

Cooperation and Self-Government: Sociopolitical Experiments in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Veranstalter: Deutsches Historisches Institut Paris; Universität Konstanz; Université de Rouen; Centre Marc Bloch, Berlin; Deutsch-Französische Hochschule, Saarbrücken

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Taking the 50-year anniversary of 1968 as its vantage point, the summer school examined the so-called „real of utopia“¹ by adopting a diachronic perspective on experimental and utopian sociopolitical movements of the 19th and 20th century. After a welcome note by THOMAS MAISSEN (Paris), the conference started with introductory remarks by SVEN REICHARDT and ANNE KWASCHIK (both Konstanz). The former focused on consecutive post-1968 movement formations, taking up concepts such as Joshua Clark Davis' „activist entrepreneurs“², critically examining their ambivalent position between experimental utopianism on the one hand and bourgeois escapism on the other. Kwaschik argued that sociopolitical experiments should be examined in their own right, stressing the necessity to refrain from a *posteriori* judgments focusing on their failure. Rather, they should be taken seriously as complex alternative models of society. This genealogy of alternative rationalities can be traced back to at least the early 19th century „utopian socialists“, continued with Marx and Engels and shaped discourses within various 20th century social movements. Reichardt and Kwaschik outlined the summer school's framework, pointing to different forms of interconnectedness between sociopolitical experiments over space and time.

The contributions to the first panel, chaired by Sven Reichardt, focused on „Experimental Cultures in a Transnational Perspective“. ROBERT KRAMM (Hong Kong) presented three case studies of early twentieth century „radical utopian communities“ in Jamaica, Japan, and South Africa, using the prism of two central categories: mobility

and the idea of the reformed body. He underlined how these projects were embedded in global networks and emphasized their role in the mobility of people and knowledge, as well as the epistemological perspective these examples offer for a decentered global history of the twentieth century. In another case study, ANNE-SOPHIE REICHERT (Chicago) interrogated the notion of the „experiment“ in the garden city of Hellerau, a project deeply rooted in Germany's turn-of-the-century *Lebensreform* movement. She focused on the eurhythmic practices introduced to Hellerau by Emile Jacques-Dalcroze. These were rhetorically and performatively situated at the intersection of avant-garde art, therapeutic measures, and methods of experimental self-investigation. FRANZ FILAFFER (Vienna) examined how the concept of the village community became a common trope in 19th century political discourse. Two core elements were responsible for its pervasiveness: the idea of co-proprietorship and democratic self-governance, and the „village commune's“ characteristic as a „phantom space“ compatible with competing political ideologies in various parts of the world. The „village commune“ could thus play an argumentative role along three axes: the critique of political economy, the critique of natural law and the construction of a universal history, making it a multi-purpose utopia with tangible global-historical significance. KATHARINA MORAWIETZ (Fribourg) concluded the panel with a case study on „Longo mai“, a network of mostly agricultural „intentional communities“ that originated in Austria and Switzerland in the 1970s. „Longo mai“ activists focused on diagnosing societal problems and finding solutions on the micro-level. This turn towards concrete issues within new social movements can be seen as a context-specific reaction to the perceived failures of „1968“. The diverse contributions to the first panel highlighted both the importance of national contexts and the influence of transna-

¹ Riot-Sarcey, Michèle. *Le Réel de l'utopie. Essai sur le politique au XIXe siècle*, Paris 1998;
Olin Wright, Erik. *Envisioning Real Utopia*, London / New York 2010.

² Clark Davis, Joshua. *From Head Shops to Whole Foods. The Rise and Fall of Activist Entrepreneurs*, New York 2017.

tional networks with regards to diagnoses of crisis and the corresponding conceptual and organizational solutions in different decades. The question thus emerged: In what way do conceptualizations of utopia and a rhetoric of the experimental relate to lived experiences?

This issue was also at the core of the second panel on „Countercultures and Cooperative Practices“, chaired by JÜRGEN FINGER (Paris). The first presentation by HUGO PATINAUX (Rouen) was dedicated to the French autonomous movement. He rooted its widely noted activities in the 2000s in both its older theoretical points of reference, notably anarchism and communism, and its praxeological antecedents. The latter can be found in the French and Italian operaist movements of the 1960s and 1970s as well as in the individualist anarchism of the *Belle Époque*. The (re-)appearance of the movement in the early 2000s can partly be explained by the mobilizing effect of neoliberal policies, which however leaves open the question of how a transfer of practical knowledge might have taken place over time. ONUR ERDUR (Berlin) addressed epistemological change in sociology during the late 1960s and early 1970s, focusing on French sociologist Edgar Morin and his stay in California. Erdur examined how both the state of scientific research with which Morin became acquainted during his stay at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies and his experiences in San Diego's post-1968 „scene“ led to a striking renewal in his thinking and writing. It became infused with an all-present parallelization of society and nature, condensed in the analogy or „short-circuit“ of the concepts of „revolution“ and „mutation“, which Erdur read as a variant of the „real of utopia“: the „bio-logic of utopia“. In the third contribution to the panel TOBIAS BERNET (Berlin) emphasized the necessity to look beyond the „dramatic moments“ of social movements and to examine the long-term effects of pragmatic practices. Taking as his example West German housing cooperatives that evolved from squats and tenant struggles around 1980, he argued that such processes of institutionalization cannot be reduced to the predominant liberalization narratives that highlight the emancipatory „cultural“ achievements of post-1968

movements while pointing to many of their traits' incorporation into neoliberal capitalism. Instead, alternative economic practices should be taken seriously as contested attempts to create post-capitalist collectives. JAKE SMITH (Colorado) concluded the panel by analyzing the transformation of leftist activism and alternative youth cultures in West Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands in the 1970s and 1980s. The late 1970s saw a shift from a general commitment to the ideas of the enlightened subject, a progressive temporality, and the search for authenticity to their widespread rejection among a younger cohort of what Smith called „regenerative activists“. These new subcultural formations, permeated by the aesthetic paradigm of punk, aimed to create „new modes of being in the world“ by enabling moments of ecstatic contact with „the uncanny“. Their artistic and protest practices challenge the concept of „counterculture“ insofar as „regenerative activists“ did not accept any positive utopia that would restore an authentic way of life. The contributions of the second panel inspired discussions on such heterogeneous topics as the role of violence in social movements, practices of memory or the effects of technological innovations and consumerism, thus highlighting the entanglements of practices, materiality, and knowledge (production). The question of activists' social background – for example to what extent new social movements were largely a middle-class affair – was a recurring issue.

The third panel, chaired by Anne Kwaschik, took up the issue of social class in the context of „Experiences of Self-Management“, focusing on labor and feminist movements. Contributing to the discussion on liberalization narratives JENS BECKMANN (Potsdam) analyzed the self-management arrangements put in place by the workers of the LIP watch factory in Besançon during its occupation in the 1970s. He gave a nuanced account of these practices, caught between a „managerial“ and a „communal“ understanding of self-management. Focusing on the practices of knowledge transfer and production of counter-knowledge, Beckmann showed how the uncertain economic position of the work-

ers temporarily gave rise to a „solidarity contract“, embodied in the notion of the „*communauté*“, by which outside expertise could productively be integrated into grass-roots action. Providing another example from the sphere of labor JASPER KLOMP (Ljubljana) explored the implementation and perception of the Yugoslavian system of workers' self-management in which the self-managed enterprise functioned as the nucleus of workers' everyday life and identity. Klomp emphasized the need to reflect on these ideas and practices in a well-balanced manner, avoiding both „Yugo-nostalgic“ idealization and outright dismissal. A contemporaneous expression of this polarized perception can be found in the reaction to the expulsion of the „Belgrade Eight“ in 1975 which eroded many Western European leftists' enthusiasm for Yugoslavia. The contributors to the second half of the panel focused on feminist socio-political experiments. NATHAN CROMPTON (Vancouver) examined the relationship between the movement for working class self-management and the feminist movement in 1970s France which was both symbiotic and antagonistic. He showed how an „autogestion“ discourse about the self-managed body was employed in the feminist struggle for free and legal abortion. Crompton then traced feminist debates about productive and reproductive labor following the onset of economic crisis. Focusing on the German autonomous movement, EMELINE FOURMENT (Paris / Berlin) raised the question of how sexual violence was addressed within groups that sought to strengthen victims' voices while rejecting formal legal action. In the first of two phases that Fourment identified, gender relations were viewed through the prism of a Marxist conception of class struggle. In this antagonistic perspective, only women could liberate themselves from men's routine violent appropriation of their bodies. The 1990s saw a shift towards a more deconstructivist perspective in which sexual violence was regarded as a behaviour learned in bourgeois society that could thus be unlearned through collective pedagogical practices. The contributions to the third panel led to fruitful discussions about the relationship between

individual and collective actors within different movements, as well as about their relations with society at large. Participants debated the ways in which the boundaries between public and private are moveable over the course of history and within different movements. The examples presented up to this point illuminated the historical diversity of linkages between experimental collective practices and the production of knowledge.

The question of knowledge production was the central topic of the final panel, entitled „Self-description and Knowledge Production“ and chaired by DAMIR SKENDEROVIC (Fribourg). MARTIN HERRNSTADT (Tel Aviv) presented a study of „*enquêtes*“ from early 19th century France, putting emphasis on the changes that this specific „knowledge form“ underwent. Originally employed to not only understand social conditions, but also to control societal transitions and moralize the objects of study, the *enquête* was appropriated and transformed by non-hegemonic actors – notably workers – in ways that served to further mutualistic forms of self-organization.

The conference's concluding discussion dwelt on a number of core issues. First of all, a critical interrogation of key concepts such as utopia, experiment, or self-management proved to be fruitful, not least because these are shaped by both movement actors and those – including historians – who study them. Secondly, the summer school's central concern – to develop a diachronic perspective on sociopolitical experiments – informed a whole range of interrelated questions: How do different groups and movements from a timespan of almost two centuries relate to each other? How does knowledge production and transfer within and between them function over time? How do (shared) bodies of philosophical and political texts on the one hand and biographical overlaps on the other shape such transmissions between „movement generations“, for example the German *Lebensreform* movement and the post-1968 alternative left? Which role does the construction of historical narratives and visions of the future play for the actors themselves and how does this integrate them in a diachronic continuity? The final discus-

sion also pointed to some relevant deficiencies in the conference's program, particularly regarding postcolonial, migrant and anti-racist movements and perspectives. This represents a desideratum in the context of otherwise rich debates that showed how various sociopolitical movements of the 19th and 20th century – as diverse as their concrete contexts might have been – can be regarded as collaborative attempts at both diagnosing and changing the state of society.

Conference Overview:

Thomas Maissen (Paris): Welcome Address

Anne Kwaschik / Sven Reichardt (Konstanz):
Introductory Remarks

Panel 1: Experimental Cultures in a Transnational Perspective

Sven Reichardt (Konstanz): Chair

Robert Kramm (Hong Kong): Mobility and the Body in Early Twentieth Century Radical Utopian Communities

Anne-Sophie Reichert (Chicago): *Leben im Versuch*: Experimental Culture in Germany's First Garden City Hellerau (1910-1914)

Damir Skenderovic (Fribourg): Commentary

Franz Fillafer (Wien): Global Villages: Communes as Nodes of Inter-Imperial Social Reform in the Nineteenth Century

Katharina Morawietz (Fribourg): *Longo mai* – une expérience collective, autogérée, transnationale (créée dans les années après '68)

Detlef Siegfried (Copenhagen): Commentary

Discussion

Public Lecture

Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey (Bielefeld): Critique de l'autorité: Les mouvements de 68 en France et en Allemagne

Panel 2: Countercultures and Cooperative Practices

Jürgen Finger (Paris): Chair

Hugo Patinaux (Rouen): Pensées et pratiques alternatives dans l'autonomie politique

Onur Edur (Berlin): The Bio-Logic of Utopia: The Sociologist Edgar Morin and the Califor-

nian Experience

Damir Skenderovic (Fribourg): Commentary

Tobias Bernet (Berlin): Neoliberal Subjects or Post-Capitalist Collectives? Cooperative Housing and the Legacy of New Social Movements in Germany

Jake Smith (Colorado): Strangers in a Dead Land: Redemption and Renewal in the European Counterculture

Sven Reichardt (Konstanz): Commentary

Discussion

Panel 3: Experiences of Self-Management

Anne Kwaschik (Konstanz): Chair

Jens Beckmann (Potsdam): Self-Management and External Expertise: The Case of LIP in Besançon, 1973-1987

Jasper Klomp (Ljubljana): „Producer's Democracy“? The Implementation of Workers' Self-Management in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Ludivine Bantigny (Rouen): Commentary

Nathan Crompton (Vancouver): Feminist Autogestion in France: Gender and Self-Management, 1971-1979

Emeline Fourment (Paris / Berlin): Making Violence against Women Political: The Feminist Alternative Justice's Debates within the *Autonomen* Movement

Detlef Siegfried (Copenhagen): Commentary

Discussion

Panel 4: Self-Description and Knowledge Production

Damir Skenderovic (Fribourg): Chair

Martin Herrnstadt (Tel Aviv): Deviant Knowledge and the Struggle for Self-Description: Socio-Political Laboratories in France 1830-1848

Anne Kwaschik (Konstanz): Commentary

Discussion

Concluding Roundtable on Cooperation and Self-Government

Zoé Kergomard (Paris): Chair

Participants: Anne Kwaschik (Konstanz) /

Sven Reichardt (Konstanz) / Detlef Siegfried
(Kopenhagen) / Damir Skenderovic (Fri-
bourg)

Notes.

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