

This can be read for what it is: a disturbing and simplistic, even offensive, appropriation of the suffering of others. But it can also be read for what it also is: an important, urgent, even desperate flailing to free oneself from the cloying and everywhere inadequately acknowledged toxicities of the supposedly clean post-1945 period.

At the same time, this passage reveals as well the deeply held conviction about the “fascist” quality of the sexual conservatism and propriety pre-occupations with which Köster was raised. That there had been a displacement of the discourse of morality away from murder and onto sex was clear to critical young people in the early 1960s. What they were not, could not have been, aware of was how very recent the shift to sexual conservatism had been.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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### The Morality of Pleasure

#### THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION

The sexual revolution arrived on the West German scene in the mid-1960s, escalating in extent and intensity throughout the remainder of the decade and into the early 1970s. The sexual revolution in all its dimensions demolished the postfascist culture of sexual conservatism. In making this revolution possible, the commercialization, liberalization, and politicization of sex were inseparable developments. While the sudden mass availability of reliable birth control in the form of the pill certainly contributed mightily to the change in sexual mores, it did not on its own create the revolution. Just as important was the thorough saturation of the visual landscape with seminude (and soon completely nude) images of women’s bodies as well as the unabashed marketing of a multitude of objects via these images, together with an extraordinary boom in the market also of overtly pornographic pictures and narratives. This “sex wave,” as West Germans called it, was joined by a broad liberalization of popular values around nudity and pre- and extramarital sex. What had previously been done surreptitiously and in hiding was brought out in the open and loudly defended. There was a far greater willingness to publicize liberal values and to attack sexual conservatism vigorously and directly. Finally, in the midst of these wider trends, there was also the emergence and rise to cultural prominence of a New Left movement as well as incipient feminist and gay and lesbian rights movements, each of which, albeit in divergent ways, sought radically to politicize questions and issues surrounding sexual relations. None of these phenomena was unique to West Germany. Rather, West German developments during the late 1960s and early 1970s moved in tandem with developments across the Western world, as throughout Western Europe and the United States youth countercultures and student rebellions exacerbated and spurred further already existing trends toward sexual liberalization.

Yet there were also crucial dimensions of the sexual revolution that were specific to West Germany. There was a distinctive force and fury to West German debates over sex and a heightened drama to the resulting social transformations. The new consensus developed in the early to mid-1960s by liberal intellectuals and New Left activists that the Third Reich

had been not only brutally but also uniformly sexually repressive became so widely assumed as to seem incontrovertible. Furthermore, armed with the idea that there were strong equivalencies between Christian conservatives and Nazis on the subject of sex, liberals and radicals succeeded in putting powerful conservative publicists on the defensive and in redirecting completely the moral terms of debate about sex. Taking their cue from the groundswell of popular liberalization and the new moral arguments advanced by liberals and leftist activists, the Social Democrats, who joined the government in the Grand Coalition of 1966 to 1969 and then took over entirely in 1969, systematically worked to undo also the legal underpinnings of the postwar culture of sexual conservatism. Laws pertaining to adultery and divorce, male homosexuality, pornography, prostitution, and abortion were all in due course reformed.

By 1966 at the latest, it was abundantly clear that censorship of nudity or sex-related themes in the media had simply ceased to function. Pictures of scantily clad young bodies, revealed bellybuttons, and unclothed breasts (with only the nipples covered) blanketed billboards and magazine covers; advertisers proliferated erotically suggestive slogans to sell everything from cars to chocolate. Frank descriptions of sexual matters filled more (and more) space in periodicals and mass-market books alike. From the trashiest tabloids to the most highbrow journals and newspapers, print media sought energetically to cash in. Magazines now ran photos of young women topless at swimming pools and published essays on topics like nude dancing or the latest imported fashion from America: partner swapping (now popular at West German parties as well). Even when articles analytically and with self-reflexive intellectual detachment raised questions about West German culture's new addiction to voyeurism (or "sex as spectator sport," as *Der Spiegel* sardonically phrased it), these essays nonetheless became part of the same circuit of erotic explicitness they claimed to criticize.<sup>1</sup> Conservative commentators responded with horror at the barrage of provocative images and texts. Yet many people welcomed the sex wave. Certainly, once the door to titillating images and narratives had been opened, supply could scarcely keep up with demand. Meanwhile, the changes were not just in the realm of representations; it was clear that general popular attitudes were also shifting decisively in a more liberal direction.<sup>2</sup>

Adultery became a particular focus of nationwide fascination. As recently as 1963, the ideal of marriage, and also young and not just older people's devotion to the value of marital fidelity, had been celebrated in the media as *the* West German cultural common sense. At that time, fidelity had been at the top of the list of qualities most valued in a marriage partner, also among female and male youth.<sup>3</sup> But beginning in 1965, and within a few years spreading relentlessly also into the most mainstream

of venues, adultery and its possible benefits for an individual *and* for a marriage became a much-debated media topic. From the left-wing youth magazine *Konkret* to the right-wing daily *Bild*, infidelity in general and threesomes in particular, though always two women with one man (not coincidentally a typical constellation in heterosexual pornography), received elaborate attention. Books like *Gruppensex in Deutschland* (Group Sex in Germany, 1968) became instant bestsellers; although they presented themselves as straightforward reportage, they also (and above all) served as narrative pornography.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, sex in film broke all former taboos. In the early 1950s, a few seconds of female nudity on screen had sparked widespread popular protest; cinemas closed when distraught patrons threw stink bombs. For the remainder of the 1950s, a combination of film industry self-censorship and rigorous government control successfully kept all nude images out of movies. Only in 1964 did Ingmar Bergman's *The Silence* break with these restrictions (with two brief displays of sexual explicitness). The film drew ten million West German viewers, but it also caused considerable uproar, as conservatives reacted in outrage.

By the late 1960s, however, such a controversy seemed quaint and quite distant. Representations that would have been labeled absolutely shocking only two or three years earlier now appeared almost tame. For instance, pseudoscientific sex "enlightenment" films made for general audiences were released to tremendous commercial success and little real debate. Some of these new films—like the documentary *Du* (You, 1968)—involved prominent liberal professionals (among them Wolfgang Hochheimer, Hans Giese, and Hans Bürger-Prinz) interviewing prostitutes or sex criminals. Other films featured naked couples debating their sexual problems, while expert voice-overs assured people that marriages could be mended through open communication. In this new genre of soft-core "education," journalist and self-appointed sex apostle Oswalt Kolle clearly set the pace. The film versions of his popular article series and books on sexuality were smash hits. Kolle classics like *Das Wunder der Liebe* (The Miracle of Love, 1967) and *Dein Mann, das unbekannte Wesen* (Your Husband, the Unknown Being, 1969) revolutionized what West Germans considered acceptable cinematic fare. This was no revolution confined to the large metropolises; Kolle's films were shown also in schools (for anyone at least thirteen years old) even in the smallest towns.

As of 1969, the now SPD-led federal government was itself sponsoring nudity on film. Inspired by the ideal of an informed and sexually mature citizenry, the government gave Kolle financial backing to produce *Helga* (1969), which became the first German film ever to document childbirth on screen. Here also, as in most other Kolle films, the entire family went nude. And as with other Kolle films, it was completely unclear whether

audiences went to be educated or rather just amused. Kolle himself was certain that he helped couples attain deeper intimacy and greater shared sexual pleasure. Yet there was something so programmatic and awkward about the way his protagonists spoke their parts that it seems more plausible to believe those of his contemporaries who say they learned nothing from his movies but just got a good giggle from the new chance to see so much naked flesh. At the same time, there is no question that Kolle's insistence that he was improving marriages contributed significantly to reversing conservatives' ability to monopolize the discussion of marriage, even as Kolle's own much-publicized marital infidelities again served both as titillating tabloid fare *and* as a focal point for West Germans' massive and quite earnest wrestling with the problem of monogamy.<sup>5</sup>

By 1970 at the latest, it was apparent to all that the already rather flimsy pedagogical apparatus for these quasi-documentary films was a farce. Yet even as the educational alibi fell away, the basic genre persisted; indeed, it achieved more commercial momentum while it grew ever more sexually explicit. The marketing of films as documentaries whose purpose was to inform citizens about sexual matters was now part of the gag. No film embodied the pseudopedagogical sexploitation nature of this genre with more aplomb and commercial success than Ernst Hofbauer's *Schulmädchen-Report: Was Eltern Nicht für Möglich Halten* (Schoolgirls Report: What Parents Don't Think Is Possible, 1970). As might be expected, this film (and its many sequels and many more rip-offs) witnessed nubile young women throwing off their clothes only to throw themselves at men (or one another) under many circumstances and for all sorts of reasons.<sup>6</sup> Purportedly based on "research" into the sexual experiences of young girls and women conducted by a Bavarian named Günter Hunold, *Schulmädchen-Report* was simply pornography. And it proved to be a financial bonanza. With the money he made from his schoolgirl movies, Hunold (who had received a degree in musicology) established an Institute for Sex Scholarship in Munich; naturally, Hunold appointed himself director.<sup>7</sup>

Fortunes flowed into (and were made in) this brave new marketplace of a sexually liberated West Germany. Even while there remained strong evidence that West Germans stayed evenly split over the desirableness of the new trends, all would concur that theirs—for better or worse—was a nation profoundly "obsessed with sex."<sup>8</sup> By 1968, for instance, West Germans reportedly purchased more naked and half-naked images than any other people in the world.<sup>9</sup> No longer was it a question of whether the flood should be stemmed; now the question was how best to capitalize upon it. Throughout the later 1960s and into the early 1970s, media and advertising just kept pushing further the boundaries of what was legally permissible and commercially palatable. And soon enough, sexual explicitness and nudity (including close-ups of penises and pubic mounds) ap-

peared on television programs as well. As with cinema, while nudity on TV in the late 1960s had initially required a pedagogical excuse, by 1970 this was no longer necessary.

Meanwhile, the sex aids entrepreneur Beate Uhse expanded her already wildly profitable mail-order business when she opened sex shops all across West Germany. From her first major storefront in Hamburg in 1965 to twenty-six sex shops across West Germany in 1971, Uhse contributed substantially to making sex-obsession a respectable pastime, especially for the working classes. Uhse was a marketing genius with a keen grasp of social psychology. While 40 percent of her overall sales were in condoms, she had much else to offer. When patrons stepped into her playfully decorated stores, they received a discreet plastic sack—the better to conceal potential purchases from the prying eyes of others. The stores' loud music allowed customers to consult staff about intimate difficulties with no fear they might be embarrassed or overheard. And there on the shelves was just about every sex-related commodity one might desire, from "aphrodisiacs" (often consisting of vitamins and caffeine) to lingerie, from sex technique manuals to pornographic books (including Hunold's publications). By the early 1970s, Uhse's flagship store in Cologne alone sold between four thousand and six thousand Deutschmark worth of objects daily. At the same time, her mail-order business served two million customers. While at least seventy other mail-order businesses (and more than a hundred other sex specialty stores) competed with Uhse's company, this competition merely drove up demand.<sup>10</sup>

One did not need to enter a specialty store or do mail order to acquire pornography, however. By the early 1970s, and even though it was still illegal, soft- and hard-core pornography became available at neighborhood kiosks all over West Germany, and it sold extraordinarily well. The boom period lasted about two years from 1969 to 1971; afterward, several porn-producing companies went bust. By late 1971 the market stabilized—but at a very high level of turnover. And although this was not well known, quite a few respectable organizations across the ideological spectrum—including trade unions and the Social Democratic Party on the left, the more right-wing Axel Springer and Bauer publishing companies, and even some Catholic presses—turned a profit off this business in glossy nakedness, as printing machines did double duty producing both legitimate and illegitimate wares. Domestic manufacturers knew they faced tough competition from abroad; in 1971, West Germans spent 50 million Deutschmark annually on imported pornography (mostly hard-core magazines from Denmark and other Scandinavian countries). And yet more than twice that (or approximately 125 million) was spent on domestically produced pornography. Whenever a publisher was convicted of producing pornography, or if a particular magazine turned up on the federal

government's index of youth-endangering literature, he launched a new periodical with a new name. Just to stay safe, some magazines simply changed their title every few weeks. For example, when the lesbian-targeting magazine *Bi* was shut down by the authorities (though whether it was purchased more by straight men than by lesbian women remains an open question), its editor simply started a magazine called *Tri*. Ever attuned to market niches that needed filling, providers (including Uhse, who took photographs of her own adolescent sons and sold them as "homophile" masturbation aids) responded to the 1969 liberalization of Paragraph 175 (which resulted in the decriminalization of homosexual acts between men over the age of twenty-one) by producing male homosexual pornography as well.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, mass demand became the key that unlocked and transformed social norms. As one owner of a sex-aids chain remarked, "the market forced us into porn—without it one cannot survive financially." Or, as the successful print pornographer Helmut Rosenberg, the owner of the Hamburg-based newspaper *St. Pauli Nachrichten*, put it as he described his phenomenal business success: "Live with porn, and you will arrive safely at your goal."<sup>12</sup> The government responded, first, by directing customs officials and police to be more lenient about pornography and, ultimately, by formally relaxing the antipornography law.

Scholarly experts on sexuality—among them medical doctors, sexologists, psychologists, pedagogues, and sociologists—were unsure what to make of the sex wave. They speculated variously that the proliferating opportunities for voyeurism were not actually changing people's sex lives very much; studies showed that the rates of marital coitus stayed about the same (two times a week) and experts surmised that, at best, Oswald Kolle had given people the encouragement to try a few different positions or at least talk more openly with their spouses about their desires. One expert estimated that at most 3 percent of German couples ever practiced group sex. Fantasy lives had expanded, commentators suggested, but not actual practices. The incredible hunger West Germans were evincing for pornography, some argued, was simply a sign of how sexually frustrated most people were and of what serious damage had been done by the years of rigorous sexual repression. Beate Uhse's business acumen was widely admired, but no one quite knew how to feel about her customers. Were they being bamboozled by false promises of heightened sexual pleasure and intensity or were they heroically refusing to live bland and conventional lives? Also outside observers displayed perplexity. Thus, for example, the French magazine *Nouvel Observateur* in 1970 snidely summarized the new West Germany as preoccupied with "Sex über Alles," but also expressed a sense of relief: "Definitely, Germany has changed. Pink has replaced brown, the heavy breathing of orgasms covers over the muf-

fled stomping of the legions. Vibrators, not cannons! It's quite reassuring."<sup>13</sup> The French, research soon revealed, were considerably more conservative in the bedroom than the Germans.<sup>14</sup>

Even as experts and outside observers remained puzzled over what was going on with married West Germans' sexuality, there was no uncertainty about the drastic shift in youth behaviors. With the protection of the pill taking away the fear of pregnancy, with the sex wave making premarital sex seem a matter not of shame but of pride, and with the rigidity of conservatives seeming not only hypocritical but simply laughable, the age at first coitus was dropping—and rapidly. As *Der Spiegel* wrote in 1971, summarizing the findings of sexologists, from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, "within four to six years, the sexual behavior of German youth has changed as never before in this century." The "time between first kiss and first coitus" was getting shorter and shorter.<sup>15</sup> Many young people were starting to have sex three or four years earlier than even their own older siblings had done. As of 1971, a third of youth had intercourse by the age of sixteen or seventeen, and more than two-thirds of the women and three quarters of the men had done so by the age of twenty.<sup>16</sup> In the remainder of the 1970s, the age at first intercourse dropped even further.<sup>17</sup>

Numerous young people also strongly politicized the ideal of sexual liberation. High school students shocked school administrators by demonstrating in the nude for liberalized sex education. Some students not only called for distribution of the pill to teens, but handed out pills directly to their classmates; other student activists in all sincerity requested that "love rooms" be set aside within schools for those in the upper grades.<sup>18</sup> When school groups or youth organizations affiliated with the YMCA or with political parties like the Social Democrats went on vacation, the youth not only went into the ocean or coed saunas naked, they also—under the slogan "Asexual togetherness is hostile to life" (*Asexuelles Miteinander ist lebensfeindlich*)—demanded the right for boys and girls to spend the night with each other and have sex. And, remarkably, protests and lawsuits initiated by parents, teachers, and administrators were set aside by the courts.<sup>19</sup> Liberal sexologists' and psychologists' arguments that premarital heterosexual activity was not only normal but advisable were taken quite seriously and led directly to the reformulation of official norms. Once again, pressure from below forced policy changes.

Youth became fearless in spoofing the more uptight of their elders, even as the content of their activism suggests how profoundly they believed in the liberating power of sexual love. One story captures this doubleness of fearlessness and faith especially well. A much-disliked authoritarian high school principal (named Epting) in a small south German town arrived at school one day to find bold graffiti scrawled across his building: "*Fickt Epting?*" (Does Epting Fuck?), it said. However, the point of the

story is not what one might think from the perspective of early twenty-first-century hindsight. These students were *not* engaging in any macho mocking or virility taunting. On the contrary, the students believed that the answer to their question was yes. The idea they had was that if only Epting would admit this truth, it would so transform him that he would voluntarily give up his power-hungry ways and become a better and more decent person.<sup>20</sup>

#### CHALLENGING THE CHURCHES

In this climate, conservatives were caught off guard and rapidly lost their moral authority. Already in 1966, the Protestant campaign "Action Concern about Germany" (*Aktion Sorge um Deutschland*) warned that a "flood of demonic forces is overwhelming our people. Countless individuals are being lured into unrestrained pleasure and the living-out of their desires," while the archconservative Catholic campaign "Action Clean Screen" (*Aktion Saubere Leinwand*) under the direction of politician Adolf Süsterhenn denounced "sexual terror" and called for tightened censorship of film.<sup>21</sup> The Council of the Protestant Church in Germany called on pastors to preach from the pulpit against the "dictatorship of indecency," and the Catholic bishopric in Rottenburg attacked the "flood of slimy filth that ruins everything."<sup>22</sup> A Protestant pastor's wife condemned the female teenage editor of a school newspaper (who had criticized conservative and inadequate sex education) as "shitty, communist, and perverse."<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, one Catholic theologian went so far as to praise Soviet communism for having stricter morals than the West.<sup>24</sup> In a signal act of cooperation, Protestant and Catholic church leaders together in December 1970 issued a statement of opposition to the sexual revolution.<sup>25</sup>

More moderate Christians strove to present themselves as by no means prudish but also emphasized how often feelings of anomie and insecurity had been generated by the sex wave, or took the tack that the sex wave was ruining sex. Thus, for instance, the Protestant theologian Helmut Thielicke declared the illustrated magazines to be "sex-blighting, because such a permanently sexual atmosphere is something unhealthy, that damages sex itself. [In this way] it loses its character as something unusual, something ecstatic, and becomes just ordinary."<sup>26</sup> Another Protestant author opined that the "orgasm discussion" in the media just made readers miserable and anxious. The rude tone with which "naked sexual facts" got handled by the press could not cover over deeper confusions and doubts people had about how to love or how to make love work for them. And teaching these things remained an appropriate role for the churches.<sup>27</sup> But the audience for both the conservative and the moderate appeals was dwindling.

More in step with the changing times was a liberal newsmagazine like *Der Spiegel*. It eagerly provided readers with pop history lessons about the Christian churches' problems with the joys of the body, observing among other things that the church fathers' "fear of sex became the trauma of a whole culture."<sup>28</sup> The magazine challenged the churches to admit their hypocrisy when they continued officially to prohibit premarital sex while quietly tolerating the one-third of all brides who came to the altar already pregnant.<sup>29</sup> It also reported that psychologist Hildegard Lange-Undeutsch, director of the first sex counseling center established at a West German university, the Free University in West Berlin, lamented how many of the suffering students who entered her office were above all victims of the "upholding by the churches of outdated sexual taboos."<sup>30</sup> But *Der Spiegel* was not alone in challenging the churches. The humor magazine *Simplicissimus* took a more tongue-in-cheek approach, publishing a cartoon of two Catholic schoolgirls listening to a priest give them conservative sex advice. One whispers to the other: "We need to go confess to him sometime soon—he sure is far behind with his well-meaning enlightenment."<sup>31</sup>

Not only did the most mainstream of venues increasingly engage in withering sarcasm about the Christian churches' discomfort with the sexual revolution and relentlessly press the point that Christianity was uncomfortable with sex in general. Christian conservatives were also so routinely compared with Nazis that conservatives felt preempted before they even opened their mouths or took pen in hand. They could hardly express hesitations about the direction West German society was taking or defend such notions as the "healthy sensibility of the *Volk*," or even argue in favor of such concepts as purity, chastity, fidelity, mother love, or family values, before immediately being accused of sounding like fascists, for each of these concepts was considered contaminated by Nazism. The Hamburg-based pedagogue and sexologist Friedrich Koch, a prominent liberal advocate of premarital sex for adolescents, brought this comparison to a very wide audience. While Koch was not consistently progressive (one of his arguments in favor of premarital heterosexual activity was that "repression of sexual wishes" and "ascetic build-up of the drives" led to "sexual neuroses, homosexuality, or intensified aggression"), he proved himself especially adept at documenting similarities between Nazi and Christian sex advice writings.<sup>32</sup> The journalist Karlheinz Deschner, who had already made a name in the early 1960s with a book demonstrating the Christian churches' support for Nazism, gained even more attention with his study, *Das Kreuz mit der Kirche: Eine Sexualgeschichte des Christentums* (The Cross with the Church: A Sexual History of Christianity, 1974). He not only scathingly quoted church leaders pleased by Nazi attacks on sexual immorality, but also cited example after example of post-war West German Christian spokespeople who, unfazed by the "millions

of dead” in two world wars and in Vietnam, continued to act like sex, nudity, and pornography were the main moral challenges. As one post-World War II Catholic commentator cited by Deschner put it: “If there is a drive capable of pressing the human being down beneath the dignity of his reason and freedom, then surely that is the sexual drive.” Incredulous that anyone “still takes this religion seriously!” rather than “making it the object of satire, of psychiatrists . . . [and] sticking its proclaimers among the comics, in courtrooms, in rubber cells,” Deschner repeatedly underscored his central thesis: “The actual crime in ‘Christian culture’ is, precisely, absolutely not murder, but rather . . . sexual intercourse.”<sup>33</sup>

Finally, however, conservative Christians were most stung by dissidents in their own ranks. Many progressive Christian activists also took up the call for sexual liberalization. For a notable development within the West German religious community of the late 1960s and early 1970s was that prominent theologians, clergymen, church officials, and activist laypeople adapted the Christian message to the new more permissive climate. In the late 1960s, a number of leading Protestant theologians called for liberalized divorce laws, more understanding attitudes toward premarital sex, and a heightened appreciation of sex within marriage. In this vein, for instance, the liberal University of Marburg theologian and sociologist Siegfried Keil, while still criticizing “masturbation and perversion, and also all forms of homosexuality and heterosexuality in which the other is not loved for his or her own sake but rather only serves as the object of one’s own drive-satisfaction [*Triebbefriedigung*],” nonetheless forcefully defended nonmarital heterosexuality as long as it was loving and oriented toward a long-term partnership.<sup>34</sup> And in 1971 an official commission of the Protestant Church published a comprehensive statement entitled *Denkschrift zu Fragen der Sexualethik* (Memorandum on Questions of Sexual Ethics). Alluding to the changed social conditions and the widespread support in the populace for premarital heterosexual activity, the memorandum implied that as long as a couple intended eventually to marry, they could decide for themselves whether intercourse was morally acceptable also before marriage. The commission went so far as to recommend the use of birth control products during premarital intercourse.<sup>35</sup> Some Protestant pastors went further, for example, proposing that church youth organizations provide spaces for young people to have sex. Other pastors even openly challenged the biblical prohibition on adultery.<sup>36</sup> The liberal magazine *Der Stern* found the new openness to youth nudity and sex among pastors so comical it ran a cartoon showing a clergyman standing outside a church and calling through the door “Children, get dressed! The worship service is starting!”<sup>37</sup>

By the early 1970s, even notable Catholics in West Germany directly challenged the Catholic hierarchy and urged that church teachings liberal-

ize in light of transformed social conditions, specifically the invention of the pill and the earlier onset of puberty (almost five years earlier, it was claimed, than at the beginning of the twentieth century). Progressive Catholic activists attending the Catholic *Kirchentag*, a big lay conference, already in 1968 had criticized Pope Paul and promoted the slogan “Yes to the Pill, No to Paul’s Sex.”<sup>38</sup> This mobilization by ordinary Catholics motivated theologians as well. Some Catholic commentators worried openly that the church’s prohibition on premarital sex drove young people (and especially young men) away from religion entirely. Catholics like the Jesuit Roman Bleistein directly argued that the church had been overly fixated on confining sex only to marriage; like many Protestants, he emphasized the gradual development of a partnership, in which sexual intimacy naturally preceded marriage.<sup>39</sup> Above all, progressive Catholics warned that the Catholic Church needed urgently to revise its general centuries-old negativity about sex. For some, this involved reinterpreting the significance of New Testament passages, putting the Christian Bible’s hostility to nonmarital sex in its proper historical context, and/or arguing that a negative attitude toward sex was not truly Christian but rather something absorbed from the Stoics or Gnostics. For others, this meant questioning whether biblical passages could even be applied to the contemporary moment. Were sexual activity and exclusive love *necessarily* bound to each other? In view of the new availability of reliable birth control, maybe sex and love had in fact become separable.<sup>40</sup> Yet others, like the former priest Hubertus Mynarek, confined themselves to attacking what they saw as the mendacity and duplicity inevitably caused by the church’s prescription that priests remain celibate. In his much-discussed book on “eros and the clergy,” Mynarek heaped on evidence of West German priests who had sex with their parishioners. Mynarek had little expectation that the church would change its rules; what he hoped for (he said) was a “revolt from below.”<sup>41</sup>

While a minority of young people stayed in the churches and sought to liberalize them from within, most youth were not interested in listening to clergymen any longer, and working-class youths and university students alike had much harsher things to say about the churches than even their liberal elders did. Young workers interviewed in 1971 about the churches’ prohibition on premarital activity responded with “it’s nonsense” and “it’s stupidity” and “they’re insane.” One young worker said: “If we want to have our fun in the evening and go pick up a babe, they should let us have our fun. We work hard all day long, the priests don’t, at most they’re fucking their cook during the day.” In general, much resentment was expressed at the fact that clergymen got good salaries for cushy desk jobs. Young working-class women made yet other points. As one put it: “They should worry about their religious junk. . . . For me

sexual intercourse has already done a lot of good, also without the church's permission." Speaking about Catholic priests, another said: "I feel sorry for them. If they had ever experienced the way one feels when one is making love, they would tell us something totally different."<sup>42</sup> Quite a few student activists shared this disdain for the churches' traditional denigration of sex. For instance, New Left-linked activists at the first nationwide gay rights demonstration, held in the strongly Catholic city of Münster in 1972, carried signs declaring that "chastity is no more a virtue than malnutrition is."<sup>43</sup> And the Frankfurt New Left student leader and sex rights activist Günter Amendt went so far as to characterize the authors of Protestant and Catholic sex advice manuals (because of the way they demonized sexual pleasure and stoked feelings of guilt and shame) as "sex criminals."<sup>44</sup>

#### READ WILHELM REICH AND ACT ACCORDINGLY!

The New Left was of singular importance in determining the trajectory of debates about sex in West Germany from the late 1960s on. As noted, from the explosion of pornography in all media and genres to the ways ordinary West Germans both young and old assertively declaimed to the press and to each other that they enjoyed sex and would not be made to feel guilty about it, the sexual revolution was manifestly a broader phenomenon than the New Left. The relationship between the sexual revolution in West Germany and the New Left student movement thus can certainly not be reduced to a simple equation. And yet it is no coincidence that in popular parlance "1968" is still often used as a shorthand to refer to both subjects.

For the influence of the New Left extended far beyond its own constituency. While the New Left student movement was never very large (actual activists numbered only in the thousands), its impact on West German values would be pervasive and profound. Not only was there considerable voyeuristic public fascination with such flamboyantly provocative experiments of the New Left as the (for a brief time) dedicatedly promiscuous left-anarcho Kommune 1 in Berlin (not least because supermodel Uschi Obermaier, fantasy object also for numerous less-leftist German men, had moved in), or the ventures in antiauthoritarian childrearing launched by the New Left *Kinderladen* movement in dozens of West German cities. Of crucial importance also is the way many of the notions articulated by New Leftists (or "68ers," as Germans call them) were taken up both by the mainstream media and by liberal professionals in the fields of medicine, sexology, psychology, pedagogy, law, sociology, and theology. All of this gave much greater legitimacy to New Leftists' sex-radical ideas,

especially their challenges to the institutions of marriage and the family and their celebrations of nonmarital sex and antiauthoritarian parenting. In a mutually reinforcing dialectic of radical experimentation and expert liberal authorities' elaboration of the justifications for that experimentation, and with numerous of the student radicals themselves advancing to the status of experts as they published (often sophisticatedly theorized) articles and books on sexual topics, the terms of debate about sex in West Germany were increasingly set by the Left.

Among the West German New Left's liberal allies were many whose sex radicalism was just as fierce as New Leftists' own, and their status as degreed professionals allowed the new ideas to be promoted as scientific truth, and explicitly appreciated by the media as a contrast to religious mystification. For example, when the liberal psychologist Helmut Kentler (older than the generation of 1968 but an important inspiration and support for it) advocated that official organizations sponsoring youth group vacations provide spaces for premarital sex to occur, this was treated by *Der Stern* as informed and valuable guidance. When Kentler undertook a study of young West German marriages in which he treated adultery sympathetically, the middlebrow parenting magazine *Eltern* was proud to publish it.<sup>45</sup> When the young professionals assisting the esteemed sexologist Hans Giese at the Institute for Sex Research in Hamburg—Volkmar Sigusch, a medical doctor, and Gunter Schmidt, a psychologist—argued provocatively that the representation of sex per se did no damage to youth or children, and that the kind of pornography in which sex was actually "represented without prejudices as a pleasure-filled social activity . . . is exactly the kind that one could without worries give to children and adolescents," the West German mainstream took this most seriously.<sup>46</sup> Sigusch and Schmidt's arguments were known to be based on careful empirical research and counted as important insights; their studies on such matters as students' and workers' sexual attitudes and practices, or men's and women's reactions to pornography, were hailed in the press, and rightly so, as the best and most reliable work on the subjects. When the Protestant Church memorandum on sexual ethics was published, *Der Spiegel* invited and printed Sigusch's critical appraisal of it (including Sigusch's challenge to the ideal of monogamous marriage, based on his contention that sexual love depended "exactly on that which monogamous relationships to a large extent make impossible: unhemmed impulses and disobedient spontaneity").<sup>47</sup> Schmidt traveled to Münster and passionately defended homosexual rights against attacks on homosexuality made by Catholic bishop Heinrich Tehumberg. Yet it was Schmidt, not the bishop, who was treated by the nonchurch media as the competent and authoritative commentator. In Schmidt's view, homosexuality was simply unremarkable, just "one characteristic in otherwise thoroughly

normal people" (ein *Merkmal bei ansonsten stinknormalen Leuten*).<sup>48</sup> As Sigusch remembered years later, speaking of himself and Schmidt: "We were constantly getting updates from the activists about what was going on in the streets, and we saw our research as complementary to their work."<sup>49</sup> Along related lines, when New Left activists Martin Dannecker and Reimut Reiche published their massive empirical study on the beliefs and behaviors of hundreds of West German homosexual men, *Der gewöhnliche Homosexuelle* (The Ordinary Homosexual, 1974), their findings provided the basis for sympathetic reports in the mainstream media.<sup>50</sup>

Precisely because the scientific research on sex in the 1950s had been so saturated with and distorted by normative notions of proper sexuality, the 1960s and 1970s turn toward empiricism—finding out what human beings were *actually* doing rather than what they supposedly *should* be doing—far from being at odds with progressive activism was in fact profoundly beneficial to it.<sup>51</sup> And by no means was this a simpleminded empiricism. Numerous New Left authors writing on sex clearly comprehended both the need for theoretically informed interpretation of evidence and the importance of critical self-consciousness about one's own standpoint and ways of framing questions.

At the same time, while the New Left understood itself, and was understood as, the vanguard of a certain kind of militant sex radicalism, it is also important to register that the New Left and its allies were often quite ambivalent about the mainstream sex wave booming all around them. The student movement was without question strongly motivated by sexual rebellion against the conformist culture of postwar West Germany. As New Left cultural critic Klaus Theweleit observed in retrospect, a "special sort of sexual tension was the 'driving force' of 1968" in West Germany.<sup>52</sup> Or, as the writer Peter Schneider put it, speaking of how he was drawn into New Left politics, "It was a new feeling for the body, a new way of moving, of speaking, and only then a new consciousness, that attracted me."<sup>53</sup> The New Left journalist Götz Eisenberg explained the "specific dynamite and radicality" of the student movement this way: "The antiauthoritarian movement was also a revolt of identity, a mutiny against the more or less awful consequences of authoritarian education in parental home and school, a detonation of the drilled bodies, senses, and wishes."<sup>54</sup> And yet many members of the New Left were also unnerved by the rapidity with which consumer-capitalist-driven sexualization took hold. The sociologist and political scientist Claus Offe remarked a bit cynically at the occasion of the thirty-year-anniversary of 1968: "They [the 68ers] demanded something that was happening anyway; they attacked only that which was already collapsing."<sup>55</sup> But the more important point is that the generation of 1968 knew this, indeed was acutely aware of this,

and its members constantly struggled to specify the differences between what they were striving toward and what was going on more broadly.

The discomfort with the mainstream sexual revolution was strongly evident already in the earliest corpus of New Left publications on sex and family life, as these texts repeatedly included anguished or scathing attempts to explain—although always with different nuances—why the "bourgeois" sexual revolution was most definitely not the bodily and psychic liberation the students were yearning for. A classic sample of one typical approach—snatches of Marxism pasted together with inexpressible utopian longings—is provided by a book on antiauthoritarian child-rearing published in Berlin in 1970: "As long as the nuclear family survives—ultimately, for economic reasons—sexual freedom serves as a sad little palliative for daily surfeit and disgust." And: "Even if people humped around ten times more than ever before, it would not add up to real sexual liberation. For merely to amass orgasms, even if man and woman arrive at them simultaneously, cannot yet be seen as a satisfying form of sexuality."<sup>56</sup> Or as Dannecker and Reiche put it in 1974 as they directly criticized Oswald Kolle: "Pleasure-filled sexual experience [*lustvolles Sexualerleben*] is as hard to achieve with the sexual techniques offered by the enlightenment industry as with the industry's . . . constantly changing recommendations for what is acceptable and what is not."<sup>57</sup> Günter Amendt's sex enlightenment book for teenagers, *SexFront* (his answer to the Christian manuals), mocked Kolle and Beate Uhse both as he announced that their recommendations for spicing up married couple's sex lives were nothing but gymnastic exercises that could not possibly recreate lost lust; marriage itself, he declared, was an oppressive institution.<sup>58</sup>

Frequently at odds with each other over whether fidelity was a bourgeois trap or (now that the bourgeoisie had given up on it also) actually an acceptable leftist value, what the activist students shared and what made their perspective on sex unique was not their advocacy of greater liberality per se but rather their insistence on connecting liberated sex with progressive politics. "No sexual revolution is possible without social revolution" is how Reiche put it in 1968 in *Sexualität und Klassenkampf* (Sexuality and Class Struggle). The mainstream sexual revolution, in his view, was all about maximizing "pseudogratiification" so as to increase capitalist efficiency and minimize social conflict that could lead to social change.<sup>59</sup> Or as one gay rights placard carried frequently at demonstrations in the early 1970s put it: "Brothers and sisters / Whether queer or not / Combating capitalism / Is a duty we've got" (*Brüder und Schwestern / Schwul oder nicht / Kapitalismus bekämpfen / Ist unsere Pflicht*).<sup>60</sup> Achieving true sexual freedom, 68ers believed, was inseparable from broader struggles for social justice. As the Frankfurt School philosopher and sociologist Theodor Adorno, teacher to many of the leading New Leftists, had said already in



1963: “The liberation of sex in the present society is only superficial. . . . In an unfree society, sexual freedom is as unthinkable as any other.”<sup>61</sup>

One impetus for New Left sex radicalism was the conviction shared by liberals and leftists that the Third Reich had been at its core sex-hostile and that the Holocaust was the perverted product of sexual repression. And there is no question that especially throughout the early phase of the sexual revolution, with its intersecting dynamics of rapid commercialization and liberalization, many liberals and leftists felt certain that sexual emancipation was itself an antifascist imperative. Members of the *Kommune 1*, on trial in 1967–68 for distributing leaflets against the Vietnam War (that allegedly also called for arson attacks on German department stores) sassily asked in response to prosecution witnesses’ criticisms of the group’s much-advertised advocacy of promiscuity: “If our antiauthoritarian stance . . . is a sign of constitutional abnormality, then is authoritarian behavior and National Socialism a consequence of the healthy normality of the Germanic race?”<sup>62</sup> As the New Left and feminist journalist Ulrike Heider later noted (in the course of her attempt to defend the gains of the sexual revolution against neoconservative ex-leftists and romantic maternalist ex-feminists), the early New Left proponents of the sexual revolution were convinced it was the sadomasochistic psychic structure produced by the petty bourgeois authoritarian nuclear family that had in the 1930s caused the Germans to become a people of racist murderers.<sup>63</sup>

Over and over, 68ers advanced the thesis that “un-lived-out sexual impulses” led to “aggression, indeed lust for murder,” as Arno Plack put it in *Die Gesellschaft und das Böse* (Society and Evil, 1967). The image of the Holocaust perpetrator—repressed, conventional, family-values-oriented—emerging from the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials of 1963–65 functioned as exhibit A. Repeatedly Plack tried to put into words what clearly for many of his generation had been a profound and values-transforming revelation: those who had, as Plack put it, “celebrated true orgies of sadism” in the camp were seemingly, when outside the camp, so law-abiding and ordinary in every respect, people who had never run amok in even the slightest way. These apparently were individuals who, before and after their time in Auschwitz, were characterized by the most stereotypical philistine probity and petty bourgeois respectability. As one member after another of the generation of 1968 would subsequently testify, the similarity between the code of good behavior postwar society demanded of them and the model evidently exemplified by the executors of genocide sickened them deeply. But it is also clear that identifying this similarity helped them feel as though they could finally understand how “it” had happened, and it gave them something concrete to fight against in their present. Above all, it gave them a way to interpret what was for them one of the most puzzling aspects of older conservative Germans’ attitudes: the way these

elders acted as though sex was a horribly dirty matter even as they seemed to identify with Nazism and were clearly disinclined to support, or were even overtly hostile to, postwar trials of perpetrators. The perplexing thing, in Plack’s words, was “the secret agreement of the society, that provides cover for the concentration camp murderer, but at the same time, for example, denounces the parents of a bride for the crime of pimping, if they allow the future son-in-law to spend the night.”<sup>64</sup> This misplaced moral emphasis—treating sex among fiancés as somehow more alarming than genocide—was not just excruciatingly hypocritical. It also seemed to be based in the conservatives’ own repressed sexuality.

Along related lines, 68ers were especially impressed with Freudian theories about fascism—like those of Erich Fromm from the 1930s—which suggested that Nazism was marked by a “relatively low degree of genital heterosexuality.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, for example, already in 1965 when the Marxist journal *Das Argument* ran a series of special issues dedicated to retheorizing German fascism, one of the contributors summarized for readers the results of Freudian approaches to National Socialism and explained that the psychic structure of both Hitler and his followers was characterized by hate, guilt feelings, and hostility toward sexuality. The animus against sexuality marking the bourgeois family weakened heterosexual tendencies only to intensify “anal- and phallic-sadistic” tendencies and contribute to the production of individuals whose personality was “authoritarian-masochistic” or “ambivalent, sadomasochistic.” This author suggested that in the sadistic subjection of and fear of the female purportedly evident among Nazis one could find the fear of sexual impulses in general, as he also pointed out that “the latent homosexual component among the Nazis” expressed itself in “the fanatic persecution of manifest homosexuality (like Jews and communists, homosexuals were sent to concentration camps).”<sup>66</sup> For Fromm, too, as Reiche quoted him at length in *Sexualität und Klassenkampf*, “the authoritarian-masochistic character” typical both of fascists and more generally of “petty bourgeois authoritarian types” was marked by an overabundance of pregenital and anal impulses evident in obsession with orderliness, punctuality, and thrift and also by a “curiously” split sexual orientation: “Physiologically, the average authoritarian man is heterosexual. . . . In his physical relationship to woman, in terms of satisfying bodily needs, he is potent. . . . But in terms of emotion he is homosexual and is hostile and cruel to woman.” Although the latent homosexuality occasionally expressed itself in an overt homosexuality—as, in Fromm’s view, Nazism had demonstrated—the more important phenomenon to note in Nazism was “the tender and loving masochistic relationship developed by a weaker man toward a strong one.”<sup>67</sup>

To lend authority to their antiauthoritarianism, 68ers also frequently invoked the Frankfurt School more generally, and especially its leading

members Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. But while Adorno's and Horkheimer's essays on authority and the family contained quite nuanced assessments of the Third Reich's contradictory sexual and familial politics, and of the connections between sexual conservatism and political conservatism, what was evident in New Left writings from the late 1960s and early 1970s was their selective appropriation of Frankfurt School ideas. While Horkheimer, for instance, had expressly stressed that the Third Reich strove to dispense with the family as the mediating link between the individual and the state and had argued that the appeal of fascism had lain in part in the growing weakness of fathers, New Leftists tended to invoke only his notions about the psychological power of parents, the ways the very structure of the nuclear family inculcated submissiveness, and the ways in which hatred of overpowering parents, which could not be expressed directly, got repressed but then also aggressively turned on those more vulnerable.<sup>68</sup> And while Adorno et al.'s *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), for example, explicitly noted that there was such a phenomenon as the politically reactionary but also sexually active person, 68ers drew exclusively on the study's findings about the links between the potential for fascism and sexual repression.<sup>69</sup>

"Fascist developments are facilitated by authoritarian character structures," opined the authors of a New Left childrearing text in summarizing *The Authoritarian Personality*, after having just specified that those character traits had their roots in strict toilet training and the suppression of child sexuality. And in their own eagerness to "smash the bourgeois nuclear family!" as the 1960s slogan went, the authors of the book ignored Horkheimer's premises about the Nazis' family-smashing aims and instead, in their concern to expose the damage done by liberal as well as conservative parents, quoted his remark from the 1930s that "whether parents are lenient or strict with the child is not important, for the child's character is influenced far more by the family structure than by the father's conscious aims and methods."<sup>70</sup> Another typical New Left childrearing text invoked Adorno as it summarily asserted that "the authoritarian personality" was characterized by "hostility to sex" and cited Horkheimer to explain how insecure people could become both brutal and overly submissive to authority. The same text then quoted Fromm's 1936 observations about parental authority being the mirror image, not the model for, social authority, only to conclude directly from there that "in the family the child is crushed, trained to be a subordinate, a faithful Christian, a sex-hostile future 'Mr. and Mrs. Clean,' an obedient worker."<sup>71</sup> The point is not that Adorno, Horkheimer, or Fromm did not say what they were quoted or summarized as saying; they did. The point is that the pieces of their work that got invoked ended up sounding a great deal like Wilhelm Reich.

For the communist Freudian Reich's influence on the New Left was unparalleled, and its members' felt need to reverse the lessons about proper behavior offered them by their own elders is the main reason for his immense popularity. No other intellectual so inspired the student movement in its early days, and to a degree unmatched either in the United States or other Western European nations. "Wilhelm Reich was probably bootlegged back then more than any other author," one former member of the West German SDS (*Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*, Socialist German Students' Federation) said in retrospect; it was "Wilhelm Reich up and down," as one New Left woman later remembered.<sup>72</sup> This had everything to do with Reich's central argument that sexual satisfaction and sadism were mutually exclusive—and that (as he phrased it) "cruel character traits" were evident among those "in a condition of chronic sexual dissatisfaction," while "genitally satisfiable people" were notable for their "gentleness and goodness."<sup>73</sup> And it had a great deal to do with his insistence that child sexuality in particular needed to be not just tolerated but actively celebrated, if fascism and neurosis alike were to be averted—an idea repeated like a mantra in dozens of early New Left writings. Reprints of Reich's work from the 1920s to the 1940s, initially in bootleg copies, then formally published, were circulated widely in the late 1960s. No book display table on a campus was complete without Reich's *The Sexual Revolution* or *The Function of the Orgasm*, and *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* was, as one contemporary reported, read just as "breathlessly."<sup>74</sup>

It is indicative, too, that for a time in 1968 the outside wall of the cafeteria at the University of Frankfurt carried a graffiti slogan exhorting all passersby to "read Wilhelm Reich and act accordingly!"<sup>75</sup> While this was obviously both a humorously *and* seriously meant incitement to engage in more "free love," the issue that requires emphasis is the *moral* force of Reich's arguments. In rediscovering Reich, activists saw themselves as rescuing an aspect of the anticapitalist and sex-radical tradition of the interwar period that the Nazis had wiped out or driven into exile. But what they revered most about Reich was the way he helped them rewrite conventional wisdom about the relationship between pleasure and evil. Reich's concepts seemed to lend additional legitimacy to that ubiquitous 1960s slogan, Make Love Not War. For this slogan was not just a recommendation for a more decent and pleasurable activity than slaughtering other human beings while risking one's own life; it was also a theory of human nature, a deeply held conviction that those who made a lot of love simply would not be interested in hurting or killing others.

Reich's contention that the sexual repression of children within the family lay at the root of almost all human cruelty showed up in countless ways in the left-leaning literature of the late 1960s. New Leftists genuinely

believed, as Ulrike Heider retrospectively summarized it, that “harmless, so-called well-behaved people had . . . been able to become sadistic SA henchmen and concentration camp guards because they had been tormented and sexually repressed by their parents.”<sup>76</sup> As Dietrich Haensch put it in his key text, *Repressive Familienpolitik* (Repressive Family Politics, 1969), a particularly accessible cut-and-paste pastiche of Reich’s main ideas, capitalist class relations, fascism, and brutality in wartime were all products of the “genital weakness” induced in those whose natural drives had been coercively distorted and repressed and who had been forced to develop “cramped-up” concepts of honor, duty, and self-control. Adolf Hitler’s regime had only intensified already-existing petty bourgeois practices, and these, in turn, had outlived the Third Reich. “The tendency to sadism is maintained,” Haensch bluntly informed his readers, “by diverting the libidinal energies away from the sexual drive and toward the drive for destruction and aggression; the necessary fixation on the enemy occurs by diverting the hatred produced by the ambivalent hate-love fixation on the sexual oppressor onto the military opponent.”<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Dieter Duhm, in his much-discussed book, *Angst im Kapitalismus* (Fear in Capitalism, 1972), also found sexual repression at the source of “the murder orgies of the Third Reich.” Duhm (in a series, incidentally, of poachings from Plack) underscored this message by suggesting that there was a direct connection between Gestapo chief Heinrich Himmler’s Catholicism-induced sexual shyness and the pleasure in sadism Himmler evinced by traveling to Auschwitz specifically to observe the flogging of female prisoners there. And like Haensch before him, Duhm tied the potential for aggression to fear and hatred of repressive parents. Referring specifically to the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial, Duhm remarked that “The bestiality of these executioners sits deeply in all human beings who are raised with the instrument of fear and who because of their fear have no possibility of living out in any way their hatred against the oppressors (in the first instance the parents).”<sup>78</sup>

Yet the most profound reasons for Reich’s tremendous appeal at the end of the 1960s lay in the complicated interrelationships between the 1940s and 1950s, between the decade of mass murder and the decade in which the future 68ers began to come of age. The extremity of the arguments advanced by sex radicals also, then, and above all, had its source in the more recent national past. For really, of course, it was the culture of the 1950s and early 1960s that the subsequent 68ers had personally experienced as repressive. The near-obsessive reference to the power of parents in writings that were supposedly theorizing Nazism suggests what else was being worked through as 68ers tackled the topic of sexual politics.

Many members of the West German New Left were preoccupied not just with loosening but with ripping to pieces the boundaries between the

so-called public and private spheres. The now-familiar slogan “the personal is political” remains most usually associated with the women’s liberation movements that grew out of and reacted against the various male-dominated New Lefts that had formed in Western nations in the late 1960s. But as New Left pronouncements on sex from the late 1960s and early 1970s make palpably clear, the urgent desire to transform both one’s self and interpersonal relations was, at least in West Germany, very much a male New Left agenda as well. One would be hard pressed, for instance, to find as many examples in other Western countries as there were in West Germany of New Left activists demanding that private quarrels between lovers be worked through in group settings (as a Frankfurt collective put it, all its members “must attempt to uncover and analyze their sexual difficulties in all their autobiographical and whole-societal complexity” and they “must process this individual problem collectively”).<sup>79</sup> One would also be hard pressed to find as many examples of activists airing in print their most intimate personal shames and hurts (such as publishing private letters from their parents, or sharing with mainstream news reporters the most painful and banal details of an unhappy student marriage). And, likewise, there is something worth noting about activists in Berlin’s Kommune 1 deliberately removing the door to the bathroom from its hinges, or other Berlin antiauthoritarian childrearing activists (among them members of Kommune 2, Kommune 1’s less promiscuous spin-off) publishing extended theoretical analyses of the dangerous political consequences of overly strict toilet training. None of this makes any sense except against the background of a postwar culture that idealized family values, overemphasized the importance of guarding family secrets, and treated the bodies of its young punitively. Only commune members sickened by the sentimental pieties of the culture in which they had been raised would suggest to their young children (as Kommune 2 did at Christmas 1969) that in an exemplary action they should burn down the Christmas tree.<sup>80</sup>

The 1950s in West Germany had been experienced by many as so utterly claustrophobic, and the sexual and familial conservatism advanced in that decade was interpreted as so wholly dishonest and reprehensible, that it seemed that only the strongest and most outrageous counterarguments and counteractions would do. Extremity appeared not only justified but mandated. The postwar tendency to present the concerns of morality as being above all about sex, not about murder—or in some cases even to present sex as being as bad as murder—could not fail to make a tremendous impression especially on socially critical young people. This is an important context to keep in mind when assessing the sexual activism of the late 1960s. In short, we need to remember just how dramatically overdetermined were the pressures to be morally righteous on that portion of the generation of 1968 that saw itself as politicized in a New Left sense.

Psychoanalyst Sophinette Becker once insightfully observed that West German New Leftists displayed an “overriding wish to be only good.”<sup>81</sup> This wish is most comprehensible against the multiple backgrounds of the immense immorality in the nation’s past *and* the obsessive moralizing about sex and proper comportment (but not mass murder) in the 1950s *and* young people’s instinctive sense that this moralizing rhetoric was itself hypocritically veiling a deeper truth of entanglement with guilt. Only against these multiple backgrounds does the peculiar radicality of the generation of 1968’s sexual activism on behalf of both adults and children make sense. And only against these multiple backgrounds can we understand the many difficulties New Leftists subsequently ran into, and the ultimately bizarre and troubling ways Nazism and the Holocaust would figure in their activism. It is specifically by looking at the seemingly most private and politically marginal documents of the New Left—the programmatic writings on child sexuality—that we can gain insight into that which otherwise seems inexplicable: the West German generation of 1968’s contradictory mixture of intense emotional identification with, and supreme insensitivity to, the murdered Jews of Europe.

#### EDUCATING FOR DISOBEDIENCE

In December 1969 West German television aired a documentary entitled *Erziehung zum Ungehorsam* (Educating for Disobedience), made by the well-known television producer Gerhard Bott. The film presented a handful of recently launched experimental antiauthoritarian daycare centers for two- to five-year-olds organized by New Left activists in Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Berlin, and Hamburg. Called *Kinderläden* (children’s stores) because they were initially often set up in abandoned storefronts, the centers had quickly spread throughout West Germany. From single centers founded in Frankfurt in September 1967 and Stuttgart in January 1968 and three started in Berlin in the spring of 1968, to eleven in Berlin in the early months of 1969, *Kinderläden* had been established in more than thirty German cities by late 1969.<sup>82</sup> The interest in *Kinderläden* can partially be explained by a generally acknowledged crisis in the availability and quality of preschool education, and the fact that they emerged at a moment of growing insecurity about the preparedness of West German parents for the task of childrearing (an insecurity both alleviated and exacerbated by the advent of new parenting advice magazines, and even beginning to be the subject of government investigations at both the federal and municipal levels). Above all, however, the *Kinderladen* movement represented a nationwide experiment to put into concrete practice theories about human nature gleaned from young radicals’ rediscovery of the

work of Wilhelm Reich and the Frankfurt School. The idea for the *Kinderläden* in Berlin had first been advanced by the SDS-affiliated “Action Council for the Liberation of Women” specifically as a way to facilitate New Left-linked women’s ability to get out of the isolation of the home and participate in political work. But already within a few months, although women remained involved in the centers both as parents and teachers, and occasionally as part of the authors’ collectives writing about the centers, control over the movement was wrested away from the women by men eager to put their own theories into practice—even as, in so doing, the men revealed how utterly central the project of reconfiguring parenting in Germany was also for them.<sup>83</sup>

The alternative daycare centers became a flashpoint for debates about sex, politics, and the significance of the intergenerational and ideological tensions dividing West German society in the late 1960s. The *Kinderläden* in Berlin garnered especially hostile and mocking publicity in the mainstream press. A local Berlin newspaper, for example, complained of “the smell of stale food and unclean children” and the purportedly coercive indoctrination presented as “Mao ousts Little Red Riding Hood.”<sup>84</sup> And in February 1969, *Der Stern* informed its five million readers that Berlin’s *Kinderläden* were producing “Germany’s most misbehaving children” (as the banner headline put it), “little leftists with big rights” whose environment was chaotic and filthy, whose parents engaged in wife swapping, and who were allowed to bash in each other’s heads with blocks and splatter the walls of their centers with paint<sup>85</sup> (fig. 4.1). Yet this was hardly the end of the story.

Bott’s film and the massive ensuing nationwide debate ultimately led to the founding of hundreds more antiauthoritarian childrearing projects. Antiauthoritarian methods (albeit stripped of their most radical implications) were also experimentally incorporated into numerous municipal and church-run preschools. And although by 1972 there were rumors that the *Kinderladen* movement had run its course and had become a victim both of the New Left’s shift away from “subjective” concerns to various competing forms of more “objectivist” doctrinaire Marxism, *and* of the appropriation of reformist impulses particularly by liberal Social Democratic state governments into public preschool programs, these rumors proved premature. Not only were some of the earliest radical experiments still functioning in the later 1970s, but the modified yet still antiauthoritarian impulse also lived on in the *Kinderläden*’s more mainstream successors, the (frequently state-subsidized) “Parent-Child Groups.”<sup>86</sup>

The *Kinderläden* and related experiments emerged as one of the West German New Left’s major concrete accomplishments, and although the number of avidly theorizing radical activists remained small, the general notions associated with antiauthoritarian childrearing captured the



Figure 4.1. *Der Stern*, no. 9 (1969), cover page. The headline reads: “Germany’s most misbehaving children.” Protests from *Kinderladen* activists about the article’s misrepresentations successfully achieved a court injunction forbidding further distribution of this issue. (Reprinted by permission of *Der Stern*)

imaginations and informed the practices of broad sectors of the generation of 1968, as well as many of its more liberal elders. The movement transformed not only preschool but also elementary education in West Germany, and affected parent-child relationships within countless families. American New Leftists on travels in Europe remember how stunned they were in some of their first encounters with their West German counterparts. Young West German parents let their children, while covered in dirt, walk the streets and ride streetcars. They allowed their children to pummel them; they never slapped back. And when asked why they encouraged their children’s disobedience, the parents answered simply: “Because of Auschwitz.”<sup>87</sup>

West German radicals saw their childrearing efforts in national terms. They believed that German culture was especially *kinderfeindlich* (hostile to children), and there is no question that they were trying (in a desperate sort of neo-Rousseauian authoritarian antiauthoritarianism) to remake German/human nature. It is also no coincidence that antiauthoritarian parents grappled repeatedly with the widespread perception that human nature might be innately evil, or that aggression between people might be inevitable and solidarity in the long run simply impossible to achieve. Precisely the ways in which the Nazi past functioned in *Kinderladen* literature, however, also helps us to see the antipostfascist elements of the New Left. By taking seriously the intensity of *Kinderladen* activists’ defenses of child sexuality and critiques of the family and by examining the peculiar ways Nazism and the Holocaust were invoked in *Kinderladen* literature, we gain a deepened understanding of the West German New Left’s complexly *mediated* relationship to the Nazi past.

Sygerhard Bott was yet another West German liberal professional quite sympathetic to the young leftists, and like so many late 1960s liberals he shared the New Left’s ideas about Nazism. Framing his presentation of the *Kinderladen* with contrasting images of the decidedly more authoritarian atmosphere in several mainstream, obviously miserably overcrowded and understaffed preschools, Bott openly justified the antiauthoritarian projects as crucial for both the prevention of individual neuroses and the development of a properly functioning democracy carried by self-determining, nonsubmissive, and critically engaged citizens. With a “scientific” psychologizing tone characteristic of much liberal argumentation of the day, the film’s voice-over informed viewers that traditional childrearing techniques concerned with obedience and cleanliness, and above all with the suppression of any expressions of child sexuality, led to “unhappy and sick adults.” This was a pressing cause for concern because “the number of neurotics in the Federal Republic is estimated at seven million!” More importantly, the film’s narrator warned that a child who was praised and rewarded for subordination would often “for the

rest of his life yearn for infantile dependence on authority, on a strong man. . . . Antiauthoritarian, noncoercive education . . . wants to break with this fateful tradition.” Citing the (at that time much-discussed) research of Hamburg psychologist Annemarie Tausch, which found 82 percent of the remarks made by the more than two thousand kindergarten teachers she observed were either orders or directive questions, the film also showed unflattering footage of precisely such teacher behavior and argued that “this kind of education leads to people experiencing oppression as something natural and finally even as agreeable.” As Tausch stated on screen in conversation with Bott, describing her own generation and that of most of the teachers, “we were in a certain sense raised for a dictatorship.”<sup>88</sup>

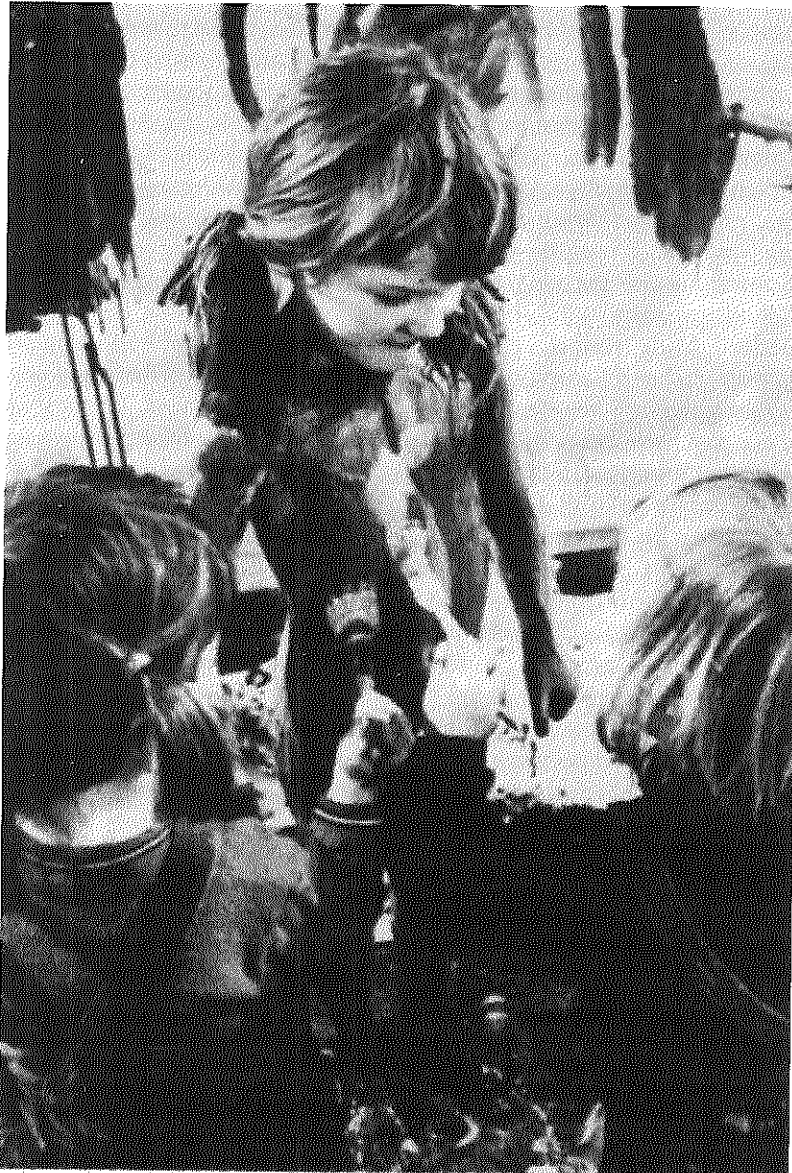
Yet these framing issues were not what struck most viewers. What primarily proved controversial about the film was Bott’s generous endorsement of the *Kinderladen*’s commitment to permitting children, if they so wished, to go naked and freely touch their own and each other’s bodies. The film included a brief scene from Stuttgart in which a little girl casually attached a cardboard penis to a cutout doll along with hair, nose, eyes and lips. It also incorporated a one-minute scene of “playing doctor” in Frankfurt in which one little boy painted in watercolor on another’s erect penis while antiauthoritarian parents and educators explained the importance of not only tolerating but assertively affirming child sexuality. In Bott’s view, these were moments of noncoercive learning, “tender play,” and the development of an “un-cramped-up relationship to human sexuality.”<sup>89</sup>

And it was these representations of child sexuality that offended and alarmed viewers. While the reception in the liberal press was—significantly—on the whole positive, conservative newspapers registered disgust, and much viewer reaction was also vituperative. After the documentary’s first airing, the sponsoring television station received more than six hundred letters, only a small percentage of which expressed approval. One writer recommended the *Kinderladen* activists emigrate with their “naked babes” and “dirty little games” to warmer climates where people live in “mud huts,” and another asked “whether these shots were really taken in Germany or in some ‘corners’ of some under-under-developed nations.” Yet another outraged viewer referred to the doctor scene and asked: “Poor Germany, where are you headed. . . . ‘Blacks’ would be ashamed to do this sort of thing, for they honor moral laws.” Meanwhile, a number of correspondents insisted that children had no sexual feelings of their own, that the little Frankfurt boy’s erection had been forcibly produced by the adults (i.e., that the situation was akin to rape) and that in this and other ways the *Kinderladen* parents were acting “below the level of animals.”<sup>90</sup>

Why did Bott’s documentary film stir such strong negative reaction in a time when nakedness and overt displays of sexuality had become so routine? That the film provoked racism specifically in response to images of white children and that it elicited such visceral negativity in an era when nudity was commonplace not only in Kolle’s sex enlightenment movies but also on television suggests that two things made the *Kinderladen* activists distinctive. One was the New Leftists’ ideological stance in direct provocative opposition to their society. (By contrast, for example, Kolle’s approach was far more conciliatory.) The second and more significant thing was the activists’ emphasis not just on child nudity but also on child sexuality.

Indeed, aside from the general encouragement for children to be self- and peer- rather than adult-directed, the vociferous defense of child sexuality was precisely the heart of early *Kinderladen* activism. The activists did not just permit the children to run naked and play with their own and each other’s bodies (fig. 4.2). They also applauded and publicized the most intimate details of the children’s sexual explorations. The Berlin-Charlottenburg *Kinderladen* collective, for instance, dedicated an entire booklet to this issue. *Für die Befreiung der kindlichen Sexualität!* (For the Liberation of Child Sexuality! 1969) did not just criticize traditional punitive approaches to child masturbation but also mocked the verbal disapproval and strategic distraction techniques advocated by such supposedly more liberal and enlightened childrearing experts as Benjamin Spock or Kurt Seelman. As an inspiring contrast, the Charlottenburgers pointedly reprinted portions of a 1930s advice book by Annie Reich (wife of Wilhelm) in which she posited that every child was a sexual being and that child masturbation “never has any damaging consequences but rather, on the contrary, is an important preparation period for the later sexuality of the adult.”<sup>91</sup>

There were also more flagrantly excessive moments. In the Charlottenburgers’ pamphlet, and again in a June 1969 issue of the prestigious journal *Kursbuch*, members of the Kommune 2 (whose children attended one of the Charlottenburg *Kinderläden*) included a detailed description of a scene of (expressly adult-encouraged) genital touching between a little boy and a little girl within the Kommune 2, and another scene in which the same little girl attempted to fit an adult penis (which, after she had asked, she had been permitted to stroke to the point of erection) into her tiny vagina (it turned out to be, as she herself “determined resignedly, ‘Too big’ ”). Throughout the account of this second incident, the authors emphasized the child’s agency in initiating and developing the encounter. But the authors’ main point was their special delight that the adult man’s mature handling of this situation helped the little girl to realize on her own, *rather than via an adult prohibition*, that adult-child sexual relations



Antiautoritärer Kinderladen, 1971

Figure 4.2. Antiauthoritarian *Kinderladen*, 1971. A naked little girl is being painted by her classmates. From Kristine von Soden, ed., *Der grosse Unterschied: Die neue Frauenbewegung und die siebziger Jahre* (Berlin: Elefanten, 1988), p. 27.

were not feasible and that it was more “appropriate to reality” to satisfy her desires with peers.<sup>92</sup> Certainly some New Leftists were horrified and repelled by this and other Kommune 2 stories.<sup>93</sup> But it is also telling that after the *Kursbuch* essay appeared, the Frankfurt *Kinderladen* collective actively debated why it was that their preschool children were not seeking direct contact with adult genitals. Could it be, they surmised with hopeful pride, that the children in *their* school were free of the “fixation-constellations typical in families” and therefore were “able, as is reality-appropriate, to satisfy their sexual and genital needs in the children’s collective with their peers?” Or, the Frankfurt adults worried, were their own unconscious hang-ups and insecurities inhibiting their children?<sup>94</sup>

Along related lines, the Stuttgart *Kinderladen* collective published the story of little girls and boys who tickled their female teacher under her clothes. Initially everything had been playful, but soon an overexcited little boy attempted frantically to pull off the teacher’s underpants while the teacher tried first to say that it was cold and she did not want to undress, then that she would undress later when they all went swimming, but finally told the little boy to stop because he was hurting her by yanking on her pubic hairs. The story ended with another little boy, who had watched the proceedings, complaining to another female teacher that “sometimes my wee-wee gets all stiff and then it also often hurts.” The teacher in turn recommended that he stroke it, and he replied, “Yeah, I’ve done that a lot.”<sup>95</sup>

As these examples illustrate, the *Kinderladen* theorists sought to confront readers with the reality of children’s desires. There was the evident compulsion to make public the most intimate details not only out of a presumed desire to shock, but also most likely out of a deeply held conviction that precisely what was most secret, shameful, or confusing could only be dealt with by engaging it openly and collectively. Stunningly, moreover, the teacher could find no other justifiable reason for defending her own bodily boundaries than physical pain. Finally, the activists, unable to imagine that children’s emotional and physiological responses could be quite different from adults, instead projected their own assumptions about sexuality onto their children’s behavior.

Meanwhile, however, and tellingly, far from recognizing the desire for sexual pleasure as some ineradicable drive in human beings, *Kinderladen* advocates instead stressed the drive’s fragility and vulnerability. Enjoyment, too, was somehow not natural and inevitable but rather required strenuous cultivation. The *Kinderladen* collective in Frankfurt, for example, repeatedly pointed this out. “We are of the opinion that the tolerance of sexual activities alone is not adequate” to assist a child “toward a stable, positive development of its sexuality.” It was necessary “fully and completely to affirm” such expressions of child sexuality as “masturbation,

child exhibitionism, voyeurism, anal-erotic tendencies, sex games—father, mother, child—doctor games, etc.” Yet at the same time, the Frankfurt collective was worried. “How can we, in view of our own problems, transfer to the children a positive attitude toward sexuality?” they asked, for “it is a fact that none of the adults in our fundamentally antisexual and pleasure-hostile society was able to develop an untroubled relationship to sexuality.”<sup>96</sup> The *Kinderladen* literature, in short, was not just about children, but very much about the parents as well. The stories the activists chose to publish show how obsessed the parents were with demonstrating their lack of sexual hang-ups—even as they revealed precisely the existence of such hang-ups.

As New Left writer Peter Schneider would remark in pained amusement in the mid-1970s, antiauthoritarian parents “live out their own uncomprehended uptightness [*Verklemmtheit*] in front of their children, but view their children’s every sexual expression with pious eyes as though it were something sacred.”<sup>97</sup> Unquestionably, there was ridicule in this comment, yet Schneider’s observation also communicates the urgency that many of his generation, and not just its main activists, had brought to the antiauthoritarian childrearing experiment. Over and over, antiauthoritarian parents pinned their hopes on their children. Because their libidinal focus was now the group and not the couple, maybe they could invent new ways to separate physical pleasure from emotional entanglement without psychic damage. Maybe they would find a way to meet each other’s emotional and physical needs without overweening possessiveness, without boredom, without mutual pain. That at least was the dream. But above all, and most frequently, activists railed at the institution that they felt was responsible for their own crippling: the nuclear family.

*Kinderladen* activists’ celebrations of child sexuality and lamentations about adult dysfunctionality were inextricably linked to a more broadly held New Left conviction that the nuclear family was a diseased and pernicious institution for which collective arrangements were the sole possible remedy. Declaring the nuclear family to be “rotten to the core,” many *Kinderladen* activists not only rotated caregiving at the preschools, but actively worked to rupture what they called parent-child “fixations.”<sup>98</sup> The deliberate rotation of caregivers within the *Kinderläden* was not just designed to reduce burdens on the grown-ups; the main aim was to give children many adult reference points rather than just one or two. And the insistence that children manage their own conflicts and that the adult caregivers avoid intervening if at all possible was yet another aspect of the *Kinderläden*’s efforts to destabilize children’s dependence on parents; for even beneficent authority was still authority. Only in collective experiences, activists believed, could people develop attitudes of solidarity, overcome their fear of authorities, and develop shared strategies for resisting

oppression. *Kinderladen* theorists (in a way that in hindsight seems quite astonishing) were thoroughly unconcerned about peer pressure. Grown-ups were always *the* problem. Even though the *Kinderladen* literature is rife with examples of parents and teachers admitting that aggression was the most difficult issue to manage in the preschools and a number of the Berlin groups gradually did get more interventionist in their approach to it, the *Kinderladen* activists were profoundly committed to the assumption that aggression was a transitory phenomenon whose existence could be traced back to some other, unfulfilled need for nurture or pleasure.

If anything, *Kinderladen* activists believed that children should direct aggression toward their parents and all authority figures. The obscenity of the traditional culture of child beating and the need to do away with it once and for all was a central motivating force of the antiauthoritarian childrearing movement. As New Left childrearing activist Lutz von Werder pointed out in the later 1970s, it was outrageous that West Germans allowed their dogs more room to play than their children, that the *Kinderschutzbund* (Federation for the Protection of Children) had only 80,000 members, while the *Tierschutzverein* (Association for the Protection of Animals) had 800,000, that beatings were still considered by many an acceptable pedagogical strategy, and that there were approximately 1 million cases of child abuse in the Federal Republic each year, including approximately 1,000 fatalities. In Werder’s view, what was hidden behind these statistics was “an enmity toward children that has its source in the backwardness of the German conditions.”<sup>99</sup> In the activists’ view, the problem in the past was that the overwhelming power of the parents was such that the aggressions children actually felt toward their parents, and that also all adults still felt toward authority figures, could only be expressed downward, could only, in short, be directed toward those more vulnerable—toward, as the textbook-*cum*-document collection *Berliner Kinderläden* (1970) put it, “hippies, Negroes, yesterday Jews and today Arabs.”<sup>100</sup>

As the reference to the Jews of “yesterday” already suggests, in the activists’ efforts to explain the connections between overbearing parents, suppressed pleasures, and aggressions toward others, the Nazi past figured uneasily. The Third Reich was most frequently invoked when activists sought to demonstrate the broader political import and antifascist value of their pro-sex and antifamily values position. In their critique of even liberal sex education guides’ tendency to downplay pleasure and emphasize the dangers of venereal disease, for example, the Berlin-Charlottenburg collective stingingly pointed out that “It is well known that the National Socialists combined their fascist racial theory with the irrational warning against the decadent Jews, because they were supposedly responsible for sexually transmitted diseases.”<sup>101</sup> Moreover, the Charlottenburgers observed at another point, anyone who insisted on the “hallowed”



importance of the mother-child bond was “simply confirming what clerics, National Socialists, and Christian Democrats have already for a long time been preaching from their moral pulpits about ‘the smallest cell of the state—the family.’”<sup>102</sup> A father who worked in the Berlin-Neukölln *Kinderladen* informed a reporter from *Der Stern* with coy insolence that not only did the parents allow the children to masturbate and play sex games but also that “Many children were already toilet-trained. Now they shit in their pants again. They’re repeating the anal phase. That’s good. Did you know that most concentration camp guards had anal difficulties in their childhood?”<sup>103</sup> Members of the Berlin-Lankwitz collective, meanwhile, in the opening volley of their book, *Kinderläden: Revolution der Erziehung oder Erziehung zur Revolution?* (*Kinderläden: Revolution of Education or Education for Revolution?*, 1971), placed the anal phase and the Holocaust together at the center of political theory. Punitive toilet training, the authors contended, led to authoritarian personalities with sadistic fantasies who oppressed minorities; preoccupation with cleanliness was part and parcel of a mind-set that sent people “into the oven.” And indicatively, although, as the Lankwitzers analyzed how abjected minorities were treated, they were clearly referring to Jews (and, above all, the way Nazis demonized Jews by associating them with sexual lasciviousness), they were *also* speaking about themselves. Thus, when they elaborated on how those who identified with authority projected their own forbidden wishes for pleasure onto “out-groups” and then took a substitute pleasure in aggressively persecuting those outsiders, the examples of outsiders they gave were also of “rebels,” “troublemakers,” and “radicals.”<sup>104</sup>

But nowhere did the Holocaust function more awkwardly than in a brochure by the Charlottenburgers entitled *Kinder im Kollektiv* (*Children in the Collective*, 1969) (fig. 4.3). This booklet contained both the most sustained attack on the family form and on parent-child “fixations” of any *Kinderladen* document and the most direct and repeated references to the mass murder of European Jewry. The brochure was part of a series of annotated reprints of classics of literature on child development published under the auspices of Berlin’s Central Council of Socialist *Kinderläden*. This particular brochure reprinted David Rapaport’s 1958 article on collective childrearing in kibbutzim in Israel (the annotations revealed that the Charlottenburgers deemed this experiment inadequately radical) and Anna Freud and Sophie Dann’s 1951 essay evaluating the psychological development and group dynamics of six child survivors of the concentration camp Theresienstadt, cared for in the postwar years in a British orphanage. What the Charlottenburgers so loved about Freud and Dann’s depiction of the six German Jewish boys and girls, all orphaned shortly after birth because their parents had been deported and murdered in the killing centers in Poland, was the children’s extra-



Figure 4.3. “Children in the Collective.” Title page of *Kinder im Kollektiv*, ed. Zentralrat der sozialistischen Kinderläden West-Berlins (Berlin: Sozialistischer Kinderladen Charlottenburg I, 1969). Part of the series “Directions for a Revolutionary Education” edited by the Central Council of Socialist *Kinderläden* in Berlin. Contains: Anna Freud, “Children in the Concentration Camp”; David Rapaport, “Kibbutz-Education”; and Authors’ Collective, “Education in the Socialist *Kinderläden*.”

ordinary mutual solidarity and the way they directed their libidinal needs toward each other rather than toward adults. The Charlottenburgers saw the case of the Theresienstadt children as inspirational; they evidently believed that this case provided proof positive that an intense mother-child dyad in the early years was not necessary for a child's healthy emotional development.

The Charlottenburgers, however, were not only unreflective about their own romanticization of oppression. With breathtaking naiveté, they also compared the three- and four-year-olds in their own *Kinderladen* favorably with the Theresienstadt children. The work with the Charlottenburg children had demonstrated, they felt, that "new behaviors and more intensive relationships with each other" were possible also for children who had initially been raised in nuclear families. Meanwhile, the Charlottenburgers criticized Freud and Dann for being "bourgeois" researchers and for downplaying the Theresienstadt children's sexual activities, even as *Kinder im Kollektiv* juxtaposed Holocaust information with feminist observations. On the same page that documented the numbers of deportations from Theresienstadt to the death camps, for example, the Charlottenburgers also railed against the exclusion of women from societal life because of their childrearing duties within the nuclear family.<sup>105</sup>

Without question, this material is offensive. Rather than striving, as for example the Lankwitzers did, to make some sense of the ways sexual repression in childhood might contribute to the development of racist attitudes and violent impulses, the Charlottenburgers, while gesturing toward many of the same issues, treated the Holocaust more as a mundane event, a backdrop of sorts to what they appeared to see as the real drama, which was the Theresienstadt children's apparent ability to do without parents entirely. One possible reading of the comparisons and juxtapositions advanced by the brochure is that the Charlottenburgers simply exhibited exceptional insensitivity and thoughtlessness. For them, the facts of the fascist past and the Holocaust were not reasons to engage in antifascist childrearing; rather, a handful of child survivors of the Holocaust by complete coincidence happened to offer one of the best proofs that nuclear families were unnecessary. But another way to read what is going on in this brochure—for it cannot be coincidental that Rapaport's study on Israel is the other text discussed at length, and not any number of Communist collective experiments that could have been analyzed—is to see that *only Jews*, the New Left's parents' generation's primary victims, could offer morally acceptable evidence that parents were entirely dispensable, and that children were much better off without them. For if there was an unconscious wish expressed in this document, it was (as Reimut Reiche would point out in 1988) that the 68ers' own parents could be killed.

## SEXUALITY MAKES YOU FREE

How can these contradictory invocations of the Holocaust by West German New Leftists be explained? On the one hand, numerous New Leftists were indisputably motivated to engage in antiauthoritarian childrearing precisely because they perceived the authoritarianism and conservatism with which they themselves had been raised as an extension of Nazism. They believed that to encourage a child's independence of spirit and lack of deference to authority enabled the development of a healthy selfhood. They were convinced that subservient, slavish, and insecure personalities made a democratic society impossible. They were also convinced, based on their readings of both *The Authoritarian Personality* and the writings of Wilhelm Reich, that racism and cruelty resulted from sexual repression. On the other hand, the Holocaust clearly functioned unevenly and selectively in New Left activism.

The fact of the Holocaust—as it had once again become so forcefully present in the West German cultural imaginary since the Auschwitz trial of 1963–65—gave New Leftists the single most important moral wedge against teachers, parents, and politicians perceived as corrupt. The Holocaust seemed to justify a rejection of practically the entire generation that had been adults during the 1930s and 1940s. That this older generation, with a few honorable exceptions, was "fascistic" became a frequently used shorthand to indicate New Leftists' revulsion at all personal or political conservatism.

Yet the 68ers were also quite confused about Jews, having absorbed fundamentally incoherent messages about them. The government took an officially philosemitic line, but individual politicians made antisemitic statements without embarrassment. Religious leaders made vague references to German guilt but advanced analyses implying that Jews were responsible for their own suffering. The Auschwitz trial had been accompanied not only by a heightened awareness of the details of the death camps but also a rise in open expressions of popular antisemitism, and suggestions that in the Weimar era Jews had "overreached" their place in German society and hence provoked their own destruction. Finally, New Leftists, with no genuine grasp of what it was like to be persecuted, or of how very gradually the process of marginalization had occurred, wondered why Jews had not rebelled sooner or more.

As Eberhard Knödler-Bunte, a member of the generation of 1968 and one of the coeditors of the influential New Left journal *Ästhetik und Kommunikation*, admitted in a retrospective essay written in the early 1980s, in his adolescent disgust with his family, he had unabashedly instrumentalized the Holocaust as he rejected the church and his parents. Yet in

addition, his remarks reveal the ambivalence about Jews that he had assimilated from them as well: "From my parental home I knew only that one had sinned heavily against the Jews, and the pastor traced this back to the betrayal of our Jesus. More could not be gotten in a north Württembergian small town in the fifties. . . . What remained palpable was the aura of innuendo and secrets that was as difficult to get at as the one surrounding sexuality." Knödler-Bunte confessed that, having learned about the Judeocide from a book in 1958, it became an ethical weapon for him:

That the Germans could kill millions of human beings just because they had a different faith was utterly inexplicable to me. My whole moral world view shattered, got entwined with a rigorous rejection of my parents and school. If religion had not prevented this mass destruction of human beings, then it is no good for anything, then the whole talk of love of your neighbor and of meekness . . . was just a lie.

Meanwhile, as a preteen, Knödler-Bunte had fantasized himself rescuing the Jews from the concentration camps—as in a kind of cowboys-and-Indians game—although he also conceded that they had remained "faceless" to him. He had deliberately not educated himself much about the concrete details of the Holocaust: "I wanted the Holocaust abstract, an absolute fact for a morality that forgives nothing."<sup>106</sup> Solely to take offense at these remarks is to miss the significant truths they also tell, both about the quality of the postwar climate and about the ambiguities and resentments that intensify but also incomplete awareness of the national past could engender.

Furthermore, New Leftists felt powerfully the superficiality of the official culture of philosemitism. They sensed the self-exculpatory ideological work that was ironically being done precisely by the ritual *mea culpas* annually proffered by government leaders, for example, at the occasion of *Kristallnacht* memorializations. One reason New Leftists so often evaded the centrality of the Holocaust to the Third Reich—and tended to treat it as an ancillary phenomenon to German fascism rather than its core—was due to the way conservatives had managed to monopolize the topic of the Holocaust, not only capturing the terrain of memorialization for themselves but also succeeding in treating the Holocaust as somehow disconnected from the rest of the Third Reich, and hence disconnected from the Germans and from history.<sup>107</sup> As Hermann Peter Piwitt put it in the New Left journal *Konkret* in 1978, with snarling sarcasm:

Judeocide: the topic is and remains the great atonement market. Plant a little tree in Jerusalem and already the good German feels free inside to turn to new persecution of minorities and violence-agitation. . . . As long as fascism contin-

ues to be foreshortened into nothing but persecution of the Jews, these media presentations only over and over again allow the citizen the one conclusion: Nothing against National Socialism—just that business with the Jews shouldn't have been.<sup>108</sup>

And as this remark already suggests, New Leftists also sensed the anti-Jewish racism lurking just beneath the surface philosemitism. Yet New Leftists' almost kneejerk opposition to anything postwar conservatives supported only guaranteed that when conservatives were thrilled at the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War of 1967, the New Left (which had previously been strongly pro-Israeli, and especially inspired by the ideal of a socialist and democratic Israel) switched sides and became aggressively pro-Palestinian. To a degree that has not yet been fully explored, the excitement among West German conservatives at the Israeli victory appears to have something to do with the relief Germans felt at Jews no longer being victims.<sup>109</sup> A cartoon published in *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* captures well the doubleness of New Left reactions to this sense of relief. At one and the same time, the cartoon highlights the older generation's racism and communicates New Left suspicion and perplexity about how to feel about Jews having revealed themselves to be militarily adept: West German conservative elites are at a cocktail party chatting about the Israeli victory. Says one older man (apparently a military officer, thus by implication a former member of the *Wehrmacht*) to the others: "Honestly, I never thought that Jews could be such brave soldiers. Although, of course, there is much German blood in them."<sup>110</sup>

One of the most troubling features of the West German New Left is that despite its rebellion against so many values held dear by the older generation, and despite its awareness of the problems in that older generation's attitudes about Jews, it too advanced anti-Jewish ideas. But it would take more than a decade for New Left antisemitism to be discussed publicly and extensively in the West German media, and even longer before New Leftists acknowledged that this was a problem they had. Ultimately it would take Jewish members of the New Left—both German Jews and American Jews who lived in West Germany—to challenge their peers and get the issue taken seriously. When *Konkret* journalist Henryk Broder published his anti-New Left broadside in the major national newspaper *Die Zeit* in 1981, in which he recounted numerous instances of anti-Jewish remarks among West German New Leftists and feminists and charged that "you remain the children of your parents," it came as quite a shock.<sup>111</sup> Several other New Left-affiliated Jewish commentators soon offered related critiques.

Not until the late 1980s, however, did non-Jewish former members of the West German New Left attempt to disentangle their conflicting emo-

tions, acknowledge the antisemitism in their erstwhile activism, and try to offer explanations for what had gone wrong in the late 1960s. While there had been earlier efforts to address the failures of the New Left, none of them had taken on the problem of New Left antisemitism. The year 1968 had marked both the high point of the antiauthoritarian student movement, and the moment when it had begun to unravel, and post-1968 history consisted of a whole set of delayed reactions. At each stage, New Leftists struggled to understand their difficulties through a different lens. The immediate aftermath of 1968 saw the retreat of some activists into depression about why the revolution had so quickly run aground. Others worked ever more frenetically to bring about that revolution, founding a profusion of (often rigidly authoritarian and mutually combative) Marxist-Leninist and Maoist splinter groups and hundreds of anticapitalist initiatives in working-class neighborhoods and on factory shop floors. By the mid- to late 1970s, New Left commentators wondered about their own relentless self-abnegation before a largely hostile working class. And it was in this context that New Leftists struggled to recall what had drawn them into anticapitalist activism in the first place. And yet references to the Holocaust are practically nonexistent in the retrospective reflections written in the 1970s. Indeed, the one time that Nazi mass murder is mentioned at all, the group being “gassed”—astonishingly but indicatively—is the German working class.<sup>112</sup>

Most scholars and popular commentators have understood this anticapitalism as an expression of disgust at the parents’ generation and its postwar materialism. This interpretation makes sense not least because precisely the incessant economic activity of the postwar years—the busy rebuilding that created the “economic miracle”—did indeed serve as the parents’ generation’s alibi for avoiding its own confrontation with the Nazi past; demonstrating capitalist prowess had been one of many West Germans’ primary ways of pretending to be democrats and of securing integration into the West. But in the late 1980s, the most thoughtful of the 1968 generation suggested that their own fierce anticapitalism may actually have represented an attempt to rescue the parents’ honor and innocence.

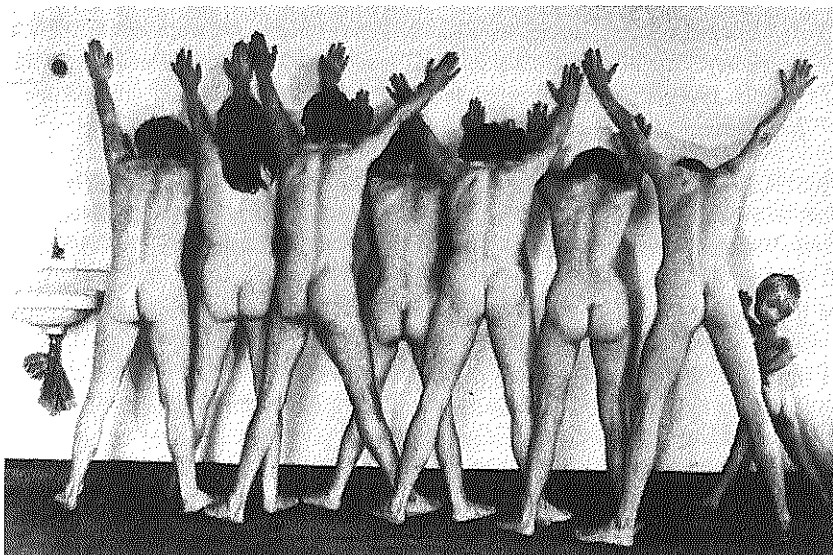
In 1987 New Left writer Peter Schneider took the provocative position that the obsession with criticizing and combating capitalism was in fact a way of *absolving* the parents’ generation of guilt. New Leftists’ relentless insistence on rejecting all liberal and conservative analyses of Nazism—which tended to emphasize individual motivations and responsibility—in favor of Marxist interpretations that emphasized social and economic structures and processes did, he said, provide some insight. But it also and nonetheless had an exonerating effect:

As long as German fascism remains a “conspiracy” of a few powerful industrialists, then our parents, no matter what they may have done, were victims of this conspiracy. This historical lie spared us from having to come to terms with the concrete and personal guilt-portion of our fathers and thus also with our own entanglement as their sons and daughters.<sup>113</sup>

A year later, sociologist Claus Leggewie registered his own surprise at the perplexing phenomenon that, simultaneously, the New Left’s emergence had been rooted in his generation’s discovery of the Holocaust and yet New Leftists continually disavowed the Holocaust’s German and Jewish specificities in a diffuse rhetoric of fascists versus antifascists. Leggewie noted: “About the burying of the initial impulses one can only speculate; it is possible that among those born after [Nazism] there was greater sorrow for the perpetrators, and namely one’s own parents, than for the victims of the ‘final solution.’”<sup>114</sup>

In a retrospective essay on the sexual revolution marking 1968’s twenty-year anniversary, former New Left leader Reimut Reiche (now a professional psychoanalyst) put this case even more strongly. Reiche did not only contend that the 68ers’ negative fixation on capitalism was actually the expression of an effort to locate the guilt for Nazism in a place external to their own parents. He went so far as to say that his reading of New Left documents from the later 1960s suggested to him that what was at work among 68ers was “a just as horrifying as it is devastating attempt to release the concrete Germans and thereby the collective parents of the 68ers from guilt and to project this guilt onto the ‘capitalist means of production’ . . . and on the Jews.”<sup>115</sup>

Reiche sought to psychoanalyze his own generation and make sense of its conflicted impulses. In his view, a major though unconscious motivation for the 68ers was unbearable grief, rage, and guilt over the Holocaust. But he said as well that these emotions were not something the generation of 1968 expressed directly; rather it attempted to manage them both through incessant and exhausting political activity and by displacing the emotions onto the arena of sexuality. This premise was based on a particular reading of Sigmund Freud and of what Reiche understood as basic human nature: that depression and other painful affects can be held at bay through frantic sexual activity and a constant state of sexual arousal. Reiche thought the (preeminently but not exclusively male) New Left habit of compulsively multiplying one’s sexual partners was an attempt to ward off crashing despair. Reiche’s second premise was that the New Leftists both hated their parents and loved them. On the one hand, they were driven to avenge the Holocaust by, in a sense, murdering their parents. On the other hand, they were also desperate to absolve their



### Kahle Maoisten vor einer kahlen Wand

Figure 4.4. *Der Spiegel*, 26 June 1967, p. 20. “Naked Maoists before a naked wall.” Members of the Kommune 1 in 1967. From a self-promotional brochure. Photo reprinted and captioned (and the genitals erased) by *Der Spiegel*. (Reprinted by permission of Thomas Hesterberg and *Der Spiegel*)

parents. It was this doubleness of vengeance and reparations, this effort to invert *and* correct their relationships to their own parents that, in Reiche’s view, was being acted out in turn on the children of the 68ers.

Reiche argued that the activism of Kommune 1 and Kommune 2 and the *Kinderläden* could not be written off as the work of anomalous extremists but rather was symptomatic of dynamics in the entire student movement. The activists’ insistence on rupturing parent-child bonds, he thought, was a symbolic way to implement parricide. Their encouragement of shared sexual arousal between adults and children was a way again to reconcile the generations. “I do not hesitate to insist,” Reiche declared, “that here a collective intergenerational trauma of the generation of the student movement is being acted out on the next generation.” Reiche also commented critically on a famous photograph of the unclothed backsides of the Kommune 1—including one of the two children living with them—which had been distributed by the commune in a self-promotional brochure and circulated in the mainstream media in 1967 (fig. 4.4). The photo had become a major iconic image for the New Left, one that was routinely reprinted, usually in a spirit either of humor or

nostalgia. Reiche thought the photo’s popularity and its obsessive re-printing was no coincidence, for in his opinion no image more perfectly captured both the intensity of the struggle to overcome the terrifying past by sexualized means and the impossibility of doing so. Caustically, Reiche observed:

Consciously this photo scene was meant to recreate and expose a police house search of the Kommune 1. And yet these women and men stand there as if in an aesthetically staged, unconscious identification with the victims of their parents and at the same time mock these victims by making the predetermined message of the picture one of sexual liberation. Thereby they simultaneously remain unconsciously identified with the consciously rejected perpetrator parents. “Sexuality Makes You Free” fits with this picture as well as “Work Makes You Free” fits with Auschwitz.<sup>116</sup>

Reiche’s association of this particular photograph with the Holocaust was not just a retrospective or iconoclastic move. Already in 1967, when it first appeared in the media, Rudi Dutschke, one of the most earnest and charismatic of the New Left’s leaders—and himself rather dubious about the Kommune 1’s pursuit of promiscuity (“the exchange of women and men is nothing but the application of the bourgeois principle of exchange under the sign of pseudorevolutionism”)—had a visceral reaction to the photograph. Labeling the commune’s members “unhappy neurotics,” Dutschke said that the group’s naked self-display in the picture “reproduces the gas chamber milieu of the Third Reich; for behind the exhibitionism helplessness, fear, and horror are hidden.”<sup>117</sup> Dutschke simply saw the New Leftists as taking the place of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust and did not have the more elaborate reading of their split identifications that Reiche provided in hindsight. This fit with Dutschke’s belief that antileftism had in the 1960s come to substitute for Germans’ erstwhile antisemitism. And it also no doubt had something to do with the way 1960s conservatives—from professors to construction workers—aggressively announced that New Leftists “all belong in a concentration camp,” or shouted at student demonstrators “into the oven,” “you should be gassed,” or “under Adolf that wouldn’t have happened” (*unter Adolf wär das nicht passiert*).<sup>118</sup> Yet that Dutschke had the specific immediate reaction he did above all suggests just how potently tangible was the sense already in the late 1960s, and not just with the benefit of hindsight, that sex was a key locus for young politically motivated West Germans’ struggles with the national past.

Just as the sexual conservatism of the 1950s was not only about sex but served as well as a strategy for mastering the Nazi past, so too, albeit again in contradictory ways, the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s became a major locus at which intergenerational conflicts over the

events of the 1930s and 1940s were at once engaged and evaded. For finally, the disturbing ways references to Nazism and the Holocaust functioned within New Left and liberal writings of the 1960s and 1970s suggests not only how urgent was the felt need to reverse the sexual “lessons” of Nazism as these had been drawn in the 1950s, but also, and perhaps even more significantly, suggests something of the extraordinary difficulties of theorizing a sexual revolution—and, above all, of connecting pleasure with goodness, sex with social justice—in a country in which only a generation earlier pleasure had been so intimately enmeshed with evil.

More recent work on 1968 has ignored the insights generated in the later 1980s. Especially at the occasion of its thirty-year anniversary, 1968 was frequently represented as the moment when young New Leftists broke the postwar silence and angrily confronted an older generation compromised by Nazism. The more critical assessment of the 68ers’ actually rather ambiguous relationship to the Holocaust has largely been suppressed and forgotten. At the very least, the fact of New Left antisemitism should be consistently integrated into the current retrospective assessments of 1968. Yet we can also move a step further toward explaining the otherwise perplexing coexisting tendencies to identification and disidentification with the murdered Jews by recalling how the New Leftists’ antipostfascism shaped their antifascism. For this is what is missing in Reiche’s otherwise brilliant reading. His implication that the 68ers initiated the displacement of intergenerational tensions about the Holocaust onto the arena of sex is not right, for that displacement had already long since been enacted by their parents.

Moreover, what requires attention are two distinctly related although seemingly incompatible aspects of the generation of 1968’s experience. On the one hand, there was the oppressive proximity of the 1960s to the 1940s—in other words, the very real sense of threat still emanating from the older generation. As Klaus Theweleit strove to express it in 1990, it could be quite frightening to try to grow up in the wake of the Germans’ “great lost/won war” (by which he meant that while Germans had lost the war against the Allies, to a large extent they had “won” the war against European Jews). It was, as he put it in almost hallucinatory stream-of-consciousness style, terribly scary and confusing to come of age knowing that many of the adults around one had been “Russian killers, Jew burners”:

All these ground-beef faces . . . all these good warbling Germans, tears in the eyes at the sad melodies, blood in the mouth at the happy ones, and with rage and horror at the suspicion of anything sexual in the “little ones,” . . . still not sated, still chewing, remains of the dead hanging out of all the holes in the

sheared skull, lard from the occupied territories rotting in the yellow gaps between the teeth, the cold stench of tobacco in all the toilets, covering the past with stink. . . .

Theweleit recounted in revulsion “the sweaty pleasure of their celebrate-’em-as-they-come-parties, they came all the time and there was blood in the party punch [*es war Blut in der Bowle*], something about which I later, from about the age of fourteen on, informed about the extent of the murder of the Jews in the camps, could say: yes, that was *them*, who else.”<sup>119</sup>

Yet we also need to keep in mind the misunderstandings about the past to which the generation of 1968 was subjected. For although the 1940s seemed in some ways unbearably close, on the other hand there was also an almost unbridgeable epistemological gulf separating the generations. The generation of 1968 had a profoundly distorted understanding of the national past, and precisely this faulty paradigm informed so many of the projects it pursued with such ardor. Taking seriously the obsessive reiteration of the damage done by the nuclear family and the provocative way references to the Holocaust sit in the midst of elaborations of the need for a more liberated attitude toward children’s physical pleasures does not merely, then, help us to understand what motivated the student upheaval in the first place, and to understand the emotional and bodily wellsprings of the movement’s very particular pathos and fury. It also helps us see how extraordinarily indirect, even circuitous—but therefore no less powerful—are the mechanisms by which the burdens of the past are handed down from one generation to the next.<sup>120</sup>

And finally, lest Reiche’s incisive critique of his morally fervent former New Left comrades seem to absolve the rest of the sex-wave-obsessed West German populace, it is worth posing as a question—not least because the sex wave followed so rapidly upon the revelations of the Auschwitz trial and hit West Germany with such uncommon might—what possible psychological and ideological work in mastering the past and keeping massive depression and self-confrontation at bay was being done by the manic society-wide escalation of a culture of constant sexual invitation and arousal. Certainly the force with which the sexual revolution itself ultimately collapsed in West Germany (announcements that it was over would fill the media in the early 1980s) suggests that more—much more—had been at stake in it than the innocent pursuit of pleasure.