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Spaces for Feeling Differently: Emotional Experiments in the Alternative Left in West Germany during the 1970s

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Introduction

How does it feel to live in capitalism? Are there 'normal' or 'typical' feelings in a capitalist, urban society? In the 1970s, West German leftists would have answered such questions by arguing that capitalism necessarily produces fear, that living in modern cities makes people feel isolated and lonely, and that boredom and frustration characterize capitalist society. Numerous leftist texts analysed this 'emotional normalcy' under capitalism that damaged both individual personalities and personal relations. Facing this emotional plight, left-wing activists tried to develop practices that would allow them to 'feel differently': to overcome fear and loneliness and to foster meaningful interpersonal relations. Alternative leftists thus created, we argue in this article, various spaces for trying out new and different feelings. Producing these feelings would not only cure, the argument went, individual 'damaged personalities', but would also be politically subversive as it could challenge the domination of rationality characteristic of capitalism.

In this article, we explore how the trying out of feelings in West Germany's alternative left worked. Attempts to produce different feelings were based on what we call a specific emotional knowledge about capitalism, that is an understanding of how capitalism, and specifically capitalist spatial arrangements, produced, regulated and restricted feelings. The

1

emotional knowledge facilitated, we argue, a variety of experiments that would yield the feelings that leftists missed so dearly under capitalism. We are thus neither interested in what feelings a peculiar (built) environment produce, nor are we interested in the ambivalent emotions that social movements create and arguably need to work on (from a geographical perspective, see Brown and Pickerill 2009; Wilkinson 2009; Askins 2009; from a historical perspective, see the discussion in Häberlen and Russell, 2014). Rather, we explore how historical actors thought about the emotions capitalist society and the built environment in cities produce, and how this knowledge informed practices that could yield very real emotions. To make this case, we will first analyse the emotional knowledge leftists produced, and then look at two distinct spaces for trying out emotions, namely, first, a variety of consciousness-raising and therapy groups where people tried to build new intimate relationships, and, second, demonstrations and festivities that constituted temporal zones of exuberance.

Methodologically, our article builds on Monique Scheer's suggestion to understand emotions as practices. Rather than separating practices and emotions, Scheer draws our attention to the 'doing' of emotions in a performative sense. With Scheer, we will ask what people did, not least with their bodies, 'in order to have emotions' (Scheer 2012: 194). We will read these practices as attempts to produce feelings, as emotional experiments that could—with regard to the actors' intention—succeed or fail. Importantly, this implies that we seek to make claims about 'real' emotions and not just the representation of feelings (Eitler and Scheer, 2009). Highlighting the experimental nature of leftist emotional practices in the 1970s allows us to shed a different light on a decade that is often perceived as deeply transformative. Not least, scholars then and now have claimed a dramatic change of values that took place in this decade as people came to seek self-fulfilment and personal liberty, while traditional values

such as industriousness and discipline lost appeal (Inglehart, 1977; Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael, 2008: 61-66). Drawing mainly on Michel Foucault's work, other scholars have interpreted these changes in terms of changing subjectivities, arguing that a 'neo-liberal' subjectivity emerged that, equally by invoking self-fulfilment and personal liberty, requires people to constantly work on improving themselves (Miller and Rose, 2008; Bröckling et. al., 2000). The alternative left with its focus on changing one's (emotional) self, the argument goes, ultimately contributed to this neo-liberal subjectivity, despite the anti-capitalist intentions leftists professed (Reichardt, 2014: 885-891; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Though these scholars make important points, we consider this line of arguing one-sided, because it cannot grasp the openness and indeterminacy that characterized the leftist experimenting with feelings in the 1970s and that made those experiments fascinating. Beyond the historical case study we discuss, we hope that our analysis of the dynamic interaction between creating an emotional knowledge and engaging in emotional experiments will be of interest for the study of emotions in other times and places, as it can highlight the trying-out process of producing specific feelings.

Empirically, our article will address what scholars have called the alternative milieu in West Germany (Reichardt, 2014; Reichardt and Siegfried, 2010). This alternative milieu encompassed a broad variety of non-dogmatic left-wing groups, most of them organized in a rather informal way. There are no exact numbers about the size of this left-wing milieu, but social surveys suggest that it was not a marginal milieu, in particular amongst the educated youth and in university cities. Surveys conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s estimated that between 10 and 15% of West German teenagers and young adults were part of the alternative milieu, which amounted to a total number somewhere between 700,000 and 1.3 million. A survey from early 1980 that was not limited to teenagers and young adults but

3

included people between the age of 14 and 54 even estimated that 2.7 million people belonged to the alternative milieu, while a further 3.4 million were at least open to alternative ideas (Reichardt, 2014: 40-41). Small, local left-wing magazines and newspapers reached a combined print-run of 1.6 million (Reichardt and Siegfried, 2010: 11-12). Our research builds on these magazines as well as other left-wing publications. While we will thus present a limited number of examples, they represent a much larger milieu. And while we focus on the West German case, it is worth noting that similar critiques of the boredom of modern urban life existed on both sides of the Iron Curtain (for a literary example from the GDR, see Pludra, 1980). Notably French left-wing theorists such as Henri Lefebvre and the activist artists of the Situationist International, namely Guy Debord and Raoul Vangeim, criticized modern cities as deeply fragmented places that isolated people from each other and caused deep boredom (Lefebvre, 1991; Debord, 1995; Vaneigm, 2003, 38-39).

Fear and Isolation: The Construction of Capitalist Emotional Normalcy in 1970s Leftist Discourse

In the wake of the student revolts of the late 1960s in West Germany and elsewhere in the Western World, leftist political thinking changed. Many students distanced themselves from the traditions of classical Marxism and emphasized the role of the 'subjective factor' [*subjektiver Faktor*] for the struggle against bourgeois, capitalist society (see only Gilcher-Holtey, 2005). As Rudi Dutschke, arguably the most famous leader of the West-German student movement, argued: It is 'not an abstract theory of history that binds us together', but an 'existential nausea' and a 'sentimental-emotional refusal' of a society that 'subtly and brutally oppresses the immediate interests and needs of the individuals' (Dutschke, 1968: 91). Society was oppressive, radical students argued, because it restricted not only the fulfilment

of individual needs, but also the free expression of subjective experiences and feelings. Given these restrictions, the very act of expressing such feelings could be a means of resistance. Along those lines, Herbert Marcuse, a central theoretical thinker for the New Left, hoped that a 'new sensibility' he saw amongst students would become the foundation of a renewed political resistance (Marcuse, 1969). The turn to emotions amongst radical students and New Leftist thinkers was, in other words, a central element of the politics of the anti-authoritarian movement (Häberlen and Smith, 2014; Davis, 2003).

Classical Marxist theory with its focus on economic questions failed to provide the analytical tools adequate for understanding this 'subjective factor'. The West-Berlin *Kommune 2*, a political commune formed in 1967 by leading members of the anti-authoritarian movement,[1] argued that Marxist theory is too abstract to account for the 'subjective experiences and feelings (suffering, fear, aggression, loneliness)' [*subjektive Erfahrungen und Gefühle (Leid, Angst, Aggression, Einsamkeit)*] that people have under capitalism (Kommune 2, 1971: 33).[2] The group thus called for a 'revolutionary social psychology' that would explain how capitalism generates specific mentalities and feelings in individuals: a psychological theory that would provide what we would call the emotional knowledge that was needed to identify specific 'capitalist feelings'. Analysing capitalism in such emotional terms, activists created a knowledge about the feelings in urban, capitalist society. Activists developed an understanding, that is, how it would normally feel to live in capitalism, how such feelings were created, and what role the urban environment played thereby. Based on this knowledge,

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[1] On collective living in the alternative left, see Reichardt (2014: chapter 5).
[2] The book cited is the commune's experience report, first published one year after its early break-up in the summer of 1968 and soon becoming a bestseller in the leftist milieu. Its title translates as "Attempt to Revolutionize the Bourgeois Individual. Connecting Collective Living with Political Work!"

it would be possible to develop emotional practices that could yield different feelings as a means to overcome the emotional damages inflicted by capitalist society.

To develop this emotional knowledge, radical students during the late 1960s turned to Freudo-Marxist theories, many of which dated back to 1930s (Eitler, 2007; Herzog, 2005: 152-162; Schulz, 2003). Drawing on psychoanalytical theory, thinkers like Wilhelm Reich, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse had tried to explain both why people conformed under capitalism and why they supported fascist regimes and movements. According to Wilhelm Reich, the authoritarian nuclear family suppressed und negated sexual needs from an early age on. This sexual suppression resulted in an anxious and submissive, but also aggressive and sadistic characters that could easily be exploited by capitalism and that were prone to fascist mobilization (Reich, 1970; Reich, 1974; similar, but less focused on sexuality: Fromm, 1936).

Ultimately, the emotional knowledge Reich developed remained centred on questions of sexuality. In the early 1970s, however, leftist thinkers expanded beyond this focus on sexuality to understand how capitalist society yielded specific emotions. Most prominently, leftist authors argued that capitalism produced fear. In 1972, leftist sociologist and social psychologist at the Sigmund-Freud-Institute in Frankfurt Klaus Horn, for example, explained in Marxist terms that capitalist rationalisation—reducing everything and everyone to its economic exchange value—was increasingly internalized by the individuals, who therefore became not just alienated, but 'inauthentic' (Horn, 1972: 23). As a substitute for authentic personality, people in capitalist consumer societies purchased a 'commodity identity' [*Warenidentität*]. Capitalist principles also governed interpersonal relations, turning them into a matter of (emotional) investment, profit and consumption (Horn, 1972: 34).

Thus, it became impossible to have non-instrumental, genuinely communicative and 'libidinous', that is profoundly trusting or loving relationships. Instead, Horn claimed, as human personality was reduced to its exchange value under capitalism, 'emotional life' was 'essentially reduced to fear, to social fear': fear was the basic emotional reaction to the helplessness and disorientation people experienced under the heteronomous constraints of capitalism, this fear drove people into consumption, and fear ruled the social relations rid of mutual trust and communication (Horn, 1972: 67, 70).

In the same year, left-wing psychologist Dieter Duhm published his book *Fear in Capitalism* (Duhm, 1972), which became a bestseller in the leftist milieu that was printed in the 14th edition in 1977. Drawing on Marxist theory and psychoanalysis just like Horn, but using a less abstract and complicated terminology, Duhm argued that fear was, far from being an individual emotional reaction to threatening situations, the ubiquitous emotional state under capitalism. Explaining capitalism in Marxist terms, Duhm identified five core principles of capitalism that all caused people to be permanently afraid: first, the fear of authorities like parents and teachers, necessary for capitalist domination; second, the commodification of personal relations, which makes people feel isolated and alone, and results in feeling constantly examined like a product; third, Duhm argued that alienation produces fear, because people are constantly subjected to anonymous market forces beyond their control; fourth, Duhm regarded the pressure to perform well as a permanent source of fear; and finally, capitalist competitiveness results, according to Duhm in fear, as people have to be constantly afraid that someone else might win this competition, be it in job matters or in love matters. (Duhm, 1972: 31-54). 'Our life', Duhm summarized his argument, 'is controlled by *Angst*. […] This inconspicuous and "normal" *Angst* that exists everywhere in our society is neurotic. It is an indissoluble part not just of our individual life, but of our

society. It belongs to capitalism, not only as its product, but as part of its construction, as a building block without which everything would collapse' (Duhm 1972: 8).

The fear capitalism induced had, leftists argued, also further emotional repercussions. Under the condition of permanent competition, admitting feelings, above all negative emotions like fear or any other personal 'damages', could easily turn into a sign of weakness. Hence, leftists argued, capitalism prevented people from showing and expressing their feelings, not least since only rational calculation mattered under capitalism (see e.g. Anon., 1977a). This general lack of communication, the argument went, made people feel lonely and isolated. But capitalism had also an inherent interest in keeping people from communicating with each other. Genuine communication might result in feelings of solidarity, a crucial precondition for the struggle against capitalism. Keeping people isolated, by contrast, would make them easier to subdue and control (see e.g. Reiche 1968).

Left-wing critics specifically held the structuring of capitalist space responsible for creating feelings like fear and isolation. They thus connected a critique of social isolation with a critique of modern capitalist urbanity. Time and again, leftist magazines described cities as 'concrete desserts' or 'concrete silos of suburbia' that alienated people from each other, as an anonymous author for the Munich *Blatt* put it (Anon., 1976a). Neighbourhoods 'are cut into pieces' by 'gigantic street constructions', an author for *'s Blättle* from Stuttgart claimed, that 'destroy social contacts' and make neighbouring areas 'uninhabitable due to noise and exhausts.' This way, 'communication shall be made more difficult, everything is made anonymous, everyone for himself and against everyone else, everything is easier to control and to monitor' (Anon., 1982). In Berlin, members of the *Stadtteilzentrum Kreuzberg* complained that families who had been pushed to newly built suburbs now lived 'isolated

and usually without any contact to their neighbours', whilst 'modern life' in the form of

'Lego multi-storey buildings' conquered Kreuzberg (Anon., 1978a).

In contrast to old cities whose narrow architecture had facilitated communication, modern

cities were purely functional and left no space for feelings or sensual impressions. A grey

monotony had replaced the diversity of old urban centres, leftists believed. The 'dearth [*Öde*]'

of 'concrete silos' in suburbia, the 'feelings of monotony, apathy and lethargy' are a means,

Detlef Hartmann argued in *Große Freiheit*, to make people 'look for recovery [*Erholung*] in the

city centres, to shop in the city centre and to consider, as it were, the act of buying as central

for their life.' Even the playgrounds in these suburbs resembled 'totally planned cities',

Hartmann claimed, and made parents wonder whether their 'children were turned into

conveyor-belt workers for slides' (Hartmann, 1981). In modern cities as well as in capitalism

more generally, to sum up leftwing arguments, everything was relegated to the rational

principles of profitmaking. Feelings had simply no place in this rational world; indeed, it was

this hostility to feelings that yielded those negative feelings like fear, loneliness and boredom

left-wing authors complained about.

Leftist writers created a detailed knowledge about normal feelings under capitalism: there

was nothing but fear, loneliness, boredom, but also a general emotional void, since feelings

had no place in a society dominated by a rationality focused on making profits. But the

emotional knowledge leftists formulated also provided them with glues how to feel

differently and how to rearrange spatial settings as a means to recover those feelings that

were deemed lost under capitalism. It called for overcoming isolation and loneliness by

expressing feelings, not least fear, and for overcoming boredom and monotony of everyday

life, for example by intervening into the urban landscape in an effort to make it more

beautiful, but also by creating communicative situations in the otherwise uncommunicative and isolating commercialized centres of modern cities. In what follows, we will examine two specific attempts to create spaces for alternative and anti-capitalist feelings. First, we will turn to various 'groups' that provided alternative leftists of the 1970s with a training ground to learn how to feel differently. These groups provided a protected, intimate space for emotional experiments, opposed to bourgeois conceptions of 'privacy' that were considered as a constituent of social isolation. Second, we will discuss transgressive moments of emotional intensity that activists normally missed in their everyday life under capitalism. Whereas groups sought to create 'emotional refuges' (William Reddy, 2001: 129) that would allow for different feelings, activists intervened into capitalist space and disturbed its daily routines in an attempt to create moments of extraordinary emotional intensity.

Creating Spaces for Feelings: Emotional Experiments in Groups

In the 1970s, a plethora of therapy-, encounter and consciousness-raising groups (called 'self-experience groups' in German) flourished in West Germany, particularly amongst students and in the educated middle classes (Tändler, 2012; Tändler, 2016). Leftists believed that living and working in groups would help them overcome isolation and develop the feelings they missed in capitalism. Groups thus became a central place for trying out different feelings. Such groups included a variety of encounter-, therapy and consciousness-raising groups as well as communes, or *Wohngemeinschaften*, literally 'living communities'. Not surprisingly, there are no exact statistics of how many people joined such groups, not least due to their great diversity and often informal nature. A survey from 1979 estimated that by then about 300,000 people had participated in some version of the various group dynamic

trainings and seminars, which had been virtually unknown to the West German public until the late 1960s but the number of which had grown since then to roughly 4,000 per year (Theis, 1979: 46). Four years later, according to another observer, the number of people who had some experience with such groups had increased to about half a million (Nau, 1983: 132). These figures, however, neither included (clinical) therapy groups nor self-help groups, which were both growing rapidly in those years as well, though clearly distinguishing between those kinds of group is impossible. Anecdotal evidence suggests that groups were typically between five and ten members strong. Sometimes groups formed just for a one-time event, while others met on a regular basis for months or years. Many of these groups wrote extensively about their experiences in leftist magazines. We will draw on these reports to analyse groups as attempts to create emotional refuges.

Within the alternative left, joining such groups was particularly popular. Even though it is impossible to provide any exact data, anecdotal evidence suggests that all over West-German university cities, activists joined therapy- and consciousness raising groups, often in the form of men's-, women's- or gay groups.[3] Both activists and left-leaning therapists placed high hopes for personal transformation in these groups. Left-leaning psychoanalyst Horst-Eberhard Richter for example hoped that groups would 'give new meaning to [people's] deformed and emptied relations' (Richter, 1972: 33).

Leftist consciousness-raising groups that functioned without a professional therapist, probably the vast majority, pursued similar emotional goals. Men's groups, for example, wanted to foster 'more intensive and more emotional relations between men', as Helmut

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[3] See the special issues of Kursbuch 37 (October 1974): *Verkehrsformen. II: Emanzipation in der Gruppe und die "Kosten" der Solidarität*, and the alternative leftist monthly from Heidelberg, Carlo Sponti, 26/27 [1976], devoted to forms of therapy.

Rödner (1978: 24) summarized the results of his study about such groups in 1976. Along these lines, a man from Freiburg named Martin Defren who wanted to form a men's group hoped that a 'larger group' might provide him with 'an opportunity for retreat, for solidarity, for strengthening feelings' (Defren, 1980). Members of a women's group from Munich that included seven women similarly argued that they could 'erase not only the wall between us and our bodies, but also the wall between us women' (Anon., 1976b: 136). Organizing life collectively in a group, Michael Hiltl wrote in the leftist journal *Ulcus Molle* in 1981, in a way summing up those arguments, would 'replace the fear of loneliness through stabilization in the group' (Hiltl, 1981: 17).

At times, communes pursued such therapeutic goals as well, as the example of a commune founded in 1976 in the Hessian city of Gießen shows. For the three male and three female inhabitants, one main objective of living collectively was to reduce their bourgeois *Berührungsangst* [fear of touching and being touched] by regularly cuddling together and stroking each other. At the same time, some of the commune members participated in a women's and a men's group, respectively; while the women tried to learn 'self-assertion', the men attempted to conquer their 'anti-emotionality' and their 'adoration of rationality'. To further support the goals of the commune, the members then also started attending group therapy sessions together to 'intensify contacts' within the group and to treat 'behavioural problems' (Anon., 1980: 45-51). A sociological study conducted in 1978 found that similar aspirations were common amongst young people living in communes. About half of the interviewees from more than one hundred communes reported that they expected 'intensive communicative relations', 'emotional security', and 'personal development' as a result of living in a commune. (Cyprian, 1978: 31-33).

In groups, activists tried to work on their 'personalities' and their emotional behaviour. Men wanted to challenge their rational and 'dick-fixated' masculinity and to learn to express their feelings, women wanted to develop a better relation to their bodies. Working on one's self was usually hard labour. One participant of a Berlin based men's group for example described his experience in a men's group as a year of 'self-re-education' [*Selbstumerziehung*], which was unfortunately not enough to erase twenty-five years of 'miss-education' [*Fehlerziehung*] (Anon., 1976c: 6). Given this rhetoric, it is easy to see how what was intended as a 'governing-technology of freedom' [*Regierungstechnologie der Freiheit*] effectively turned into 'destructive self-imposition' (Reichardt, 2014: 888). Conceived as liberation from mainstream social norms, demands and expectations, groups effectively institutionalized new norms that not only allowed participants to freely talk about their feelings, but also required them to do so.

Nevertheless, however coercive these group norms might have been, they also served as inspiration for designing emotional experiments that would yield the feelings participants missed in capitalism. Exactly how these emotional experiments should work was up to debate. Martin Defren from Freiburg for example noted that he did not quite care how the strengthening of feelings might be accomplished, through 'talking, being silent, reading books together, doing hard or soft self-experience' – what that meant remains unclear – 'hiking, making music, [or] cooking' (Defren, 1980). Many groups paid attention to the spatial setting of their meetings. Some groups met in private apartments, where a 'situative tenderness' [*situative Zärtlichkeit*] would develop more easily, whereas other groups found private apartments distracting and met in neutral rooms (Autorengruppe, 1976: 54, 60).

Groups also turned to expert knowledge for guidance. Of particular popularity was the advise book *Guide to Social Learning for Couples, Groups and Educators* by psychologists Lutz Schwäbisch and Martin Siems (1974), who had developed a detailed program for eleven three-hours sessions. Their program contained a series of communicative and bodily exercises. For example, participants should sit in a circle, hold each other's hands, and express feelings like fear, tenderness or sorrow with their hands (for two minutes each); afterwards, they should talk about their experiences (Schwäbisch and Siems, 1974: 293-294). Not least, the authors paid special attention to the spatial arrangements of group sessions that were considered crucial for trying out different feelings. They advised against using too comfortable seating, as this would make it easy to retreat in 'frustrating situations', and instead suggested that participants should form a closed circle, without a table, so that everyone would sit similarly close to the centre (Schwäbisch and Siems, 1974: 264).

For individual exercises, however, this arrangement would be disrupted. One exercise, for example, called 'seating sociogram', required people to sit next to someone or away from someone according to momentary feelings. For about ten minutes, participants should listen to their feelings and change their place, with or without chairs, just as they felt. Afterwards, they should discuss how 'easy or difficult it was to express my feelings through my position' (Schwäbisch and Siems, 1974: 292). Spatial arrangements, these exercises indicate, were considered crucial for the production of feelings. Sitting in a circle would help participants develop feelings of openness and intimacy; physical proximity or distance within the circle would help them express their feelings and thus facilitate emotional self-knowledge, which might then lead to more intimacy as well. Space was, in other words, an essential element for the experimental setting of groups.

Sometimes, the attempts to create feelings of personal intimacy free of fear could succeed, as the experiences of a West-Berlin women's group from the mid-1970s show. One 17-years-old girl wrote: 'We talked about our sexual problems, masturbating, sleeping together, and it was a really great experience for me to say things in that area that I was thinking about. It was all very much free of fear' (Ulla et. al., 1977: 148). Manfred, a member of a men's group, similarly described in 1976 how group members talked about each other, stressing that he had a 'very good feeling' after group meetings, especially when he 'honestly said something' which he otherwise did not do (Anon. 1976c). But verbal communication was often not enough. A men's group from Heidelberg for example noted that 'verbal power does not create emotionality, verbal orgasms still don't yield emotional climaxes' (Männergruppe, 1976). Many groups deemed physical intimacy necessary to overcome the isolation of capitalist society. Touching each other, massaging and cuddling allowed participants to feel their body, something that was considered normally impossible in a society deemed deeply hostile to both feelings and bodies. A man named Klaus Hammer for example wrote about his experience in a sensitivity training workshop in early 1977 that he could 'exchange caresses' with other participants 'according to the momentary feelings', which he perceived as 'extraordinarily liberating and elevating [*beglückend*]' (Reich, 1977). In these cases, either communicative or physical exercises seem to have produced the intended feelings of personal intimacy.

But this was not always easy, nor did it always work. Members of a gay group from West Berlin for example noted in 1976 that they 'communicated nearly exclusively on a rational, verbal level', which made them 'suppress any group feelings.' This changed only for one evening when they cooked together, drank wine and played a 'slip-game' that allowed them to explore other group members' secret feelings with three questions. The apartment where

15

the group met became an emotional refuge for trying out new emotional practices. For the first time, they wrote, they could talk about 'sympathies and antipathies, erotic attractions and intimate relations outside the group' (Ahrens, 1976). But trying out new feelings did not always work. Perhaps most problematically, the ritualisation of talking about personal issues made the feelings of intimacy feel false. Another girl that had participated in the Berlin women's group mentioned above for example noted the 'cosy atmosphere' of group meetings had created merely the impression of feelings like 'we get along with each other, we have the same difficulties'. But these feelings did not exist in reality, she argued. 'You talk about very intimate issues, things you wouldn't even tell your boyfriend, but when you meet at school or in the city, you don't know what to say' (Ulla et. al., 1977: 152). In statements like hers, the normative pressures (she herself noted the 'group pressure') come to the fore. Joining a group allowed participants like this girl to talk about feelings and other intimate issues, but it also required them to do so.

Similarly, the production of bodily feelings could fail. When the women's group from Berlin reached something of a dead end after talking about all personal problems, one of the members suggested trying how 'being touched or fondled' by another woman would feel. But fondling other girls by command did not work; this had to happen 'spontaneously', one of the girls stressed (Ulla et. al., 1977: 149-150). A group of gay men and women in West Berlin made a similar experience. They had frequently talked about nudity, but practically the 'sensual experience of one's own body in the group-public was still fear-laden.' One day, after a long discussion about the fears of showing the naked body – men were afraid that their penis might be too short, women that their breasts might be saggy – group members slowly undressed. Once undressed, they sat 'cramped' on the matrasses. At first, they did not dare touching each other, but after a while, they hesitantly stroked arms and legs, while

genitalia remained taboo. Rather than touching each other, they talked about the meaning of clothing, until they got dressed again. Loosing their cloths had not helped them create a physical intimacy. 'We were naked and still not really undressed. Instead of touching, smelling or fondling us, we tensely stuck to our outer shelly by talking about clothing.' At least they had lost some of their fears of being naked, the story concluded; during subsequent sauna visits, they learned to deal with their nudity in a more relaxed manner (Anon., 1976d: 51-52). The group was a space stage bodily experiments that would, group members had hoped, yield different feelings, such as physical intimacy or a non-fear-laden relation to one's body. But in this case, the experiment did not produce the desired feelings, and the group had to go to a more conventional place, a sauna, to experience such feelings.

For left-wing participants in groups, these became a place to practice, indeed in the most literal sense of 'training', a different emotional style that would, ideally, have an impact on their emotional life outside the group as well. Once again, this could fail or succeed in different ways. A male member of the commune from Gießen mentioned above for example noted that his men's group had encouraged him to overcome his male rationality, which he did by dropping-out of his mathematics studies and studying sociology instead (Anon., 1980).[4] Manfred, member of the men's group from Berlin already mentioned, emphasized how the group had changed his emotional behaviour. He had become more willing to talk to his girlfriend about personal issues, he was more 'sensible' and paid attention to 'humane feelings and problems', or so he claimed. Even their sexuality had changed, as they cuddled more but had less frequently genital sex (Anon., 1976c). In other cases, however, this emotional transformation did apparently not work. The men's group from Heidelberg

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[4] Anecdotal evidence suggests that participating in group therapies could lead to the decision to study psychology, sociology or educational studies; see biographical information on participants in a group therapy in Ziem (1972).

mentioned above, for example, disbanded after two of its leading members had fought over a woman – the most traditional male conflict possible, as the remaining group members remarked. All the emotional work in the group had, it seems, not resulted in the men developing different emotional styles in the long term (Männergruppe, 1976).

Groups constituted spaces, as these examples indicate, where participants could and had to work on their feelings in a long and demanding process. To that end, they staged emotional experiments with unknown results. The 'restructuring of the character' was, as a therapy group's participant stated, an 'utterly painful process' which not everyone could stand and that required permanent self-monitoring as well as monitoring by the therapist and the group (Ziem, 1972: 23). But even though groups were facing 'infinite difficulties', as another author noted, there was no alternative to enduring the time-consuming collective 'learning processes' lest one remained an 'isolated narcissistic individual' (Binger, 1974: 1).

Spaces of Exuberance: Disrupting the Emotional Monotony of Capitalism

Groups provided activists with spaces for trying out and learning how to feel differently. Occasionally, this succeeded in yielding extraordinary intense feelings, for example when men cuddled or massaged each other. Group sessions, however, were not the only spaces for feeling differently activists sought to create. Leftists also tried to facilitate moments outside of the group context that would facilitate intense emotional experiences that disrupted the emotional monotony of capitalism, for example at street festivals or during riots. Whereas groups typically met in protected spaces to create a sense of intimacy, activists used riots or festivals to turn streets into spaces of exuberance that might affect not only themselves, but also 'ordinary' bystanders.

18

The experience of 'feeling differently' in these moments also differed in two further ways from the emotional work that went on in groups. First, experiencing extraordinarily intense (and hence different) feelings did not require people to work extensively on themselves; to the contrary, it would be a peculiar situation that could, as it were, work on people. To be sure, group practices, particularly 'cathartic' group therapies, frequently produced intense, even ecstatic emotional experiences (see e.g. Taëni, 1980; Kommune 2, 1971: 41, 274). But although these experiences seemed to contribute much to the attraction of groups, they were usually considered only a step, albeit an important step, in a long-term transformation of the emotional self. This, second, points to a different temporality of 'feeling differently'. Long-term transformations, as pursued in groups, were of minor importance during moments of intensity. The moments of disruption leftist activists sought to create could, after all, only provide brief, temporarily limited moments of intensified feelings.

According to leftists, streets turned into spaces of intense exuberance spontaneously and unpredictably, and indeed had to. From a scholarly perspective, such rhetoric of spontaneity is usually, and rightly so, met with scepticism: as scholars, we tend to see scripts behind such rhetoric. Yet, while we, too, argue that such scripts existed, we find it inadequate to analyse such 'spontaneous' moments of emotional intensity *only* as scripted. Leftists had, we propose, an understanding of how spaces of exuberance could be created 'spontaneously', and how it would feel being in such a space; this, after all, enabled them to actively create such spaces, for example when performing street music, organising festivities, or engaging in riots. Yet, whether such (momentary) practices indeed did produce the desired feelings was contingent. Spaces of intensive feelings, in other words, were created following a script, for which elements of surprise and spontaneity were essential, but whether that script was indeed enacted was never predictable. To understand how feelings of intensity 'worked', we thus

need to first look at the knowledge of 'intense spaces' leftists produced. In a second step, we will then discuss a number of examples to show how feelings of intensity were produced – and how this, too, could fail.

Leftists, as we have seen, criticised the capitalist order for its dull and functional rationality. Carnivalesque moments of exuberance that disrupted this order were considered deeply and inherently subversive within the alternative left. Such an understanding of carnivals has, of course, a long history, within leftist discourse as well as within scholarly debates (see only, and most famously: Bakhtin, 1984). However, this is not the place to trace that history. Rather, we are interested in how leftists created, by discussing carnivals as subversive events, a knowledge about intense feelings in such situations. One particularly interesting text, the book *Vulkantänze*, co-authored by Herbert Röttgen, a prominent figure in Munich's alternative scene, and less prominent Florian Rabe, must suffice (Röttgen and Rabe 1978).

In general, the book was an attempt to rehabilitate the powers of mythic thinking against scientific rationality. Festivities played a central role for their program of reinstating the myth. Even though festivities no longer resembled the great events they once had been, Röttgen and Rabe claimed, they were still an 'interruption of time, the stopping of mechanical life. … And however crippled and wrong-headed they might express themselves, emotions and affects definitely come into their own.' For Röttgen and Rabe, festivities were moments of 'mixing', when 'groups, genders and classes that remained separated in everyday life create new relations, interweave and interlock, right to the voluptuousness [*Wollust*] of communion, of homosexuality, of incest.' In their mind, festivities were moments of exuberance, not least in a bodily way: 'priests wear women's cloths, they paint their faces in colorful ways or cover them with terrifying masks.' And if the 'passions' became too 'intensive', festivities turned

into revolutions: great revolts were, above all, a 'massive festival, a devil's ball that made all normalities dance, a cornucopia of feelings' (Röttgen and Rabe, 1978: 113-115). A similar rhetoric can often be found in leftist magazines (e.g. Die Mili TANTEN UND ONKELS, 1978). Texts like *Vulkantänze* provided readers, we propose, with an emotional knowledge not only of how to feel during exuberant events, but also of what would create those intense feelings of *Wollust*: the (bodily) collapse of boundaries and orders, the 'orgies, dances, the gluttony, the sexual libertinage'. Leftists, in other words, had at least an idea of how an exuberant and carnivalsque event would look like, and how it would feel being in it.

Demonstrations, in particular if they turned violent, could provide such carnivalesque experiences. But for this to work, something unexpected (and yet expected) had to happen. An author for the Frankfurt *Pflasterstrand* for example noted the 'feeling of strength, solidarity' during a 'spontaneous demonstration' in December 1978 in front of a police station to support arrested comrades. Tellingly, protesters laughed, sang, and danced, all of which turned the demonstration into a topsy-turvy carnivalesque space (Anon., 1978b). A Mayday demonstration in Hamburg that year showed how easily this festive atmosphere could turn violent: 'Then the demonstration: finally action again! … We are still alive. Dancing, drumming, cuddling, yelling, colour eggs, chants, stones, the cops: I run, but no fear, totally surprised.' (Anon., 1978c).

While these situations, the dancing and singing in the streets, but also the confrontation with the forces of order, provided activists with (expectedly) unexpected feelings, moments of rioting were most intense. After protestors clashed with the police at an anti-neo-Nazi demonstration in Frankfurt in July 1978, the local *Pflasterstrand* wrote: 'The fantasy of resistance creates such situations in no time, seemingly out of nothing, which participants in

the street fighting experience as intensive moments of coming alive; - and if it's only for the ten minutes that the barricade is defended. Nobody had expected such an offensive escalation that day, nor did anyone prepare for. Perhaps that's why it was so coherent [*stimmig*]' (Micky, 1978). Like in the carnivals Röttgen and Rabe described, the order was turned on its head, if only for the brief minutes during which the barricade was successfully defended. Arguably, we can trust that the riot itself happened unexpectedly; yet, that the riot created a space for intense feelings of exuberance was anything but unexpected.

Confrontations with the police, whether peaceful or violent, were not the only moments of emotional intensity. Perhaps not surprisingly, festivals and parties had a similar potential for being spaces of feeling exceptionally intensely. Leftists arguably organised such events with the aim of facilitating opportunities for intense feelings. The event that resembled – at least if we are to believe the account a participant provided – perhaps most closely the exuberant festival Röttgen and Rabe described was a party after a gay liberation demonstration in provincial Tübingen in South-West Germany in the summer of 1979. 'At midnight, the *Barn* [the location of the party] was a volcano, I haven't seen something like that before, everything curls topsy-turvy, women, men, leather folks, tranny chicks [*Fummeltrinen*], heteros, lesbians, nearly naked and completely naked, half-orgies on the stage – the festival is immensely gay, immensely perverse, no inhibitions, and immensely affectionate.' The pressure to find someone for the night, so common at parties, was gone. 'It's just this feeling of emotional security [*Geborgenheit*], of community, of getting lost [*Aufgehen*] in the music, the dancing, the people, the atmosphere.' Even during breakfast the next morning, people were 'cuddling, relaxed, caring [*verschmust, gelöst, lieb*]' (Toni and Magnus, 1979). The cuddling is, of course, reminiscent of what happened in therapy groups, and activists arguably knew that

cuddling was a means to overcome loneliness and isolation, but neither the party nor the breakfast the morning after are presented as part of an attempt for a therapeutic self-transformation. For one night and one morning, the 'Barn' had become a space for extraordinary emotional intensity.

In this case, the festival seems to have succeeded in producing the feelings of exuberance leftists longed for, not least due to the bodily transgressions – the undressing, the dancing, the cuddling – that were part of the festival. But it did not always work. Playing the wrong music that would lead to the wrong dancing could prevent such exuberance, as women from Göttingen complained after a women's congress in Stuttgart. The 'slow gooey music' had made women dance stereotypically in a 'cutely female, gracefully, charming' way, but kept them from letting out their 'energies (and aggressions)', they wrote (Anon., 1977b). The slow music and dancing apparently did not create a topsy-turvy, orgiastic situation of intense feelings that those women had longed for.

Finally, activists intervened into the urban space to disrupt the (sensual) monotony they criticised about modern capitalism. One example from Munich may suffice. In July 1977, anti-nuclear power activists organized an uncommon demonstration. Rather than marching through the streets chanting slogans, some two hundred activists cycled through the city with colourfully decorated bikes and trailers from which they played music, thereby turning at least some streets of Munich into a space of joy. 'For a few hours, the streets were illuminated by a colourfully composed convoy of bicycles that proved that even in this city close to the abyss flashes of life are possible.' They decorated cars with flowers, planted a piece of lawn in the midst of a street, and cycled through the city playing music. It was an enjoyable demonstration, as the account remarks (Anon., 1977c). While the account does

not explicitly depict the demonstration as an intense moment, the rhetoric of 'flashes of life' suggests that, for the brief moment of a flash, the demonstration did facilitate extraordinary feelings by aesthetically disrupting the grey monotony of concrete. In this instance, it was not the topsy-turvy situation of a riot or an orgiastic festival that created the space for feeling differently, but the brief aesthetic intervention into the urban space.

In all these situations, whether during exciting riots, exuberant parties or joyous bicycle demonstrations, activists sought to disrupt the dull normalcy of everyday life under capitalism. Fighting the police, dancing wildly or decorating cars with flowers yielded an emotional intensity that activists normally missed. Activists never quite knew when to expect such situations – a demonstration could turn into a riot, but that was never certain –, and the less expected such a situation was, the more intense it arguably felt; yet, activists also knew how to feel once such a situation did occur. In contrast to the groups that sought to help people feel differently in the long run, those moments of emotional were characterized by their temporal limitation. Rioting or excessive dancing disrupted the dullness of everyday life for a brief moment, but was never—at least not explicitly—regarded as having the long-term therapeutically transformative effect that groups would ideally have.

Conclusion

In the 1970s, radical leftists in West Germany analysed capitalism in terms of the emotional harm it caused, thereby developing what we have called an emotional knowledge about capitalism. This knowledge provided activists with the basis for developing a variety of practices that would yield feelings they normally missed in capitalism. Whether in group-settings, in communes or during riots with the police, activists created what we described as

spaces for feeling differently. In those spaces, activists had the opportunity to experiment with feelings and to try out how to feel differently – sometimes successfully, sometimes not. How feeling differently in those spaces worked, however, differed. In groups or communes, activists tried to work on their (emotional) self in order to overcome isolation, loneliness and a general hostility towards feelings; they aimed, in other words, for a long-term emotional transformation. Such a personal transformation mattered less during the exuberant moments of rioting or excessive partying in more or less public spaces. Here, the goal was to create spaces of emotional intensity that would disrupt, violently or not, the emotionless monotony of capitalist everyday life.

A Foucauldian perspective on these practices might interpret them as 'technologies of the self' that, while intended as liberating, effectively produced new norms and rules that shaped an 'alternative' subjectivity for which the open expression of allegedly authentic feelings became imperative (Reichardt, 2014: 884). Indeed, one might consider the alternative left as part and parcel of the emergence of a new neo-liberal regime of subjectivity that, as governmentality studies have pointed out, does not rely on direct force and restraint, but promotes technologies of the self that promise self-fulfilment, autonomy, and creativity, all values held dear by radical activists in the 1970s (Miller and Rose, 2008; Bröckling, 2000; Bröckling, 2007). Therapeutic practices have become a common feature of emotional self-management in the business world and elsewhere, whilst tourism and leisure time industries provide consumers with ample opportunities for intense and exuberant (though perhaps not quite disruptive) moments.

All of this might call for understanding the history of the alternative milieu as part of the renewal of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). We agree with this argument on a

macro level concerning the overall long-term effects. But at the same time it strikes us as one-sided and deterministic when it comes to the complexities of historical micro-dynamics. The focus on the demands of a new regime of subjectivity fails to pay adequate attention to the open-ended nature of the emotional experiments leftists engaged in. While participating in a group required people to submit themselves to a strict set of rules, this very submission simultaneously created the opportunity for trying out novel bodily, communicative and emotional practices that could yield extraordinary feelings. Ignoring this emotional productivity by limiting the analysis to governmental aspects would render an understanding of the attraction of those seemingly bizarre emotional practices impossible. Whether these and related practices are now inescapably entangled with neo-liberal governmentality or still might be considered to have emancipatory potential, as some activists seem to do (see Wilkinson, 2009), must remain open here.

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