

## Utopia in Practice:

### The Discovery of Performativity in Sixties' Protest, Arts and Sciences

*Martin Klimke, Joachim Scharloth*

#### *Abstract*

*In this article, we argue that the discovery of performativity in the late 1950s and 1960s not only had a substantial impact on both artistic and academic discourse but also inspired protest movements, especially those of the late 1960s. Just as the social sciences used performative practices to reveal the processes of production in a mutually shared social order, protesters relied on them to unmask the allegedly repressive character of the state, the 'system,' or the 'establishment.' Anthropologists, too, used performative practices to gain a deeper understanding of native and tribal rituals, and protesters drew on these same techniques to expose and provoke an often hostile response from the authorities to raise consciousness along the lines of an anti-authoritarian and anti-imperialist critique of modern society, as the case of West German student leader Rudi Dutschke demonstrates.*

#### *The Emergence of Performativity in the Academy and the Arts*

The idea of performativity first appeared in the speech act theory of John Langshaw Austin. In 1955, Harvard University invited the Oxford-based British philosopher to give the annual "William James Lectures." In this series of lectures, Austin attacked the philosophical view predominant at that time that utterances chiefly serve to state facts and thus can be deemed true or false according to the truth or falsity of the facts they state.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, he argued that sentences which can be evaluated for their truth content—"constative" utterances—only form a small and special part on one end of the scale of utterance types. At the other end, Austin identified utterances that do not state any facts but with which the speaker performs an action—"performative" utterances.

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<sup>1</sup> John Langshaw Austin, *How to do things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*. Ed. J. O. Urmson. Oxford: Clarendon, 1962. For a short introduction cf. Marina Sbisà, "Speech act theory". In *Handbook of Pragmatics*, Verschueren, Jef, Jan-Ola Östman, Jan Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen (eds.): *Handbook of Pragmatics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995, p. 495-506.

Performative utterances like “I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth,” Austin maintained, do not describe anything but create reality when certain conditions are fulfilled. These sentences are not true or false, but become “infelicitous” or “unhappy” when the connection between them and the social order of which they are a part is out of sync. When performed successfully, performative utterances set conditions for determining the appropriateness of future action. Calling a ship that has been baptized “Queen Elizabeth” “Maria Stuart” would thus be considered inappropriate. Moreover, performative utterances are self-referential: They do not refer to anything beyond themselves but create what they are talking about in the act of being said. Even though Austin himself deconstructed the prototypical distinction between performative and constative utterances in the course of his lectures, his identification of performative utterances was a real breakthrough for modern linguistics and philosophy, which inspires theorists from all disciplines until today.

In October 1959, only four years after Austin gave these lectures, performativity made its debut in performance art as well. Alan Kaprow, a former student of Columbia University’s art history program, conducted the first of “18 Happenings in 6 parts” at the Reuben Gallery on Fourth Avenue in New York.<sup>2</sup> Kaprow had divided the gallery space into three rooms with transparent plastic walls. The admission tickets directed visitors to take specified seats in each room at particular times and strictly choreographed their movements; they witnessed, among other events, a girl squeezing oranges, an artist lighting matches and painting, and an orchestra of toy instruments. Unlike standard

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<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive account on Kaprow’s influence on performance art cf. Philip Ursprung, *Grenzen der Kunst. Allan Kaprow und das Happening, Robert Smithson und die Land Art*. München: Verlag Silke Schreiber, 2003, and Jeff Kelly, *Childsplay. The Art of Allan Kaprow*. With a foreword by David Antin. Berkeley etc.: University of California Press, 2004. For a systematic discussion of the aesthetics of performance art cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2004.

theater, these happenings abandoned any traditional narrative, involved the audience in the creative process, and tried to create a situation in which traditional modes of perception and of creating meaning were rendered invalid. It is from these performances that the now-famous term “happening” is derived: used originally to indicate a very determined, rehearsed, and diverse production, the word has come to mean a spontaneous, undirected occurrence.

“Happening” and “performance” became buzzwords in the international vocabulary of the Sixties. These new kinds of performances distinguish themselves from traditional theater by abandoning the dichotomy of stage and audience and, at the same time, by abolishing the sharp distinction between the symbolic and the concrete. Their actions are never solely symbolic. Their use of the body, the materiality, the temporality, and the spatiality has qualities that semiotic categories cannot adequately describe. As Kaprow later wrote, “A happening, unlike a stage play, may occur at a supermarket, driving along a highway, under a pile of rags, and in a friend’s kitchen, either at once or sequentially ... It is art but seems closer to life.”<sup>3</sup>

Speech act theory and performance art thus shared the insight that symbolic actions—performative actions in everyday life as well as artistic performances—have the potential to create or undermine social reality. This insight quickly spread among scientists and theorists all over the world and made the 1960s the decade of the discovery of performativity.

### *Performativity in the Social Sciences*

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<sup>3</sup> H. Harvard Arnason / Prather, Marla, *History of modern art: painting, sculpture, architecture, photography*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998, p. 489.

A further example of the triumphant course of this idea is its application in the social sciences, especially in a then booming field: ethnomethodology. Harold Garfinkel's 1967 book *Studies in Ethnomethodology* remains a milestone in the adoption of performativity theory. Garfinkel sought to study how people make sense of their everyday surroundings, display this understanding to others, and produce the mutually shared social order in which they live. He assumed that there is a self-generating order in concrete activities that members of society achieve through actual, coordinated, procedural practices or methods. In his study on the male-to-female transsexual named Agnes, Garfinkel theorized that gender is a 'situated accomplishment.'<sup>4</sup> Agnes did not experience her gender visibility as routine or taken for granted but employed tacit means to secure and guarantee her rights and obligations as a normal adult female; thus Garfinkel was able to document how members of a society regularly employ such means to establish their gender identities.

To access the methods people use to create a mutually understood social order, Garfinkel developed his famous breaching experiments, wherein an experimenter violates commonly accepted social rules to analyze how people react.<sup>5</sup> Stronger reactions, Garfinkel supposed, point to stronger rules. Examples of such breaching experiments included

- standing very, very close to a person while otherwise maintaining an innocent conversation;
- saying 'hello' to terminate a conversation;
- mistaking customers for clerks and waiters intentionally;

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<sup>4</sup> Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967, p. 121.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Baert, *Social Theory in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998, p. 86f.

- having adult children return to their parental homes and act like lodgers;
- and ‘tipping’ friends, parents, or strangers for small favors.

Such breaches of convention create troublesome events, which help to reveal the ordinary practices used to achieve stability. Like happenings, breaching experiments are a type of performance that involve the audience and break traditional rules to generate reflexivity about methods of making sense.

Another social scientist who took up the idea of performativity was anthropologist Victor Turner. Whereas Garfinkel used breaching experiments to scientifically analyze the everyday methods of creating a mutually understood reality, Turner developed a “performative anthropology” to create a new *mode* for understanding different cultures. Having worked on the transformative effects of ritual performance for years, he aimed to unify ethnographic texts with praxis. In the early 1970s, he had an opportunity to do so when Richard Schechner, Professor of Performance Studies at New York University, invited him to conduct summer workshops with students of anthropology and drama students there. Re-enacting rituals of the Central African Ndembu tribe, he and his group utilized the concepts and techniques of the Western theatrical tradition to gain access to the lived experience of “the other.”<sup>6</sup> They sought to translate the native culture to overcome the limits of understanding and “thick description.”<sup>7</sup>

Garfinkel’s and Turner’s scholarship represents two applications of performativity theory with different effects: The first promotes creates reflexivity about the social order

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<sup>6</sup> Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: PAJ Publications, 1982, p. 84. For a critical reconstruction of Turner’s work cf. Bennetta Jules-Rosette, Decentering Ethnography, “Victor Turner’s Vision of Anthropology”. In: *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 24, Fasc. 2, May, 1994, pp. 160-181.

<sup>7</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture”, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973, pp. 3-30.

by questioning common forms of perception and interpretation. The second allows for new modes of experience on the side of the performer. Both effects were essential to the ways the social movements of the 1960s employed performative practices, particularly as exemplified in the thought of Rudi Dutschke, the most prominent spokesperson of the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (SDS) [German Socialist Student League], a leading organization in the West German student protests of the late 1960s.

### *Protest Performances in the 1960s*

In 1969, the Federal Ministry of the Interior concluded in an official report that the student protesters in West Germany had borrowed and further developed U.S. forms of direct action, taking the names of these actions, such as "go-in" and "sit-in" over unchanged. As the ministry argued, "The course of the [student] riots, most of all in Berlin, has shown that systematic forms of demonstrations, especially the technique of 'limited rule-breaking', are a particularly effective tool for emotionalizing the masses and arousing a 'social-revolutionary' consciousness."<sup>8</sup>

This report sums up the transnational attraction of performative protest techniques during the 1960s. Activists across the world were, of course, inspired by a variety of cultural practices, as well as artistic and political movements, that they frequently adopted from for use in their own political context. But performative practices were a particularly rich source of inspiration. The theoretical notions advanced by Austin,

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<sup>8</sup> „Der Verlauf der Unruhen, vor allem in Berlin, hat gezeigt, daß methodische Demonstrationsformen, insbesondere die Technik der 'begrenzten Regelverletzung', ein besonders wirksames Mittel zur Emotionalisierung der Massen und damit zur Weckung eines aggressiven, 'sozialrevolutionären' Bewußtseins sind. Die Methoden studentischer Proteste wurden aus den USA (Berkeley-Universität) übernommen und zum Teil weiterentwickelt. Dabei wurden die für die einzelnen Aktionsformen verwandten Bezeichnungen (Go-in, Sit-in usw.) unverändert mitübernommen.“ Bundesministerium des Innern, ed., *Zum Thema. Hier: Die Studentenunruhen* (Bonn: Heider, 1969), 49.

Kaprow, Garfinkel, and Turner thus found direct implementation in the actions of the protest movements of the 1960s. Although previous protest actions had often contained performative elements, it was new for such elements to derive from a conscious application of theory and to be placed in a larger avant-gardist tradition.<sup>9</sup>

Also new was the increasingly globalized media landscape of the 1960s, which magnified the impact of these nonconformist actions. As the media system gradually shifted to more visual codes with the spread of television, images of the African-American civil rights movement, for example, gained a worldwide reach.<sup>10</sup> Yet the non-violent protests conducted by students sitting down at a segregated lunch-counter in Greensborough, NC, in February 1960, or by the Freedom Riders on interstate buses in May 1961, or by civil rights marchers in 1965 in Selma Alabama, were all, to use Garfinkel's terms, breaching experiments, designed to expose and stir up a system of apartheid in the heart of the so-called free West. The violent response they provoked from local authorities and angry citizens revealed how deeply ingrained racial inequality was in American society. The protests also initiated a process of national reflection and political action to mend these deficiencies on a legal level through the civil rights legislation of 1964/65.

The iconography, protest methods, and ethics of the civil rights movement thus had an impact far beyond America's borders and played a crucial role in politicizing Western activists. Foreign observers were especially fascinated by the idea of direct

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<sup>9</sup> For an earlier history of student protest or social activism see for example Mark Edelman Boren, *Student Resistance: A History of the Unruly Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting. Democracy in American Social Movements* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 26-44.

<sup>10</sup> See the groundbreaking study by Kathrin Fahlenbrach, *Protest-Inszenierungen: Visuelle Kommunikation und kollektive Identitäten in Protestbewegungen* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2002).

action with its roots in the essay on “civil disobedience” by Henry David Thoreau and its application by Mahatma Gandhi in India. Furthermore, the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley in 1964 and the emerging anti-war and teach-in movement the year after proved that these performative direct actions could also be implemented on campus and put other political issues onto the public agenda; in fact, they were able to excite and mobilize large numbers of people in an active, participatory process.

It is therefore no surprise that these political strategies soon made their way across the Atlantic, becoming re-contextualized in different cultural and political frameworks. Artist groups such as the *Situationist International* (SI) or the Dutch *Provos* began to draw on these methods, further fostering their transnational pollination.<sup>11</sup> Dieter Kunzelmann, for example, a member of the SI and one of the leading protagonists of the counter-cultural group *Kommune 1* in the Federal Republic in the late 1960s, played a crucial role in infusing the student movement in the Federal Republic with these anti-authoritarian methods.<sup>12</sup> The first detailed introduction to the concept of direct action among student activists, however, was provided Michael Vester, the vice president and international secretary of the German SDS. Vester had studied in the U.S. from 1961 to 1962, He worked extensively with the American SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and its most active members, Al Haber and Tom Hayden, helping the group formulate its Port Huron Statement, a comprehensive manifesto of its ideals at the

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<sup>11</sup> Niek Pas, “Subcultural Movements: The Provos,” in: Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, eds., *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-77* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 13-22; Thomas Hecken and Agata Grzenia, “Situationism,” in: Klimke/Scharloth, *1968 in Europe*, 23-32.

<sup>12</sup> One the role of Kunzelmann see for example Wolfgang Kraushaar, *1968 als Mythos, Chiffre und Zäsur* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2000), 302; Dieter Kunzelmann, *Leisten Sie keinen Widerstand!: Bilder aus meinem Leben* (Berlin: Transit, 1998), passim.



beginning of the decade.<sup>13</sup> After his return, Vester introduced the German SDS to the theories of the American New Left, and demanded the implementation of “direct action” as practiced by the Free Speech and anti-war movement. For him, this political strategy was vital to the German SDS's efforts to defeat impending emergency laws that threatened to disempower parliament in the case of a vaguely defined state of emergency.

Vester's call for a more action-oriented strategy helped push aside more traditional political approaches, eventually enabling the anti-authoritarian faction around Rudi Dutschke to rise to prominence in the German SDS. More and more German SDS members saw the American scene and protest techniques as a source of inspiration in 1965/66. The sit-in at the Free University of Berlin on June 22, 1966, is a particularly good example of this. Just as their peers in Berkeley had done two years before, West Berlin students now made the connection between the university's problems and the shortcomings of society at large. In consequence, direct actions now became a staple ingredient in the German SDS's protest repertoire. The new SDS president Reimut Reiche, for example, made it clear that U.S. direct actions, and especially the university revolt at Berkeley, functioned as role models. In his view, the "political forms of struggle in civil disobedience" developed at Berkeley were techniques which the West German SDS now needed to learn and apply themselves.<sup>14</sup>

However, the SDS, and especially the anti-authoritarian faction around Rudi Dutschke, did not simply take over American methods but adapted them to fit their own

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<sup>13</sup> “Sit-In, Teach-In, Go-In: Die transnationale Zirkulation kultureller Praktiken in den 1960er Jahren,” in: Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, eds., 1968. Ein Handbuch zur Kultur- und Mediengeschichte (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2007), 119-135. See also Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Global Protest and Student Unrest in West Germany and the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Reimut Reiche, “Studentenrevolten in Berkeley und Berlin,” in: *neue kritik* 38 / 39 (October / December 1966), 27.

blend of revolutionary theories, which was strongly influenced by Situationist ideas, the minority theory of Herbert Marcuse, a voluntaristic concept of revolution advocated by George Lukacs, as well as Che Guevara's foco-theory.

The idea behind SI, whose tactics were inspired by Dadaism, Surrealism, and the Lettristic International, was to disturb the routine of social relations by devising "spectacular" actions to alter conventional meanings. In other words, one should deprive common actions of their traditionally assigned functions by placing them in different contexts, thereby attributing new significance to them. This "détournement" (misappropriation) was designed to provoke a process of critical questioning by participants and audience alike in order to create a new consciousness.<sup>15</sup> As a member of "Subversive Aktion," the German branch of the "Situationist International," Dutschke studied these ideas and tactics, which had a formative influence on him. From the start, Dutschke had sought a way to translate the analysis of modern society's organizational patterns provided by Critical Theorists Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer into political action.<sup>16</sup> These avant-gardist strategies now equipped him with the insights and action repertoire to realize this goal.

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<sup>15</sup> Christopher Gray, *Leaving the 20th Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International* (London: Rebel Press, 1998); Tom McDonough, *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> "Es gibt in der Bundesrepublik auch heute ausgezeichnete Analysen, die in der Hauptsache von der 'institutionalisierten Kulturkritik' (Adorno, Horkheimer) und der 'linken Professorenschaft' (H. Bahrtdt, v. Friedeburg, Lieber, Habermas, Bloch u.a.m.) geleistet werden. Wir fragen uns allerdings, wie es möglich ist, dass bei diesen hervorragenden Denkern die in der gegenwärtigen bundesrepublikanischen Wirklichkeit völlig unverständliche Trennung von Denken und Sein, von Theorie und Praxis, weiterhin durchgehalten werden kann?," Rudi Dutschke, "Diskussion: Das Verhältnis von Theorie und Praxis," based on a letter from July 4, 1964, subsequently edited and published in *Anschlag 1*, in: Böckelmann / Nagel, *Subversive Aktion*, 195.

From Marcuse, Dutschke adopted the idea that society completely manipulated workers, repressing their revolutionary potential.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, society's minorities and marginalized presented the only conceivable potential forces for social change in such a "one-dimensional" society.<sup>18</sup>

In Dutschke's interpretation, however, students and intellectuals could help these forces to break out of their repression since they were equally outside of society and protected by their status. The task of the avant-gardist intellectual or student was to politicize the masses by raising awareness of their oppression.<sup>19</sup> To achieve this emancipation outside traditional Marxist models, Dutschke redefined the subject-object relationship, first by helping to cultivate a revolutionary situation through education and information, and second, by gaining theoretical knowledge and a sense of purpose through direct political action.<sup>20</sup> Following the ideas of Hungarian philosopher George Lukacs, Dutschke advocated a voluntaristic concept of revolution, in which revolutionary consciousness is created through action.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the experience of political

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<sup>17</sup> This outsider theory ("Randgruppentheorie") and the term "Great Refusal," on which Dutschke draws later, were proclaimed by Marcuse in probably his most influential book, the "One-Dimensional Man." See Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man. Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 256-257.

<sup>18</sup> Dutschke took his Marcuse quote from Herbert Marcuse, "Freiheit: von oder zu," Westdeutscher Rundfunk, December 1964, 6, in: Rudi Dutschke, *Diskussionsbeitrag*, 323.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> „Unsere Gedanken, die zur Wirklichkeit drängen, auf Verwirklichung des Gedankens aus sind, müssen auf eine Wirklichkeit treffen, die schon so in Bewegung geraten, so schwanger von Enthüllungswillen ist, daß der revolutionäre Gedanke, die revolutionäre Theorie, 'nur' noch Ausdruck der Bewußtwerdung und Bewußtmachung der gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit ist, unmittelbar, von den Massen ergriffen, zur 'materiellen Gewalt' wird. [...] Die Basiskraft der zukünftigen Gesellschaft, die von der Avantgarde 'bearbeitet' wird, kann nur die Klasse von Menschen sein, die sich als identisches Subjekt-Objekt der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft begreift und erfährt." In: Rudi Dutschke, "Diskussion: Das Verhältnis von Theorie und Praxis," based on a letter from July 4, 1964, subsequently edited and published in *Anschlag 1*, in: Böckelmann / Nagel, *Subversive Aktion*, 191 f. See also Rudi Dutschke, "Die Widersprüche des Spätkapitalismus, die antiautoritären Studenten und ihr Verhältnis zur Dritten Welt," in: Bergmann, *Rebellion der Studenten*, 39 f.

<sup>21</sup> See George Lukacs, "Die Verdinglichung und das Bewußtsein des Proletariats," in: idem, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein. Studien über marxistische Dialektik* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1968), 355. For a detailed analysis by Dutschke see idem, *Die Widersprüche des Spätkapitalismus*, 47f.

praxis provided the complement necessary to transcend the repressive mechanisms of society and develop a revolutionary theory.<sup>22</sup> This insight, combined with the action repertoire provided by Situationism, became an essential part of Dutschke's revolutionary agenda.

In contrast to both Lukacs and Marcuse, Dutschke considered the national liberation movements of the Third World the new revolutionary agents. From his perspective, these movements were part of an international class struggle that had long replaced the Cold War in its political and military intensity and caused a shift from the bloc confrontations of East and West to the North-South divide.<sup>23</sup> These movements, and particularly the theories of Frantz Fanon on liberating features of violence in colonial situations and Che Guevara's foco theory, whose premise was that small, devoted groups can create the conditions for revolutionary situation and incite it, equipped Dutschke with techniques to create revolutionary consciousness that he considered transferable to the situation in West Germany.<sup>24</sup>

In practical terms, Dutschke perceived the task of student revolutionaries as being to further polarize society and to foster revolutionary consciousness by breaching society's rules through direct action.<sup>25</sup> Social conventions were, in Dutschke's eyes, illegitimate instruments of control by the established powers that needed to be overcome.

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<sup>22</sup> See also Rudi Dutschke, *Diskussionsbeitrag*, 321 f.

<sup>23</sup> Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Europäische Peripherie," in: *Kursbuch 2*, August 1965, 154-173.

<sup>24</sup> Dutschke was able to read the unpublished manuscript of the German translation of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* due to his acquaintance with SDS member Traugott König. See Frantz Fanon, "Von der Gewalt," translated by Traugott König, in: *Kursbuch 2*, August 1965, 1-55; Chaussy, *Die drei Leben*, 103 ff.

<sup>25</sup> „Die Aufgabe der linken Studentenverbände besteht gerade darin, eine der beiden Seiten stärker zu politisieren, um die Bewußtseinschärfung größerer Teile der Studentenschaft durch Aktion und Aufklärung zu ermöglichen. [...] Die 'Sit-ins' sind Kampagnen, um die Aktionseinheit des antiautoritären Lagers mit seinen jeweiligen Repräsentanten zu ermöglichen, um 'Gesprächen' jenseits der bewußten Öffentlichkeit der Universität vorzubeugen." Rudi Dutschke, "Demokratie, Universität und Gesellschaft," May 1967, in: Miermeister, *Geschichte ist machbar*, 70 f.

As he argued, “the established conventions of this unreasonable democracy are not our rules; the starting point for the politicization of the student body has to be our conscious transgression of these established rules.”<sup>26</sup>

In the physical, performative confrontation with the authorities, individuals were to experience the restraining powers of society as they manifested themselves in the violence used against demonstrators, for example. This process was supposed to work as a political eye-opener that not only liberated people by illuminating the underlying violence of the system, but also transformed them from authoritarian, capitalist personalities to more human characters. This was the pre-requisite for any revolutionary struggle.<sup>27</sup>

Dutschke’s rather abstract theories hit home on June 2, 1967, when student protestor Benno Ohnesorg was killed in the streets of West Berlin by a plainclothes policeman during a demonstration against the Shah of Persia. In the subsequent shift of the West German student movement from protest to resistance, direct action became the rallying cry for dealing with this traumatic incident. English-language manuals on direct action translated into German became required reading for West German activists, and the West German SDS called for the establishment of direct action centers at every major university. As Dutschke argued,

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<sup>26</sup> „Aus dieser theoretischen Einschätzung der Integrationsmechanismen der bestehenden Gesellschaft ist es für uns klargeworden, daß die etablierten Spielregeln dieser unvernünftigen Demokratie nicht unsere Spielregeln sind, daß Ausgangspunkt der Politisierung der Studentenschaft die bewußte Durchbrechung dieser etablierten Spielregeln durch uns sein mußte.” Rudi Dutschke, “Redebeitrag auf dem Kongreß in Hannover am 9. Juni 1967,” in: Miermeister, *Geschichte ist machbar*, 78.

<sup>27</sup> “Nun zeigte es sich aber gerade, daß diese aktiven Konfrontationen mit der Polizei und damit auch dem Senat und der Politik des Senats in West-Berlin, daß wir in diesen Auseinandersetzungen jenen elementaren Lernprozeß absolvierten, um überhaupt uns die Fähigkeit für den politischen Kampf, für den Klassenkampf zu erwerben. Ohne diesen Selbsterziehungsprozeß und Selbstaufklärungsprozeß in der Praxis, in der aktiv-militanten Auseinandersetzung mit dem System ist eine Politisierung der einzelnen, ist eine Politisierung der Individuen nicht möglich.” Rudi Dutschke, “Vom Antisemitismus zum Antikommunismus,” in: Bergmann, *Rebellion der Studenten*, 75.

[D]ealing rationally with conflicts in our society implies action as a constitutive measure, since education without action quickly becomes mere consumption, just as action without any rational assessment of the problem can turn into irrationality. I call on all West German students to immediately set up action centers in the universities of the Federal Republic: for an expanding politicization in the university and the city through education and direct action, whether it be against the emergency legislation, the [right-wing] NPD, Vietnam or hopefully soon Latin America as well.<sup>28</sup>

The impulse for direct action that was supposed to go through the Federal Republic in the following months was now inextricably bound to Dutschke's anti-authoritarian policy of creating consciousness through physical confrontations on the streets.<sup>29</sup>

Some, however, disagreed with this strategy. In a memorable denunciation during a congress in Hanover after the funeral of Benno Ohnesorg, the Frankfurt philosopher Jürgen Habermas called Dutschke's voluntaristic strategy a "leftist fascism," provoking a storm of outrage among congress participants that eventually led him to apologize for his remarks. Despite such criticism, Dutschke's theoretical notion continued to shape the dynamic of events. Together with Hans-Jürgen Krahl, the theoretical mastermind of the Frankfurt SDS, Dutschke presented his long-term strategy in September 1967 at the SDS national convention. Separating their action-oriented political strategy from traditional methods, they argued that when the inherent brutality of the political system of the First World was experienced through direct action on the streets, demonstrators would be able to see the similarities to the situation in the Third World both sensually and intellectually;

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<sup>28</sup> Rudi Dutschke, *Redebeitrag auf dem Kongreß in Hannover*, 80; Ekkehart Krippendorff, *Anleitung zum Handeln. Taktik direkter Aktionen* (Berlin: Voltaire Verlag / Oberbaumpresse, 1967). The publication is the direct translation of a "Manual for Direct Action" as it was used in the civil rights movement.

<sup>29</sup> "Die Lehre aus dem 2. Juni kann nur darin bestehen, daß wir in der Zukunft die fähigsten Kräfte des antiautoritären Lagers für die allseitige Leitung und Organisation der Auseinandersetzung auf der Straße etc. mobilisieren. Durch gemeinsame Erfahrungen und persönliche Freundschaft verbundene Kampfkomitees müssen die Führung der Demonstration übernehmen, nicht Ordner oder Funktionäre. Durch Organisation und Leitung wird Entfaltung von Initiative, praktische Teilnahme aller Demonstranten erst möglich. Manipulative Führung bedeutet Ausbeutung und objekthafte Benutzung der Demonstranten, Frustration und Resignation. Emanzipierende Führung bedeutet eine Aktualisierung und Realisierung der potentiellen praktisch-kritischen Tätigkeit der beteiligten Menschen, bedeutet durch Aufklärung vermittelte praktische Bewußtwerdung." In: Rudi Dutschke, "Vom Antisemitismus zum Antikommunismus," in: Bergmann, *Rebellion der Studenten*, 81 f.

as a consequence, direct action would create international solidarity.<sup>30</sup> Krahl and Dutschke demanded that the SDS move toward a “propaganda of action” in the metropolis, complementing the “propaganda of bullets” modeled on Che Guevara’s actions in the Third World. The image of the urban guerrilla, protected by the university as his operational basis, thus became the most radical extension of the performative concept of direct action and its integration into the political strategies of the German SDS.

Although the idea of an urban guerilla in the Federal Republic was part of the discussions on direct action in the West German student movement, it cannot be constructed as a direct link to the terrorism that shattered West Germany in the 1970s.<sup>31</sup> Dutschke himself had always rejected political murder in the First World as inhuman; he believed it played into the hands of the counter-revolution.<sup>32</sup> For Dutschke, the role of a revolutionary in West Germany was not to incite armed conflict, but to participate in

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<sup>30</sup> „Die revolutionären Bewußtseinsgruppen, die auf der Grundlage ihrer spezifischen Stellung im Institutionswesen eine Ebene von aufklärenden Gegensignalen durch sinnlich manifeste Aktion produzieren können, benutzen eine Methode politischen Kampfes, die sie von den traditionellen Formen politischer Auseinandersetzung prinzipiell unterscheiden. Die Agitation in der Aktion, die sinnliche Erfahrung der organisierten Einzelkämpfer in der Auseinandersetzung mit der staatlichen Exekutivgewalt bilden die mobilisierenden Faktoren in der Verbreiterung der radikalen Opposition und ermöglichen tendenziell einen Bewußtseinsprozeß für agierende Minderheiten innerhalb der passiven und leidenden Massen, denen durch sichtbar irreguläre Aktionen die abstrakte Gewalt des Systems zur sinnlichen Gewißheit werden kann.” Rudi Dutschke and Hans-Jürgen Krahl, *Organisationsreferat*, 94.

<sup>31</sup> On the question of continuities and breaks from the student movement to the terrorism of the 1970s with respect to theories and practices of violence see also Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, “Transformation by Subversion? - The New Left and the Question of Violence,” in: Belinda Davis, Martin Klimke, Carla MacDougall and Wilfried Mausbach, eds., *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Intercultural Identities in 1960/70s West Germany and the United States* (New York: Berghahn Books, forthcoming 2009).

<sup>32</sup> “Aufruf zu Gewalt, Mord und Totschlag in den Metropolen hochentwickelter Industrieländer – ich denke, das wäre falsch und geradezu konterrevolutionär. Denn in den Metropolen ist im Grunde kein Mensch mehr zu hassen. Die Regierenden an der Spitze – ein Kiesinger, Strauß oder was auch immer – sind bürokratische Charaktermasken, die ich ablehne und gegen die ich kämpfe, die ich aber nicht hassen kann wie einen Ky in Vietnam oder Duvalier in Haiti.” In: Interview with Rudi Dutschke, “Wir fordern die Enteignung Axel Springers. Ein Gespräch,” *Der Spiegel* 29, July 10, 1967, in: Gretchen Dutschke, *Die Revolte*, 34.

consciousness-raising efforts of the voluntaristic avant-garde to mobilize a majority.<sup>33</sup> In a long march through the institutions of society, this elite was to gradually undermine the system and transform it into a direct democracy with politically active citizens: “The continuous updating and concretization of the objectively existing opportunities for conflict by means of *direct actions* change the structural basis and the productive force of consciousness, which is crucial for any transformation. [*These direct actions*] create the condition for a qualitatively new, more humane society.”<sup>34</sup>

Direct action, according to Dutschke, thus provided the necessary “revolutionizing of the revolutionaries” to win over greater majorities of the population for long-term, fundamental social and political change.<sup>35</sup> As he argued in May 1968, “As these direct actions transform us internally, they are political. Politics without any internal change of the people who participate in it is the manipulation of elites. [...] All the confrontations with the police during the demonstrations, the frustrations and increasing aggressions expanding internally and externally that typically result from them, should be understood as a continuous process of learning, as an uninterrupted attempt to transform one’s own character structures.”<sup>36</sup> It is this legacy of performative and direct actions—though at

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<sup>33</sup> As Michaela Karl pointedly sums up, “Wenn er auf die Übernahme der Fokus-Methode baut, dann ruft er damit nicht zum gewaltsamen Kampf auf, sondern plädiert für eine in der Bundesrepublik modifizierte Form dieses Mittels; für eine Nadelstichpolitik, für subversive Tätigkeit einzelnen Gruppen, die ein System verändern können, indem sie von einer Minderheit zur Mehrheit werden.” In: Karl, *Revolutionär ohne Revolution*, 148.

<sup>34</sup> “Die ununterbrochene Aktualisierung und Konkretisierung der objektiv gegebenen Konfliktmöglichkeiten durch *direkte Aktionen* verändern die strukturelle Grundlage und die für die Veränderung so entscheidende Produktivkraft Bewußtsein; sie schaffen die Voraussetzung für eine qualitativ neue, humanere Gesellschaft.“ In: Rudi Dutschke, “Zum Verhältnis von Organisation und Emanzipationsbewegung,” in: *Oberbaum Blatt* 5, July 12, 1967, 6 (quoted after Karl, *Revolutionär ohne Revolution*, 142).

<sup>35</sup> Rudi Dutschke, “Die geschichtlichen Bedingungen für den internationalen Emanzipationskampf,” in: SDS Westberlin, *Der Kampf des vietnamesischen Volkes*, 124; See also Bergmann, *Rebellion der Studenten*, 93.

<sup>36</sup> „Weil uns diese Aktionen innerlich verändern, sind sie politisch. Politik ohne innere Veränderung der an ihr Beteiligten ist die Manipulation von Eliten. [...] Die ganzen Auseinandersetzungen bei den



times misappropriated—that had the most profound impact on West German society and politics in the 1970/80s.<sup>37</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The theoretical discovery of performativity and the practice of methods of direct action in the 1960s were responsible for the introduction of “prefigurative politics.” Historian Wini Breines coined this term to denote “the effort to create and prefigure in lived action and behavior the desired society, the emphasis on means and not ends, the spontaneous and utopian experiments that developed in the midst of action while working toward the ultimate goal of a free and democratic society.”<sup>38</sup> In the second half of the 1960s, this understanding of politics became a characteristic feature of many protest actions across the world. In West Germany, even earlier critics such as Jürgen Habermas stopped denouncing the protest movements as a “fake revolution” and began to praise them for taking aim at the political alienation of broad segments of the population.<sup>39</sup>

With their performative forms of protest, the social movements of the late 1960s rocked the self-evident factualness of the traditional social order, transforming it into an

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Demonstrationen mit der Polizei, die daraus meist entstehenden Frustrationen und vermehrten Aggressionen, die sich nach innen und außen ausweiten, sind zu begreifen als permanenter Lernprozeß, als ununterbrochener Versuch der Veränderung der eigenen Charakterstruktur. Wir in einer autoritären Gesellschaft aufgewachsenen Menschen haben nur eine Chance, unsere autoritäre Charakterstruktur aufzubrechen, wenn wir es lernen, uns in dieser Gesellschaft zu bewegen als Menschen, denen diese Gesellschaft gehört, denen sie nur verweigert wird durch die bestehende Macht- und Herrschaftsstruktur des Systems.“ In: Bergmann, *Rebellion der Studenten*, 76f.

<sup>37</sup> On the complicated legacy and the roots of 1970s terrorism see also Sara Hakemi, “Das terroristische Manifest: Die RAF im Kontext avantgardistischer and und neo-avantgardistischer Diskurse,” in: Klimke/Scharloth, *1968. Ein Handbuch zur Kultur- und Mediengeschichte*, 278-284.

<sup>38</sup> Wini Breines, *Community and organization in the New Left, 1962-1968: The Great Refusal*, xiv.

<sup>39</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Die Scheinrevolution und ihre Kinder,” in idem, *Protestbewegung und Hochschulreform* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969), 191.

object of reflection.<sup>40</sup> The direct actions they employed created new ways of perceiving social inequality and power relationships and anticipated a new and utopian social order. The performative sit-ins and other, more ordinary breaching experiments in our daily cultures and interactions thus ultimately paved the way for a far greater social and cultural change, including a boost in participatory democracy and civil society, than many of the “political” demands of the student movement ever did.

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<sup>40</sup> For an empirical analysis of performative protest actions in the West-German 1968 movement cf. Joachim Scharloth, “Kommunikationsguerilla 1968. Strategien der Subversion symbolischer Ordnung in der Studentenbewegung”, Beate Kutschke (ed.), *Musikulturen in der Revolte*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008, pp. 187-196, and Joachim Scharloth, “1968 und die Unordnung in der Sprache. Kommunikationsstrukturelle und sozialstilistische Untersuchungen”, Steffen Pappert (ed.), *Die (Un)Ordnung des Diskurses*. Leipzig: FSR Germanistik, 2007, pp. 11-36.