character by highlighting their commonalities and differences. However, hermeneutic historians might object to such an approach by arguing that differences in spatial and temporal context as well as in fundamental character make contrasting sixty-eight with eighty-nine intellectually hazardous. Although undeniable, such risks can nonetheless be minimized by clarifying what precisely is to be compared, which criteria are to be used, and how the changes are to be evaluated.³ One of the founders of historicism, Johann Gustav Droysen, already knew that comparisons need not obliterate uniqueness but are rather essential in discovering the particular nature of a given set of events.

Comparing 1968 with 1989 is unfortunately complicated by the fierce polarization of the public discourses that surround these events. Since many adults have lived through the student revolt and the collapse of communism, personal memories are bound to color their reactions for or against. Moreover, in the construction of "history" contending ideological camps have produced contradictory narratives, with the Left celebrating the youth rebellion but deploring the failure of socialism and the Right blaming intellectuals for the outbreak of anarchy but welcoming German unification. Sometimes these antagonists seem not to be speaking of the same subject at all but of entirely different developments. To escape such rhetorical traps, historians must therefore distance themselves and reflect on their own stake in these debates.⁴

The following remarks attempt a selective comparison of 1968 and 1989 as historical caesuras in postwar development. They largely center on Germany, since it is the only place that participated both in the Western youth revolt and in the Eastern collapse of communism, major upheavals that dwarf in importance other potential watersheds.⁵ As frequent references to

sixty-eight indicate, the former has come to be accepted as the most significant turning point in the evolution of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), while the latter, in evasive allusions before or after the *Wende* (turn-around), demarcates the end of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) as an independent state as well as the return of national unity. The German case provides particularly suggestive contrasts since the two competing states were part of the opposing Cold War camps, therefore illuminating some of the wider trends of both sides in one contested space.

1968 AS CULTURAL REVOLUTION

From a historian's point of view, much of the literature on 1968 is rather disappointing. The further the occasion recedes in the past, the more nostalgic and inconclusive reminiscences of sixty-eighters as well as media restagings during various anniversaries become.⁶ Suggesting irony and ambiguity, literary attempts at portraying the social and personal upheavals mainly help to dramatize the events.⁷ In contrast, social scientists tend to ponder the causes of generational rebellion and educational analysts probe the institutional background of student revolt in comparative terms.⁸ But in spite of some suggestive studies of radical organizations and evocative oral-history collages, there are hardly any comprehensive histories of sixty-eight so far, perhaps because the subject is so controversial and diffuse.⁹

In contrast to the momentous changes of other caesuras, the actual events of the year 1968 appear rather minor in retrospect. Conventional accounts of the German student revolt highlight only a handful of dramatic incidents: (1) the death of Benno Ohnesorg on June 2, 1967, during the anti-Shah demonstration in Berlin; (2) the activists' anti-Springer campaign and show trial at the end of that year; (3) the leftist anti-Vietnam War congress in February 1968; (4) the shooting of student leader Rudi Dutschke in April by a right-winger; and (5) the extraparliamentary opposition (ausser-parlamentarische Opposition or APO) march on Bonn in May to protest

2 Karl Dietrich Bracher, "Zeitgeschichtliche Anmerkungen zum 'Zeitenbruch' von 1989/90," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Jan. 20, 1991; and Klaus Tenfelde, "1914 bis 1990 – Einheit der Epoche," *Die Politik und Zeitgeschichte* B 40 (1991): 3–11; and Werner Müller, "Doppelte Zeitgeschichte: Periodisierungsprobleme der Geschichte von Bundesrepublik und DDR," *Deutschland Archiv* 29 (1996): 552–9.

3 Konrad H. Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist, "Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung – Eine vergleichende Fragestellung zur deutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte," in Konrad H. Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist, eds., *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland 1945–1970* (Frankfurt am Main, 1997), 11–46.

4 Konrad H. Jarausch, *Die unruhigste Einheit 1989–1990* (Frankfurt am Main, 1995), 12ff.

5 A somewhat comparable case would be Czechoslovakia where the 1968 effort to humanize socialism played a pivotal role in preparing the "velvet revolution" of 1989. See Mark Kramer's chapter in this book; for the related, but less widespread, Polish protest, see also Jerzy Eisler's chapter in this book.

6 Oskar Negt, *Achtundsechzig: Politische Intellektuelle und die Macht* (Göttingen, 1995), 21ff.

7 Michael Lützel, "Von der Intelligenz zur Arbeiterschaft: Zur Darstellung sozialer Wandlungsprozesse in den Romanen und Reportagen der Studentenbewegung," in Michael Lützel and Egon Schwarz, eds., *Deutsche Literatur in der Bundesrepublik seit 1965* (Königsstein, 1980), 115–34.

8 Klaus Allerbeck, *Soziologie radikaler Studentenbewegungen: Eine rechtshänder Untersuchung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und den Vereinigten Staaten* (Münich, 1973); and Philip G. Altbach and Seymour Martin Lipset, *Students in Revolt* (Boston, 1969).

9 Tilman Fichter, *SDS und SPD: Parteilichkeit jenseits der Partei* (Opladen, 1988); James E. Teat, *The Free University: A Political History* (Bloomington, Ind., 1988); and Bernd Rabehl, *Am Ende der Utopie: Eine politische Geschichte der Freien Universität Berlin* (Berlin, 1988).

the proposed Emergency Laws.¹⁰ Even allowing for the rapid spread of mass protests to other campuses and emotional confrontations with the police, by themselves these are rather paltry affairs with few casualties, hardly the stuff of which demarcations between historical eras are usually made.

The importance of sixty-eight in public memory therefore has to rest on something else, namely, the mythologization of the struggle in the media. Protesters themselves excelled in dramatizing their agenda and picturing their movement as the heroic uprising of a critical vanguard for the oppressed within Germany and without. With witty posters, peppery handbills, rousing chants, mass marches, ingenious sit-ins or teach-ins, and other provocations, they spread their message among the student clientele. At the same time, the conservative press, led by the tycoon Axel Springer, painted the protesters in alarmist colors as ingrates and misguided children of the bourgeoisie or as dangerous revolutionaries and anarchists threatening property, order, and morality. This media contest for generational solidarity or public disapproval was largely an exercise in symbolic politics, seeking to mobilize support by means of emotion and persuasion.¹¹

Beyond its symbolic power the significance of sixty-eight also derives from its ideological innovation. Breaking out of the Cold War confrontation, the New Left program contributed significantly to the revival of self-criticism within the Western camp. Today, some of its overblown texts read like a curious mixture of antifascist critiques of the elders, neo-Marxist attacks on capitalism, and participatory pleas for grassroots democracy. Some of this intoxicating cocktail derived from a desire to democratize institutions in practice; other ingredients represented a strange blend of Freudianism and the Frankfurt School; yet others were a delayed confrontation with the suppressed Nazi past. At the same time, an anti-authoritarian lifestyle sought to undermine "bourgeois" behavior through experiments with drugs, free love, communal living, and so forth.¹² One of the most fascinating aspects of 1968 is the speed with which this rhetoric and practice spread from a hard core to a broader group of youthful sympathizers.

¹⁰ Slightly modified list from Stuart J. Hiltwig's chapter in this book. Cf. also Tent, *Free University*, 331ff.

¹¹ Elizabeth Peifer argues in her dissertation, "From Event to Experience: The Myth of 1968 in German Political Culture," Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997, that 1968 must be understood less as a series of real events than as the result of discursive contests that created a larger-than-life myth.

¹² See the countless documents in Siegfried Lönnendonker, Tilman Fichter, and Jochem Standt, eds., *Hochschule im Umbruch*, vol. 5: *Genial und Groggig: 1967–1969* (Berlin, 1983); and Konrad H. Jarausch, *Deutsche Studenten 1800–1970* (Frankfurt am Main, 1983), 226–41.

Outliving the dramatic mobilization of youth, this generational revolt also triggered a series of new social movements. As forms of critique of Adenauer Germany, pacifism, feminism, and environmentalism had already begun to formulate their programs in the late 1950s and early 1960s. But the student revolt combined these separate causes into a systemic critique and spread their message to the educated segment of an entire generation where it shed its outsider status and became normative to a degree. In order to combat the bourgeois mainstream, these movements adopted many of the protest forms of the students, absorbed some of their unorthodox Marxist ideology, and endorsed much of the countercultural lifestyle. Although some of its elements were quickly commercialized, this shared protest/experience helped to produce a shift toward "postmaterialism" in the younger generation that rejected the consumerism of their parents.¹³

In a more conventional sense, the generational rebellion in 1968 accelerated a series of political reforms that ironically helped to stabilize the Federal Republic. In institutional terms, student protest initiated a gradual move toward greater participation in different institutions such as university governance. On the national level, pressure by the extraparlimentary opposition reinforced the switch from a CDU-led government to a social-liberal coalition under Willy Brandt that sought to expand the scope of the welfare state. On the international plane, the antiwar agitation also reinforced the shift toward a Central European détente in the form of the well-known Ostpolitik, which sought reconciliation with Germany's eastern neighbors.¹⁴ Resulting from a contested interplay of New and Old Left, these departures softened some of the most objectionable features of Adenauer Germany and thereby helped save the system from more drastic challenges.

The activists' ubiquitous assault on tradition eventually produced a massive backlash that sought to undo some of its changes. Inflamed by the Springer press, the older generation, religious circles, and even much of the working class remained skeptical of the student rhetoric. Some of the ideological dogmatism inherent in the K-groups, the violence of the Baader-Meinhof terrorists, or self-destructive behavior of the communes' anarchical lifestyle seemed to bear out the critics' worst fears. Through the exaggeration of its intent, sixty-eight gradually turned into a negative sig-

¹³ Robert Inghelhart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton, N.J., 1977); Sylvia and Martin Grellenthagen, *Ein schwieriges Erbe: Zur politischen Kultur im veränderten Deutschland* (Münich, 1993). See also Claus Leggewie's chapter in this book.

¹⁴ Christoph Oehler, *Hochschulpolitik: Die Entwicklung der Hochschulpolitik seit 1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 1989); Arnulf Baring, *Mittelwischel: Die Ära Brandt-Scheidt* (Münch., 1984); and Gottfried Niechardt's chapter in this book.

nifier, a generalized reference point for all the changes that threatened the order, stability, and decency of the middle class. Trying to capitalize on this resentment, the center-right parties began to campaign against this symbol, demanding a *Wende* of their own so as to return to older values and safer practices.

Because of such paradoxical features, sixty-eight might best be understood as a transformational experience, a kind of "cultural revolution." Since the political system was not overthrown and economic structures remained in place, skeptics might deprecate it as a mere "epiphenomenon," a delayed modernization crisis. But such minimizing fails to explain the symbolic force of the date, which suggests that one look for other, less tangible indicators instead. What actually changed were individual consciousness, social style, and cultural temper, a whole wealth of ideas and attitudes, of personal and interpersonal relationships. Sixty-eight was a rupture of the statist tradition that opened new space for antiauthoritarianism, egalitarianism, individualism, or universalism and obliterated the distinction between high and popular culture.¹⁵ Whereas the precise processes of change remain elusive, it is indisputable that German values and behavior did become more open and democratic after that year. This transformation is part of a wider cultural shift, also evident in other Western countries such as France and the United States.

1989 AS CIVIC REVOLUTION

Although it has had less time to develop, the debate about the fall of communism is similarly polarized between celebratory and catastrophic discourses. The German media are full of sensationalist disclosures of corruption within the Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands or SED) or allegations of complicity with the security police or Stasi. The public hearings of the Bundestag commission of inquiry have produced interesting testimony and lengthy expert opinions, but they ultimately became bogged down in electioneering. Surprised by the end of the GDR, social scientists theorize more about the collapse of the SED and the subsequent system transformation than they offer contextual analyses of the democratic awakening. Bothered by a lack of perspective and uncertain documentation, historians are just beginning to propose tentative

explanations.¹⁶ The shock of 1989–90 is still so profound that myths of "liberation" or "colonization" dominate over sober analysis.

In causal terms, there might be several unexpected connections between the events of 1968 and 1989. The Soviet repression of democratic socialists during the unforgettable Prague Spring disillusioned Eastern intellectuals with the project of building a better Germany. Although the SED managed to repress overt unrest, artists like Wolf Biermann and Stefan Heym lost faith in communism's antifascist claims to moral superiority.¹⁷ At the same time the Brezhnev Doctrine squelched economic reforms such as the New Economic System and launched the COMECON on the road to bankruptcy. In spite of the sealed border, some of the concerns of Western advocates of nuclear disarmament, sexual equality, and ecological consciousness eventually seeped across into the GDR. In a way, the small and embattled human rights movement of dissidents in the 1980s was a delayed response to the Eastern repression and Western reform associated with 1968.¹⁸

The context in which the democratic awakening unfolded was, however, quite different from the matrix of generational rebellion. In spite of its considerable authoritarian shortcomings, the FRG was at least nominally a democracy that provided formal rights that could be claimed and enlarged through protest and provocation. In contrast, the GDR was at best a *Fürsorgethätigkeit*, a welfare dictatorship, that took care of the basic needs of its citizens in exchange for their unquestioned political loyalty.¹⁹ When the GDR leadership refused to follow the Soviet lead toward *perestroika*, ordinary East Germans began to find their accustomed modesty and retreat into privacy unbearable, while dissidents felt emboldened by Gorbachev. In contrast to the Western possibility of replacing the government by election, the SED was locked into Honecker's post-Stalinist dictatorship that allowed no real possibility for reform.

16 Laurence H. McFalls, *Communism's Collapse, Democracy's Demise?* (New York, 1995); Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, N.J., 1997); and Konrad H. Jarausch, "The GDR as History: Reflections on Public Debate and Academic Controversy," *German Politics and Society* 15 (1997): 33–48.

17 Stefan Heym, *Nachruf* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), 737ff.; Armin Müller and Stefan Wölle, *Liturgie auf Raten: Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte* (Münster, 1993), 367ff.

18 See Kramer's chapter in this book. Cf. also Ulrike Poppe, Rainer Eckert, and Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Zwischen Selbstbehauptung und Anpassung: Formen des Widerstandes und der Opposition in der DDR* (Berlin, 1995).

19 This term comes from Jarausch, "The GDR as History," 44. Cf. also Siegrid Menschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR: Zum Paradox von Stabilität und Reform in der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main, 1992); and Christiane Lemke, *Die Ursachen des Unibaus: Politische Sozialisation in der ehemaligen DDR* (Opladen, 1991).

15 Lothar Baur et al., *Die Fächer der Revolte: Über die Veränderung der politischen Kultur durch die Studentenbewegung* (Berlin, 1988).

The actual events of the fall of 1989, while amplified by the media, were also more momentous than those of the student revolt. In human terms the mass exodus with its embassy occupations in Budapest, Prague, and Warsaw as well as its border crossings was much more compelling. It took greater courage to stand up to ruthless *Köpos* (police) or Stasi thugs in protesting for human rights than to provoke the FRG *Bullen* (cops). Through the mobilization of the Monday demonstrations in Leipzig, the civic movement accomplished what the sixty-eighters failed to do, namely, to link dissident leaders with working-class followers so as to succeed in overthrowing first a government and then a regime. Some of the program-matics of the New Forum and the hopes for a third way, cultivated by the Round Table, may have contained echoes of the student revolt, but the fall of the Wall passed all earlier efforts in symbolic and substantive significance.²⁰

In contrast to the increasing radicalization of sixty-eight, the national turn during the winter of 1990 surprised participants and observers alike. When the protesters succeeded in liberating the public sphere for free expression, the timid and silent majority of East Germans articulated its own desires and repudiated the leadership of the dissidents.²¹ Fed up with further attempts to reform moribund socialism and enticed by exaggerated images of Western affluence, ordinary GDR citizens chose the apparently successful system of the Federal Republic. Decades of frustration with the lack of "the thousand little things" under state planning had pent up a consumer demand that exploded with elemental force in favor of a social market economy. Even if there was little overt nationalism, the semantic shift from "we are *the* people" to "we are *one* people" was the inevitable result.

Unlike the gradual reforms triggered by the student revolt, the transformation of East Germany after unification was abrupt and thorough. Not only did the accession of the five new states to the old FRG introduce a Western parliamentary system with human rights and an elaborate social safety net in eastern Germany, but the collapse of the GDR also initiated a massive reconstruction from above and from the outside, in which the Trust Agency (*Treuhandanstalt*) dissolved the large-scale state monopolies and converted them into smaller private companies, owned mostly by Western firms. Although ample transfer payments from Bonn cushioned the shock,

the social result of this deindustrialization was devastating unemployment, especially for women. As if these changes were not brutal enough, the switch to the Western system also purged academic institutions and instilled a competitive, pluralistic culture that devalued Eastern competence and spurred extensive disorientation.²²

Disatisfied with the lack of ideological innovation, some former sympathizers of sixty-eight have labeled *eighty-nine a nachholende Revolution*, a mere attempt to catch up with the advanced West. No doubt the recovery of human rights and parliamentary politics as well as the restoration of a welfare capitalism were efforts to restore what had been propagated in 1848 or 1918 and lost after 1945. The return of a reduced form of unity in a German national state also fits this pattern.²³ But echoes of sixty-eight in the dissident agenda regarding peace, gender equality, ecology, and human rights also went beyond older democratic aims. Although illusory, the hopes for a third way did not reject socialism in order to restore capitalism but rather intended to make a qualitative leap into a postsocialist and post-capitalist world.²⁴ While ordinary people looked to the West, intellectuals possessed a utopian vision that sought to transcend both German paths.

Although the meaning of 1989 remains contested, it might be considered a new type of "civic revolution," aiming at a rebirth of civil society. Interpreting the overthrow of the SED as a collapse of communism begs the question of agency, but explaining it through the mobilization of the masses links 1989 to earlier popular upheavals such as 1918 or 1848. No doubt the stagnation of the planned economies and the erosion of Soviet control were essential preconditions, but the Charter 77 movement in Czechoslovakia, the Polish Solidarność (Solidarity) union, and the German peace movement fought not just for the recovery of civil rights but also for the construction of a new form of civic self-organization. Although the postunification blues has made many dissidents repudiate the term, the democratic awakening in East Central Europe seems to herald a different kind of bloodless revolution, seeking to free civil society from a totalitarian state.²⁵

22 Helga Welch, Andreas Pickel, and Dorothy Rosenberg, "East and West: United and Divided?" in Konrad H. Jarausch, ed., *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities* (Providence, R.I., 1997), 103–36.

23 Jürgen Habermas, *Die nachholende Revolution* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990); and Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflexionen on the Revolution in Europe* (New York, 1990).

24 See, e.g., Helga Königsdorf, *1989 oder ein Moment der Schamkeit* (Berlin, 1990); and Stefan Heym, *Die sanfte Revolution: Pöna, Lyrik, Protokolle, Erlebnisberichte, Reden* (Leipzig, 1990).

25 Manfred Heding, ed., *Revolution in Deutschland? 1789–1989* (Göttingen, 1991); Jarausch, *Unverhoffte Einheit!*, 112ff., 205ff., 303ff.; and the specious critique of Hartmut Zwahr, "Die Revolution in der DDR im Demonstrationsvergleich: Leipzig und Berlin im Oktober und November 1989," in

20 Elisabeth Pond, *Beyond the Wall: Germany's Road to Unification* (Washington, D.C., 1993); Jarausch, *Unverhoffte Einheit*, passim; and Mater, *Dissolution*, 108ff.

21 Jens Reich, *Rückkehr nach Europa: Zur neuen Lage der deutschen Nation* (Munich, 1991), 204ff., and Dirk Philippson, *Wie Were the People: Voices from East Germany's Revolutionary Autumn of 1989* (Durham, N.C., 1993).

COMPARING 1968 AND 1989

Due to this mixture of resemblances and differences, comparisons between 1968 and 1989 are at once intriguing and frustrating. The temporal and spatial distance, the incommensurability of the contexts, the particularity of their respective actors and agendas, and the distinctiveness of their events and results complicate systematic contrasts between these events. Nonetheless, East German dissidents and West German observers acted in 1989 on the basis of their memories of 1968 and frequently invoked comparisons between the two sets of developments. When a leading GDR dissident tried to explain the need for reform to a Western sixty-eighter, he argued tellingly, "You had your sixty-eight and we didn't."²⁶ Such a comparison is legitimate because it is not just a mind game of historians but a part of the record itself.

On a certain level of abstraction, a systematic comparison can uncover a number of striking similarities between the caesuras of 1968 and 1989. For the sake of clarity, it might help to look at such criteria as the international context, the process of mobilization, the techniques or aims of the protesters, and the achievements or results of their protests.²⁷ Because the detailed discussion of these dimensions would exceed the bounds of this chapter, a few suggestions have to suffice as an indication of some of the potential resemblances.

Both upheavals were part of wider international changes that also engulfed neighboring countries and only assumed a particular intensity in Germany due to its terrible past and divided present. Each rupture required certain enabling conditions that were the result of transnational developments such as the American defeat in the Vietnam War in the 1960s and the waning of Soviet control in Eastern Europe in the 1980s. In both cases wider trends, such as the spread of the peace movement and the example of *perestroika*, emboldened internal protesters to take to the streets. In a way, the two revolts were a challenge against the respective hegemonial power, namely, the United States in 1968 and the Soviet Union in 1989.²⁸ Whereas the Nazi legacy reinforced the generational rebellion but delayed the break

Manfred Hertling and Paul Nolte, eds., *Nation und Gesellschaft in Deutschland* (Munich, 1996), 335ff.

²⁶ Quoted in the introduction to Peifer's dissertation on the mythologization of 1968.

²⁷ For a different kind of comparison, focusing on the role of the intellectuals, see Rüdiger Bubner, "How Philosophy Failed to Grasp Its Time in 'Thought,'" paper presented at the conference "1968: The World Transformed," Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, May 23-5, 1996.

²⁸ See George C. Herrings and Lawrence S. Wittner's chapters in this book.

with the antifascist SED, the division limited the student revolt to West Germany and the democratic awakening to East Germany.

In both cases participants experienced a sense of palpable excitement, a feeling of a historic confrontation, a perception that something major was about to change. Although difficult to explain, this shift in perception played an essential role in mobilizing protesters by suggesting that their actions might actually have some positive effect. The half-heartedness of repression led to a great increase in activism such as demonstrations and resolutions, in which people who had been mute suddenly dared to voice their own demands. In both social movements students or intellectuals also played a vanguard role in articulating popular disagreement with the system and in providing the initial spark that eventually started a wider conflagration. Within this unparalleled politicization, a tension remained between the neo- or post-Marxist aims of the leaders and the more practical participatory hopes of their followers.²⁹

Both movements successfully used civil rights techniques of nonviolence, borrowed from Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., in order to dramatize their demands. This strategy of peaceful protest, which made clever use of the new medium of television, was predicated on an enemy who behaved repressively but nonetheless observed some limitations on the use of force.³⁰ Both challenges to their respective systems pursued a democratic agenda of expanding popular participation and their aims of postmaterialism and a third way sought to carve out a space between communism and capitalism. In their rhetoric these movements were a peculiar blend of modest reformism, directed toward remedying concrete abuses, and visionary utopianism, demanding an entirely new world. Each started in the social and extraparlimentary realm but eventually sought a transformation of politics.

Both revolts produced major changes in their countries, revitalizing public discourse and initiating changes that overthrew repressive structures and expanded citizens' rights. The generational rebellion of 1968 reinforced the domestic and international reform agenda of the social-liberal coalition in West Germany, whereas the civic rising of 1989 liberalized the post-Stalinist SED so fundamentally that it ceded power in East Germany almost

²⁹ Negt, *Ablaufbeziehung*, 60ff.; Steven Pfaff, "Collective Identity and Informal Groups in Revolutionary Mobilization: East Germany in 1989," *Social Forces* 75 (1996): 91-118. See also Günter-Holke's chapter in this book.

³⁰ The methods of the protesters are underanalyzed for 1968. For 1989, see Gerhard Rem, *Die proletarische Revolution* (Berlin, 1990).

without a fight.³¹ But each upheaval also had largely unintended consequences that limited the achievement of their original aims and deflected their impetus into different directions. One consequence of the student revolt was the terrorist violence of the Red Army Faction (RAF), whereas the democratization of the GDR unexpectedly led to national unification.³² If one abstracts a pattern of democratic renewal from both sixty-eight and eighty-nine, these otherwise disparate events begin to exhibit some remarkable similarities.

A closer look at 1968 and 1989, reveals, however, many differences that are so fundamental as to undermine some of the surface similarities. Especially when one descends from generalizations into the peculiarities of each situation and examines the actual sequence of events, the distinctions loom larger. Here somewhat different criteria of the character of the system, composition of the movements, specific ideological aims, and ultimate impact of changes may be more enlightening. Their cursory application to each respective upheaval serves to highlight some of the following distinctions.

In spite of the perceived repressiveness of each government, the difference in the nature of the respective system, such as the FRG of the 1960s and the GDR of the 1980s, was rather considerable. West Germany was, after all, a capitalistic democracy with irritating authoritarian features, whereas East Germany was essentially a Communist dictatorship, only softened by extensive social provisions.³³ Symbolically represented by the impenetrability of the German-German border, the international context also produced different results in the divided country. As part of the West, the FRG became caught up in its transnational youth revolt while East Berlin remained quiet. But as member of the Eastern bloc, the GDR was involved in the repudiation of communism while Bonn cheered from the sidelines. The constant comparison with the other side, resulting from being on the front line between hostile ideological blocs, initially favored repression but eventually hastened revolt.³⁴

Although there was a generational aspect to both protests, it operated differently in both situations. The sixty-eighters were largely students,

reacting also against the overcrowding of the universities, but this group was demonstratively absent in 1989, since it was highly ideologized by the SED. In contrast to the quiescence of thirty-five to forty-five-year-olds in the 1960s, white-collar workers, intellectuals, or artists of this age group, who resented the mendacity of the system, were the initial dissidents of 1989.³⁵ To the chagrin of the activists, the working people remained generally disinterested in the 1960s, but their mobilization provided the crucial mass base for the success of the Leipzig demonstrations during the fall of 1989. In consequence, sixty-eight became essentially an academic affair, whereas mass participation eventually turned the democratic awakening into a direction quite different from the wishes of its dissident mentors, organized in the New Forum.

Scrutiny of the evidence also demonstrates that the ideological programatics differed rather fundamentally between both movements. Whereas the generational revolt was motivated by an antifascist revision against the unacknowledged complicity of their elders with the Third Reich, the democratic awakening eventually turned this critique on the GDR itself and developed a leftist form of anticommunism that revived the totalitarian model.³⁶ In contrast to the self-professed Third World internationalism of the student rebels evident in the Che Guevara cult, the majority of the East German citizens in the winter of 1989 rediscovered national solidarity as the quickest way toward a freer and better life. Whereas anti-Vietnam protests turned the sixty-eighters toward an anticapitalist form of anti-Americanism, GDR citizens overcame their propagandist clichés and embraced the blandishments of Western consumer society, ignoring all postmaterialist warnings of leftist intellectuals.³⁷

In spite of their common role as caesuras, both ruptures had fundamentally different consequences. By dramatizing the authoritarianism of the university system, cultural institutions, gender relations, and individual lifestyles, the student revolt undoubtedly triggered important reforms in West German culture and society. Gained through a patient institutional struggle of the new social movements, such as pacifism, feminism, and environmentalism, this change of consciousness took years to achieve.³⁸ In

31 Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Europe* (New York, 1993). Maier, *Dissolution*, 108ff., does not explicitly mention 1968 in his discussion of the Central European pattern of revolution. Cf. Jarausch, *Unsercolle Einführung*, 309ff.

32 Jiliani Becker, *Hitler's Children* (Philadelphia, 1977), and Peter Mendl, *German Unification in the European Context* (University Park, Pa., 1993).

33 This difference is sometimes forgotten, which leads to a simplistic equation of both systems. Cf. Jürgen Kocka, *Die Vereinigungskrisen: Zur Geschichte der Gegenwart* (Göttingen, 1995), 9ff.

34 Peter Bender, *Episode oder Epoche? Zur Geschichte des geteilten Deutschland* (Munich, 1996).

35 Klaus R. Altbach, *Soziologie radikaler Studentenbewegungen* (Munich, 1973), and Klaus-Dieter Opp and others, *Die Volkshochschule Revolution* (Stuttgart, 1993).

36 Alf Lüdtke, "Coming to Terms with the Past: Illusions of Remembrance: Ways of Forgetting Nazism in West Germany," *Journal of Modern History* 65 (1993): 542-72; and Konrad H. Jarausch, "The Failure of East German Anti-Fascism: Some Ironies of History as Politics," *German Studies Review* 14 (1991): 84-102.

37 Hubertus Knabe, ed., *Anfang in eine andere DDR: Reformen und Oppositionelle zum Zubehörgesamt* (Hamburg, 1989); and Reich, *Rückkehr nach Europa*, 204ff.

38 Gerd Langguth, *Stunde nach Scheitern: Ein Psychogramm der Deutschen* (Stuttgart, 1995), 21ff.

contrast, the overthrow of the post-Stalinist dictatorship had more immediate and drastic effects, since it did not stop with a reform of the GDR but led to the complete dissolution of the second German state. The unexpected unification with West Germany introduced the successful FRG patterns into eastern Germany, thereby totally transforming the political, economic, social, and cultural pattern of East German lives.³⁹

Such fundamental differences caution against any facile conflation of the two sets of events. Viewed at a high level of generality, sixty-eight and eighty-nine might have been somewhat equivalent attempts at democratizing seemingly oppressive regimes, but their contexts, origins, and outcomes radically differed. Although they appeared dramatic at the time, difficulties in the FRG, such as the overcrowding of universities and the revision against the Vietnam War, turned out to be less deep-seated than did problems in the GDR, such as economic stagnation and political repression by a one-party dictatorship. In spite of much initial bumbling, the democratic system of the Federal Republic proved flexible enough to be reluctantly transformed, whereas the Communist GDR, after an initial attempt to remake itself, ceased to exist.⁴⁰

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN 1968 AND 1989

Perhaps more illuminating than a comparison between student revolt and democratic awakening might be an exploration of their potential relationships.⁴¹ Since both sets of events took place within one short generation, there are likely to be substantive connections between them, and their understanding might be mutually refracted in popular parlance and academic analysis. In terms of causation, one key question is whether there were any actual influences, learning processes, or programmatic echoes between 1968 and 1989. In terms of perception, an important issue might be how images of the generational rebellion continue to define the German Left and how interpretations of the fall of communism tend to legitimize the rise of a New Right.⁴² Perhaps some answers to these queries can

be found in a look at the process of learning from the events and at the construction of their memories.

In most respects, the lessons of 1968 for 1989 appear to have been positive. The internal democratization in West Germany that was accelerated by the student revolt helped refute Communist accusations of neo-Nazism and made the Federal Republic more attractive to the East Germans. At the same time, the brutal repression of democratic socialism in Czechoslovakia broke the loyalty of many intellectuals to the GDR and limited the ideological appeal of Marxism in the FRG. Moreover, the example of a largely peaceful mass movement that demanded the democratization of an authoritarian system proved instructive, even if the SED did everything in its power to discredit it as anarchistic. Finally, some of the agenda of the subsequent new social movements trickled across the Wall because it addressed pressing problems that were largely ignored in the GDR.⁴³

As a source of ideological identity, the relationship of eighty-nine to sixty-eight seems more problematic and contested. Because they still define themselves in reference to 1968, many West German leftists have misunderstood eastern dissent as a reprise of their own protests, hoped that it would achieve some of the things that they had failed to reach, and been disappointed in the result.⁴⁴ Because the Right always considered the cultural revolution of the 1960s deleterious, it sought to use the opportunity of unification to undo its effects on the larger Germany. In a well-orchestrated campaign, this self-styled "generation of eighty-nine" called for greater international assertiveness, the revival of German nationalism, the restoration of male authority, and the like. New Right resentment transformed sixty-eight from a shining example into a caricature of everything that seemed wrong in society and polity.⁴⁵ Both years therefore continue to hold magic power in defining group membership, ideological stance, and cultural style.

The most important connection between these dates lies in their symbolic meaning as reference points for important changes in postwar Germany. Popular opinion and academic analysis have accepted 1968 and 1989

39 Konrad H. Jarausch and Volker Gransow, eds., *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates, 1944–1993* (Providence, R.I., 1994). See also Michael Thomas, ed., *Abbruch und Aufbruch* (Berlin, 1992).

40 Ronald Fraser, *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt* (New York, 1988). For the eighteenth-century historian Robert Darnton, the key reference point was instead the French Revolution of 1789; see *Berlin Journal, 1989–1990* (New York, 1991).

41 Christoph Kleemann argues in favor of such a relational analysis of postwar history in the introduction to Christoph Kleemann and Georg Wichert, eds., *Die gespaltene Land: Leben in Deutschland 1945–1990: Texte und Dokumente zur Sozialgeschichte* (Munich, 1993).

42 See the article series in the *Franfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on "What's Left" in 1992 and the subsequent discussion on "What's Right" in 1994.

43 Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949–1989* (Oxford, 1995), 193ff., 201ff.

44 Fritz Haug, *Versuch beim täglichen Verlieren des Rechts unter dem Fittchen neuen Grund zu gewinnen: Das Perschke-Journal* (Hamburg, 1990); and Konrad H. Jarausch, "The Double Disappointment: Revolution, Unification, and the German Intellectuals," in Michael Geyer, ed., *The Power of Inclusion: In Germany* (Chicago, 1997).

45 Ulrich Greiner, "Die Neunundachtziger" *Die Zeit*, Sept. 16, 1994; and Wolfgang Engler, "Der aufgeschobene Streit" *Die Zeit*, Nov. 4, 1994. Cf. also Konrad H. Jarausch, "Normalisierung oder Re-Nationalisierung? Zur Umdeutung der deutschen Vergangenheit," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 21 (1995): 571–84.

as the two overriding caesuras since the end of World War II that fundamentally transformed the character of the successor states and thereby prepared the return of national unity. In contrast to earlier turning points such as 1918, 1933, or 1945, these ruptures involved neither lost wars nor the establishment of a dictatorship, but rather peaceful efforts to gain greater participation. As part of transnational currents of youth revolt and communist collapse, these later caesuras did not pit Germans against their neighbors but reinforced their place in the general pattern of Western development. For these reasons, both mark different contributions to the gradual emergence of a democratic political culture in Germany.⁴⁶

The challenge of this dual legacy is the construction of a democratic tradition for a united Germany. Unlike earlier catastrophes, these two efforts to enlarge the space of individual self-determination represent, in spite of some exaggerations and unfortunate consequences, aspirations that might serve as the foundations for a more liberal self-image. As a sometimes confused but exuberant attempt to break with authoritarian traditions, the student revolt exudes a subterranean fascination that still continues to inspire some youth today. Similarly, the self-dissolution of the post-Stalinist dictatorship through courageous dissidents, reform communists, and mobilized masses has created a model of what a docile people can achieve when sufficiently aroused. Even if they remain contested, the memories of these democratic moments can serve as positive examples for the building of a new, postnational Germany.⁴⁷

Ultimately, the symbolic dates sixty-eight and eight-nine possess a wider significance that transcends Central European concerns. The cultural revolution of 1968 was "a departure which in its contradictions moved the entire Western world" and yielded "a gain in liberality for all." Despite its misguided Marxist theorizing, the youth rebellion succeeded in strengthening antiauthoritarian tendencies, participatory desires, and postmaterialist values in the West. In contrast, the Eastern bloc repression of the concurrent attempt to create a "socialism with a human face" in Prague stripped the socialist project of creating an egalitarian alternative to capitalism of its moral credibility. Unwilling to reform until Gorbachev's halfhearted steps, the communist system therefore became a casualty of the "velvet revolu-

tion" of 1989.⁴⁸ Ironically, the youth rebellion helped save the Western system against which it protested, whereas the democratic awakening two decades later ended up dissolving socialism in Eastern Europe rather than revitalizing it. For all their differences, these pivotal dates therefore suggest a continuity across the blocs in the struggle to enlarge the domain of human dignity.

48 Robert Leicht, comparing 1968 with 1989 in *Die Zeit*, Oct. 7, 1994, and Hartmut Zwahr, "Auch die DDR hatte ihr 68-er Erlebnis: Der Prager Frühling weckte die Hoffnung auf Wandel," *Die Zeit*, June 11, 1993.

46 Konrad H. Jarausch, "Die postnationale Nation: Zum Identitätswandel der Deutschen 1945–1995," *Historion* (Spring 1995): 30–5. Cf. also Peter Merkl, *The Federal Republic of Germany at Forty-five: Union Without Unity* (New York, 1995).

47 Heinrich August Winkler, "Rebelling of a Nation: The Germans Before and After Unification," *Diakhois* 123 (1994): 107–27; and Koocka, *Verdingungsbene*, 133ff.