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*Introduction*

In a talk given for Radio France in 1966, Michel Foucault outlined his ideas for a new science called “heterotopologie” that would investigate “heterotopian,” that is, “absolutely different” places. Unlike utopias, places that do not exist in reality, heterotopias, Foucault argued, actually exist.<sup>1</sup> “We do not live,” he explained, “in an empty, neutral space,” but “we live, we die, we love” in space that is structured in multiple ways, a space that has dark and bright areas, that has different levels. There are transitional spaces such as streets and railways, open places for recreations, such as cafés and beaches, but also the closed space of the home. And then, there are spaces that are “absolutely different” compared to all other spaces. Children would know such spaces, Foucault said: the garden or the big parental bed where “one discovers the ocean because one can swim amidst the blankets; but it is also the sky, because one can jump of the feathers; it is the forest where one can hide.”<sup>2</sup> By no means had Foucault solely joyful places in mind when talking about heterotopias, as his remarks on the parental bed might imply. He equally described places such as mental hospitals and prisons as heterotopias, places reserved for those whose behavior deviated from the norms. But gardens, too, were heterotopian spaces: “We can see that all the beauty of the world is gathered in this mirror.”<sup>3</sup> Not least, heterotopias have a temporal dimension, he argued. Graveyards, for example, are places where the flow of time is interrupted, and so are libraries and museums that conserve the past for the present and the future. On the other hand, there are temporarily limited heterotopias, such as festivities and funfairs with all their attractions. Heterotopias, he thus claimed, “are coupled with heterochronias.”<sup>4</sup>

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I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers as well as Alexandra Paulin-Booth and Matthew Kerry for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

<sup>1</sup> Foucault, *Die Heterotopien*, 41. The German volume also contains the French original of the text, on which I am here relying.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

Taking up Foucault's idea, this article explores how we can understand revolts and revolutions as heterochronian moments. Such upheavals turn spaces of ordinary everyday life, the streets and squares, the factories and universities, where revolts and revolutions play out, into "absolutely different" spaces, at least for a moment. But these are also times that radically differ from normal times. Revolts, as it were, fall outside the normalcy of time. Indeed, Foucault himself once suggested such an interpretation of revolts by describing them as fireworks that are shot into the nightly sky, to enlighten it for a moment and then fade away. This, at least, is how a member of the editorial team of West Berlin's left-wing magazine *radikal* quoted Foucault in an interview with Jean Baudrillard at the height of the urban revolts of the early 1980s (and I have not been able to confirm the quote in any of Foucault's writings). It is a noteworthy context to quote Foucault with such words. The radical activist used them to describe the revolts that were just coming to an end, revolts for which the magazine *radikal* had played a central role. Thinking about revolts as extraordinary moments with little consequences is, in other words, a perspective at least some radical activists shared.<sup>5</sup>

This has interesting implications. It indicates that whether a revolt, or any other event, can be considered a "heterochronian" moment is highly subjective: not all would enjoy the fireworks. For the forces of order dispersing demonstrations or evicting squatters from occupied buildings, the revolt was arguably extraordinary in a very different way, if at all. For them, it might just have been the normal job, though perhaps a bit more challenging than usual. The same might be true for bystanders and neighbors who simply found all the fuss a huge nuisance. Indeed, whether a space is "totally different" or not, will depend on a peculiar perspective: a brothel, to use an example Foucault gave, might be a heterotopian space for people walking by, taking a look at the mysterious place and imagining what is going on inside, but much less so for the prostitutes working there.

A second implication is that revolts and similar upheavals are not, as it were, naturally heterochronian moments. They are made heterochronias because participants in the revolts perceive them to be such moments. As William H. Sewell has argued, to become a historically meaningful event, participants and commentators need to interpret what has

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<sup>5</sup> "Der Tod des politischen Subjekts. Interview mit Baudrillard," in *radikal: Fachblatt für alles, was Terroristen Spaß macht* 126/127, March/April 1984, 14-19.

happened as such a meaningful event.<sup>6</sup> The same can be said for heterochronian moments. To understand the temporal exceptionality of revolts, it is thus necessary to inquire about understandings of time, and the place of revolts in time, amongst protestors and revolutionaries. Famously, revolutionaries thought about “their” revolutions as marking the dawn of a new era. The French Revolution and its invention of a new calendar are only one example for this.<sup>7</sup> But there is also another tradition of thinking about the place of revolts and revolutions in time, not so much as a rupture in time to start something new, but as an *interruption* of the normal flow of time, something akin to festivities when the normal rules of society are temporarily suspended.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the festivals in revolutionary France that celebrated the inauguration of a new era, such an understanding of revolts *as festivals* turns attention to the moment itself, and not to new eras, whether envisioned or real.<sup>9</sup> Interpreting revolts as heterochronian moments thus means explicitly sidestepping the question of change; it means viewing revolts *not* as events that change structures in Sewell’s sense, but as events that disrupt structures, if only briefly. The smashing of clocks, whether with gunshots or with stones, symbolizes both ways of thinking about time: the end of the “old” era, or the halting of the flow of time altogether.<sup>10</sup> Exploring how exactly revolts are turned into “absolutely different” moments is the subject of this article.

Large revolutions as well as small rebellions might create such “absolutely different” moments. Take the example of a prison revolt. When Foucault mentioned prisons as heterotopian spaces, he arguably had regular prison life in mind that set a prison apart from “normal” social space. Yet, when inmates do not behave the way they are supposed to, then the prison turns, for a brief moment, into a different sort of heterotopia.<sup>11</sup> This, at least, is how the radical left-wing magazine *Linkeck* described what happened in April 1968. The police academy in Spandau, a neighborhood at the northwestern outskirts of the city, had been converted into a makeshift prison for some 120 students who had been arrested during

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<sup>6</sup> See Sewell, *Logics of History*, 225-270.

<sup>7</sup> See Meinzer, *Der französische Revolutionskalender*; Koselleck, “Remarks on the Revolutionary Calendar.”

<sup>8</sup> The canonical reference is the work by literary scholar Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*.

<sup>9</sup> See Ozouf, *La fête révolutionnaire*, 260-325.

<sup>10</sup> See Benjamin, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte.”

<sup>11</sup> For an impressive artistic representation of a prison revolt, see Stone, “Natural Born Killers.”

the Easter Riots against the Springer Press.<sup>12</sup> Rather than being terrified and subdued, the imprisoned students seem to have had fun, while their guards were increasingly powerless. According to the report, the police had sent a training officer prepared to debate with leftist students [*ein auf SDS-Verhältnisse getrimmter Schulungsoffizier*] to discuss about “Marcuse, the justification of the revolt, how communism made sense in the countries of the Third World.” The officer complained that he, “who was willing to discuss,” had been rejected by the Socialist German Student Union (SDS). Of course, he also criticized police structures. Students, at least this account claims, engaged with him, but they did not quite discuss: They “complained about his schizophrenic situation, and really shellacked him [*machten ihn fertig*].” Later on, students also started playing role games in the floors: some played the police, some played protestors. They demanded “chairs for the police” – their guards had to stand for twenty hours – “only to be blocked by the police.” Not least, being imprisoned changed the perception of time. Rather than “counting the hours” until their release, protestors asked themselves what they would do once they were out. Indeed, “groups that had fun in prison” formed “action groups” outside, hoping that, should they be arrested again, they “might have some fun together again.”<sup>13</sup>

The account sheds light on how we can explore revolts as “absolutely different” moments, taking place in temporary heterotopian spaces. Three points are noteworthy. First, the usual hierarchies of the prison dissolved and were turned upside down. Students mocked their guards and shellacked them, rather than being subjected to their power and violence. In the process, the spatial order, too, dissolved, as students went around rather freely. Second, the sense of time changed. Instead of suffering from long hours of boredom, it was quite an entertaining situation during which time seemed to fly by. German terms, though not used in this text, point to this temporal dimension even more clearly: *langweilig* (boring) referring to the seemingly never-ending long extension of time, *kurzweilig* (entertaining) to a sense that the duration of time is brief. And finally, the very telling of the story matters. The report in *Linkeck* might, of course, have very little to do with what really happened in the makeshift prison. Police files might tell a very different story. Yet, for the small revolt to become a

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<sup>12</sup> On the Easter Riots, see for example Hanshew, *Terror and Democracy*, 102-104; Siegfried, 1968, 163-168.

<sup>13</sup> “Was ein Demonstrant in 30 Stunden Haft alles lernen kann! Für alle die, die vor einer Festnahme noch Angst hatten,” in *Linkeck* 3, no date, 2-3.

heterochronian moment, this is irrelevant. It is only through the telling of such stories, true or not, that the makeshift prison was turned into a heterotopian place, and the thirty hours that arrested protestors had to spend there turned into a heterochronian moment. To investigate revolts as heterochronian moments, we need to understand what makes these moments “absolutely different,” how the experience of time changes in revolts, and not least how they ways in which activists talk and write about their revolts turns them into special moment. We need to investigate practices, not least violent practices, as much as the rhetoric and imaginations of protestors.

As an empirical example, this article explores the urban revolts of 1980-81 in cities such as Zurich, Amsterdam and most famously West Berlin.<sup>14</sup> To the great surprise of many political commentators, who had perceived the youth as rather apolitical and acquiescent (and thus very different compared to the youth of 1968) all three cities, as well as other more provincial places, saw a wave of often violent protests around 1980. In Amsterdam and West Berlin, the “movement,” as it was often called, evolved around squatted houses. By June 1981, 165 houses had been squatted in Berlin, mostly in the neighborhood of Kreuzberg adjacent to the Berlin Wall. When police attempted to evict squatters, they violently defended “their” houses; solidarity demonstrations in the streets, too, frequently resulted in riots.<sup>15</sup> In Zurich, demands for an autonomous youth center marked the beginning of the protests in May 1980. But the protests were about much more than better and cheaper housing. Activists criticized and ridiculed the entire “system.” In Zurich, they demanded an uninhibited view on the Mediterranean Sea, and in West Berlin, they longed for freedom and personal autonomy. These are, of course, vague terms. In West Berlin, activists explicated them in a peculiar way: “Perhaps freedom is only the brief moment, from the point when the cobblestone is picked up until it hits, that is the moment of change, of transgressing

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<sup>14</sup> I have written about these revolts elsewhere in more empirical detail, see above all Häberlen and Smith, “Struggling for Feelings,” and Häberlen, *Emotional Politics*, Chapter 5. On the urban revolts of the early 1980s, see only van der Steen and Andresen, eds., *A European Youth Revolt*; Vasudevan, *Metropolitan Preoccupations*; Suttner, “Beton brennt”; von Vogel and Schultze-Kossack, eds., *Zür(e)ich brennt*; Balz and Friedrichs, eds., “*All we ever wanted*”. On chronopolitics, see also Hezel, “Was gibt es zu verlieren, wo es kein Morgen gibt?”

<sup>15</sup> For a chronological and geographical overview of squatted houses in Berlin and various forms of protest, see <http://berlin-besetzt.de/>, accessed 22 June 2019.

boundaries, of movement.”<sup>16</sup> For those activists, freedom had a deeply temporal dimension. They did not struggle for an enduring realm of freedom that might begin after they had “won” the revolution and the “old” system had come to an end – the classical, as it were, way of thinking about the temporality of revolutions – but celebrated brief moments of (violent) transgression during which freedom existed. For them, the revolt, indeed the very confrontation with the forces of order, was a “heterochronia,” an absolutely different moment.

To explore how the urban revolts of the 1980s could become heterochronian moments, the article proceeds in three steps. First, it looks into imaginations and sometimes rather fantastic representations of revolts. The article argues that activists had developed, already before the “movement” began in 1980, an understanding of revolts as exuberant and festive events that fell outside of time. Activists told each other more or less surreal stories about revolts that depicted them as extraordinary and heterotopian moments. In a second step, the article then turns to violent encounters with the forces of order, arguing that these were moments of condensed time during which the regular order was turned upside down. During riots, the revolt, understood as a movement to challenge the existing order, materialized as it were in the streets in a physical and violent fashion. Finally, the article considers the period of the revolt as a whole, inquiring how the spring and summer of 1981 in West Berlin turned into a period of exuberance during which the normal temporal structure of the day dissolved. The article concludes with some remarks how the questions we ask about revolts more generally change if we explore them as temporary heterotopias, or moments that were “absolutely different.”

### *Telling Stories about Revolts: The Imagination of Heterotopian Moments*

In June 1978, protests against a neo-Nazi demonstration in Frankfurt erupted in massive riots. After the wave of terrorism during the German Autumn of 1977 had created a sense of despair and having reached an impasse, such riots came unexpected. The riot was a sign that the leftist scene was not dead. Full of excitement, a man named Micky wrote in its aftermath

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<sup>16</sup> Anon., “Anarchie als Minimalforderung,” in *radikal: Lieber explosives Chaos als Hochspannung* 97, August 1981, 10.

in the local magazine *Pflasterstrand*: “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*].” In the evening, Micky commented, this was all that people could talk about sitting in lefty bars and telling each other heroic accounts of their “fearless” deeds.<sup>17</sup> No doubt, this is a celebration of the rioting; yet, it is more than simply glorifying violence. The account of the street fighting Micky provided has a remarkable temporal dimension, depicting the very physical and violent act of defending a barricade, if only for a few minutes, as an exceptional and intense moment that seemed to have occurred entirely unexpectedly. But to become “intensive moments of being alive,” riots had to be interpreted in such terms. That is why telling stories about the riot, in bars or written down in magazines, as heterotopian moments was so important. Not least, it created a particular understanding of revolts, of the intensity of moments that radically differed from “normal” and, as it were, dead time, on which activists could draw on in future moments.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, imagining riots and revolts more generally as disruptive moments of intensified time became increasingly common in the leftist scene. In Hamburg, a Mayday demonstration in 1978 had revived a sense of activism. “Finally, action again. The sun is dancing too. We are still alive.” Soon, the demonstration turned into a riot, and while the author managed not to get injured, others were badly beaten up by the police. But this did not quite matter: “Tears and blood have flown, but the past loses itself in our future. Let’s stop whining, it’s just the beginning.”<sup>18</sup> For this author, the riot marked the beginning of something new for which the past would no longer matter. Three years later, in May 1981, a (presumably) male author wrote about Walpurgis Nights in Hamburg’s *Große Freiheit*. During the Walpurgis Night, he argued, the usual order was put upside down, due to “the acceptance of nature in human beings, who could only that way experience themselves.” Today, the tradition had disappeared, but at least unconsciously, “we” – that is, the rebellious left – built on it: “at every demonstration that does not traipse on like a funeral

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<sup>17</sup> Micky, “Römerberggespräche,” in *Pflasterstrand* 33, 1-14 July 1978, 23-24.

<sup>18</sup> “Der Mai ist gekommen – 1. Mai in Hamburg,” in *Große Freiheit* 13, June 1978, 8.

march, at every festival that blows up its boundaries.”<sup>19</sup> Such ideas were widely circulating in leftist circles. Readers interested in those mythical traditions that “blew up boundaries” might, the Hamburg author suggested, turn to Hans-Peter Duerr’s *Traumzeit: Über die Grenzen von Wildnis und Zivilisation* or Herbert Röttgen and Florian Rabe’s *Vulkantänze*, two books, both published in 1978, that were widely read in the leftist scene. Both texts reflected on revolts as peculiar moments that disrupted the normal flow of time and that provided an extraordinary sense of intensity.

Duerr’s book is a complicated and dense ethnographical text – 160 pages of text, and another 340 of footnotes and bibliography. The philosophy department at the University of Zurich had rejected the text as a *Habilitation* (the degree necessary to become a university professor in German speaking academic systems), but the book nevertheless became a bestseller in Germany. The book is a reflection on what Duerr called the space and time “in-between,” that is, the space between “wilderness and civilization,” and the time “between the ages, when the old age is gone and the new age has not yet started.” To this end, Duerr explored a wide range of “archaic” traditions and myths. Feasts in ancient Greece, where something “extraordinary” happened, where priestesses walked with bare feet over glowing coals without suffering any burns, were examples of such “in-between” moments, as were “Dionysian orgies” that survived in rural Greece until the twelfth century, according to Duerr.<sup>20</sup> In these situations, “things stand outside of normality, the order is turned upside-down and, at the same time, threatened in its existence.”<sup>21</sup> While not employing the terminology Foucault had suggested, Duerr described heterotopian spaces and, even more importantly, heterochronian moments par excellence.

Röttgen and Rabe similarly turned to myths, which they wanted to re-establish as an intellectual tradition for the left. They, too, were fascinated by the orgiastic nature of festivities, which they considered the seed for any rebellion. During a feast, they wrote, “groups, genders and classes that live separately in everyday life establish numerous ties, interweave and interlock, until the state of voluptuousness of communion, of homosexuality, of incest.” And if the passions ran high, then a feast might turn into an uprising: “All great

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<sup>19</sup> “Walpurgisnacht,” in *Große Freiheit* 45, May 1981, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Duerr, *Traumzeit*, 40.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

rebellions were less strategy, tactics, agitation, organization – they were above all a mass feast, a ball of the devil that made all normalcies dance, a cornucopia of feelings.”<sup>22</sup> For them, the exuberant disruption of the normal order of things had a revolutionary potential. These texts, whether accounts of actual moments of revolt and violence or more imaginative texts like those of Röttgen and Rabe, provided leftist readers with a peculiar understanding of the temporality of revolts. They presented revolts as exuberant moments, akin to feasts, that stood outside of and disrupted the normal continuum of time.

When youngsters – the movement was typically described as a “youth movement,” though we do not have any statistics about the age of activists – took to the streets of Zurich, Amsterdam and West Berlin in 1980, smashing windows and battling the forces of order, both activists and left-leaning commentators turned to this rhetoric of revolts as exuberant and heterochronian moments to make sense of an otherwise confusing event. Writing for the Nuremberg magazine *Anschläge*, an author with the pen name Musidora commented on the youth revolt in Zurich: “After a long night of silence [*des Schweigens*], teenagers [*Jugendliche*] begin – tied to neither space nor time, to neither any traditional idea of revolution nor any hope – to violently create some air to breath in the confining conditions. The silence [*die Stille*] in the cities was blown apart by an exploding desire that barely had an consciousness of itself, by teenagers who would previously have been incapable of saying which desires they wanted to see fulfilled.” For a brief moment, Musidora wrote, the “youth had grasped power, only to let it go a second later. They were too much in love with this game to keep it [i.e. power], and thus gave this moment a historical dimension.” But this moment of rebellion did not yield a “historical perspective”; “history remained the history of those in power, time and space remained subjected to the repressive conditions of domination.” The revolt was a historical moment, Musidora argued, because it disrupted history, but it did not change the course of history.<sup>23</sup>

In West Berlin, radical activists made similar claims in the magazine *radikal* that had become the major publication for the squatting scene in the early 1980s. For each issue, the magazine’s editors picked a different motto. For the December 1980 issue, after the hot

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<sup>22</sup> Röttgen and Rabe, *Vulkantänze*, 113-114.

<sup>23</sup> Musidora, “Züricher Nächte: Der Potlatch der Zerstörung,” in *Anschläge* 2, February 1981, 3-16. Parts of the article are reprinted in *radikal: Zeitung für den großen Abriss* 93, June 1981, 18.

summer in Zurich and riots during military celebrations in German cities such as Bremen and most recently Hanover, but before the revolt in West Berlin had really taken off, *radikal* called itself “Magazine for Uncontrolled Movements.” The issue contained a text by a group signing as “Smoking Bulldozers [sic] of Alaska,” declaring “we no longer prepare for our liberation or world revolution, we never were ‘slaves’ or ‘not-yet-human beings’.” What they did, their politics, was not about accomplishing something in the future, overcoming some sort of oppression or deficiency so that they would be full and free human beings. Rather, they were “just playing ... just like that ... no, no! Nothing further, just like that ...”<sup>24</sup>

For the April 1982 issue, *radikal*'s editors described their publication as a “magazine for unburdened [*unbeschwerte*] hours.” By then, the “movement” had passed its apogee and a feeling of resignation began to spread. Looking back, one author wrote: “The movement: that was the eruption that made a tang of future [English in the original] shine on the horizon of the desert of concrete. It was the act that made time, clotted into an unbearable duration [*die zu unerträglicher Dauer geronnene Zeit*] explode. But the stream of lava of the seething present has dried up.”<sup>25</sup> Some two years later, in February 1984, the magazine interviewed French philosopher Jean Baudrillard mentioned in the introduction. The interviewers not only quoted Foucault, but also Baudrillard himself, who had once said about May 1968 in Paris that it had been “an event that had remained without consequences, that was already at the time without a future, but that was passionate.” Later on in the conversation, the interviewers remarked that the revolts of 1980-81, had yielded a “very different feeling”, namely that “there were no more causes and consequences, but that both converged, and that there was no more time. But the after is an intrusion of time, an intrusion of continuity.”<sup>26</sup>

Radical activists, these texts suggest, had a peculiar understanding of the revolt as a distinct moment in time, a moment that did not so much radically alter the course of history, but

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<sup>24</sup> rAuChEnDeN buLLdooZer alaskAS, “Unterm Pflaster liegt der Asphalt,” in *radikal: Zeitung für unkontrollierte Bewegung* 85, December 1980, 17.

<sup>25</sup> Anon., “Eingemachtes,” in *radikal: Zeitung für unbeschwerte Stunden* 103, April 1982, 6.

<sup>26</sup> “Der Tod des politischen Subjekts: Interview mit Baudrillard,” in *radikal: Fachblatt für alles, was Terroristen Spaß macht* 126/127, March/April 1984, 14-19.

that disrupted a temporal continuum.<sup>27</sup> Revolts were seen, in other words, as moments that were “absolutely different.” Such ideas circulated already before 1980-81; when the urban revolts erupted, radical protestors had an interpretative framework at hand on which they could draw. What, then, was it exactly that made the moment of revolting so different?

### *A Condensation of Time: Violence*

Moments of confrontations with the police, often though by no means always violent, played a crucial role in yielding a sense of living in a peculiar moment.<sup>28</sup> Frequently, activists depicted such brief moments in exuberant terms, using metaphors of “explosion” and “rupture” that suggest an emotional intensification of the experience of time. Violence, that is, made the revolts a heterotopian moment. In particular, days of rioting that marked the beginning of revolts in specific cities – May 30 and 31 in Zurich, December 12 in West Berlin – were described in such terms. Writing about the riots of May 30, Zürich’s *Stilet* for example noted how “we” had “constantly been running against walls” and thereby gained a “nice little rage- and frustration-package.” But then, the riot happened: “Holy mackerell! How the eyes were glowing, but not full of hatred, no fanaticism – no, one could feel oneself, for once.” It was “like a thunderstorm on a bright day.”<sup>29</sup> In West Berlin, it was the 12<sup>th</sup> of December, 1980, that gained a mythical status – “God bless it”, an author for *radikal* remarked sarcastically three years later. A reporter for the left-wing daily *tageszeitung* wrote how he had went to Kottbusser Tor in Kreuzberg, where the riot was happening, not quite believing the rumors that were spreading. Yet, when he reached the scene, he realized that “this time, the powder keg had really exploded. The long pent-up aggression, the result of a permanent meandering between threats and negotiations, the daily pinpricks have created a situation that nobody can control.” He had entered a “different reality.”<sup>30</sup> The unexpected

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<sup>27</sup> For a theoretical elaboration of this argument with a particular focus the concept of the event from a Dutch activist perspective, see BILWET, *Bewegungslehre*.

<sup>28</sup> On violence in the squatting movement, see Anders, “Wohnraum, Freiraum, Widerstand.” However, while Anders notes the celebration of violence, she does not inquire exactly how and why riots were celebrated, and at which moment riots lost their appeal.

<sup>29</sup> “En heissa Summer, aber subito,” in *Stilet: Organ der aufgehenden Drachensaat* 56, June/July 1980, unpaginated.

<sup>30</sup> Jürgen, “Kreuzberg lebt,” in *taz* 51, 15 December 1980, 5, found in *Ordner Häuserkämpfe*,

riot produced a temporary heterotopian space in which the normal order of things had been turned upside down. As metaphors of explosion and thunderstorms indicate, activists perceived such riots as moments of a peculiar intensification and concentration of time. What had felt like an unbearable duration exploded in an instance.

The riots in West Berlin had erupted in response to the alleged – in fact, the rumors turned out to be wrong – forced eviction of a squatted house. In the following weeks and months, numerous more houses were squatted. Demonstrations and riots became a common feature in the city. Particularly heavy riots occurred over the visits of high ranking US politicians the Cold War front city: of Secretary of State Alexander Haig in September 1981, and even more so during the visit of President Ronald Reagan in June 1982, which became famous as the battle at Nollendorfplatz.

Depicting such riots as condensed moments of time that yielded a brief but intense feeling of liberty was common in the scene. In an interview with the news magazine *Der SPIEGEL* in October 1983, a young “street fighter” (*Der Spiegel*) going by the name of Keule (literally “club”), explained that he had a “good feeling” when the “cops” were running away during a riot, “a feeling of freedom.” The interviewer inquired: “Freedom for fifteen minutes?” – “Yes,” Keule said, and another man named Artur elaborated that this was a lot compared to what most people experienced in their entire life, who would never feel true freedom. These were fifteen exceptional minutes free of fear. “Then you’ve made such an experience and know how this feels.”<sup>31</sup> Another “street fighter” using the penname Tomas Lecorte made a similar point in his autobiographical account. Looking back at the nights of rioting in March 1981, he likened the chaotic action in the streets to playing. Seeing how the “armored power is at the whims of my ridiculous stones” was something he did not wish to end. “It was better than any revolution.” In the evenings, when they told each other their “heroic deeds,” victories or defeats did not matter, “only having been part of the game.”<sup>32</sup> Not always did encounters with the police have to end in violence to turn into a moment that differed from normal time. In the hot summer of 1981, both protestors and police had prepared for battle,

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Papiertiger Archiv Berlin. See also Benny Härlin, “Von Haus zu Haus – Berliner Bewegungsstudien,” in Kursbuch 65, October 1981, 1-28.

<sup>31</sup> “SPIEGEL-Gespräch: ‘Tränengas ist der dritte Bildungsweg,’” in *Der Spiegel* 43, 25 October 1983, 108-126, quotes 115-116.

<sup>32</sup> Lecorte, *Wir tanzen bis zum Ende*, 81.

the police wearing riot gear, protestors helmets and black leather cloths that offered some protection. Yet, when the demonstration passed lake Halensee in West Berlin, protestors simply took off their cloths and went for a swim, while the police had to keep suffering in the summer heat.<sup>33</sup> This, too, could be a way of putting, for a brief moment, the normal order of things upside down. It was another intense and “absolutely different” moment.

Yet, by no means all riots turned unproblematically into such intense and exuberant moments that activists celebrated, as debates about the (very much anticipated) “battle at Nollendorfplatz” in June 1982 during Ronald Reagan’s visit show. In the weeks leading up to Reagan’s visit, leftists had fiercely argued over the right way of protesting against the American president. A growing number of activists became profoundly skeptical whether a riot everyone expected would be the right thing to do. In April 1982, authors for *radikal* for example noted that “every arrest warrant and every smashed skull” made the “open confrontation” with the police less appealing. Rather than feeling as “living actors of unchaining,” more and more people felt like “beaten victims” after a demonstration. The problem was, the authors analyzed, that “our own daredevil myth agitated us into repeat offenders, produced foolish actions, schematic and controllable behavior.”<sup>34</sup> A month later, activists demanded to “cancel the battle,” because the defeat was predictable, and the riot would have lost all spontaneity. No longer would the riot be a disruptive and intense moment in time; it would be just part of normal time.<sup>35</sup>

But the riot was not cancelled. Instead, it was unexpectedly massive. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June, about 80,000 people had protested mostly peacefully against American foreign policy. The following day, more radical activists had organized a demonstration. Some 4,000 protestors had already gathered at Nollendorfplatz, when the police cordoned the square to check all of the protestors individually at two openings. This is where riots erupted. Protestors threw rocks at the police that did not dare to send its forces into the crowd. Soon, protestors

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<sup>33</sup> Personal conversation with G. U., Berlin, October 2011; see also Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics*, 136.

<sup>34</sup> Dr. Seltsam, “Käseklaue und Bombenbau,” in *radikal: Zeitung für Jagd aus Leidenschaft* 104, May 1982, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Fernando, “die schlacht absagen,” in *radikal: Zeitung für den unkontrollierten Ernstfall* 105, June 1982, 12.

arriving late at the scene started attacking the police from the rear. Eventually, the police had to retreat.<sup>36</sup>

After the riots, activists sought to make sense of what had happened. The very same authors who had a year before defined freedom as the moment between picking up a rock and its hitting, “that is the moment of transgression,” now asked much less enthusiastically, though without explicitly referring to the riot: “What now, when there are no more new boundaries to be transgressed?” There was a first time for everything: spraying a parole on a wall, throwing a rock, throwing a Molotov cocktail. But a boundary could be transgressed only once, and taking the next step – picking up a gun – was a step few people wanted to take. Thus transgressions had to move to a different, less militant terrain, the authors argued. For a year, a long time during the revolt, the authors noted, they had been searching for such a terrain, but to no avail. The cycle of revolting that had begun five years ago with the Sex Pistols had collapsed.<sup>37</sup> For these authors at least, the impossibility to transgress new boundaries meant a return to normal times.

Along similar lines, another author remarked that the initial spontaneity – meaning “doing the right thing without thinking” – had given way to temerity – meaning “that it had been better to think.” In the initial euphoria, memories of the past had been forgotten, and hence the “lack of history resulted in the mistake of repetition, the repetition of mistakes.” In the mode of repetition, the sense of living through a particularly intense moment of time disappeared. He mocked the preparation for the anti-Reagan demonstration: “If we all bring our revolutionary super-ego, then we are twice as many.” But then, it was the police that put an end to the planned “dignified” demonstration. The “action” began at Nollendorfplatz, “and holy fuck, what an action,” he wrote with apparent excitement. “Our rags weightlessly fly over the borders of order, the law is in flames.” It was another instant, comparable to previous battles, in which he succeeded in freeing himself “from the constraints of the usual impotence.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See AG Grauwacke, *Autonome in Bewegung*, 73-76.

<sup>37</sup> Das “reale” no future, “[No title],” in *radikal: Zeitung für den reisenden Absatz* 106, July 1982, 10.

<sup>38</sup> K. Ätzer, “Rhythmuswechsel, oder: Wenn wir alle unser revolutionäres Über-Ich mitbringen, dann sind wir schon doppelt so viele,” in *radikal: Zeitung für den reisenden Absatz*

Other activists similarly celebrated the riot as a moment that stood apart. Most explicit is a pamphlet by a group signing as “Fighters of the Sado-Marxist International.” They, too, mocked the plan of having a “dignified demonstration of the protesting morality.” Everyone had come, they claimed, to avoid working that morning, having an “indeterminate feeling that something might happen. People were there to see remote acquaintances, to experience some genuine moments, in short: to have fun, and to give the entire thing [*dem Ganzen*] a healthy push.” Initially, it felt like being on a “funeral,” but then, the “hearse” was opened, and quickly, the crowd started “killing time” without any previous arrangements or leaders. It was, they claimed, not a fight against “the symbol of the police or NATO,” but “a game for the sake of playing,” not only playing “with the cops,” but also “with and against urbanism, the commodity, the cars, the traffic, the concrete, the fragmented time.” The rhetoric the “fighters” employed depicted the riot as a temporary heterotopian space par excellence. In their words, the “vandals” had “created a zone that was partially liberated of any control, of any power and law.” In that zone, “encounters” and “complicities” could develop, “multifarious games against a world that controls all wishes and redirects them into production and consumption.” It was a “pleasure just to be there, to militantly [*kämpferisch*] and passionately reconquer a space and time that escaped at this moment from any political or other maneuver. One settled scores with the accumulated grey of work and the daily boredom.”<sup>39</sup>

The debates about the riots in June 1982 shed an interesting light on what it took for riots to become a heterochronian moment. Both the arguments in favor of “cancelling the battle” and the celebrations of the riot after it had happened indicate that if a riot was to be expected, it became part of the normal order and was hence no longer an “absolutely different” moment. The riot on 12 December 1980 had been such a special moment, but as riots became the norm and the police learned how to deal with them, they lost their special character. And interestingly, against all predictions, the riot on 11 June 1982 also turned into a heterochronian moment when the police had misjudged the situation and lost control. Along similar lines, the comments highlight that a transgression had to be unique. Once the riot became repetitive and hence predictable, it ceased to be a heterochronian moment.

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106, July 1982, 8-9.

<sup>39</sup> Die Kämpfer der aufbrechenden sado-marxistischen Internationale, “Nicht stehenbleiben,” Pamphlet, June 1982, found in Ordner Anti-Nato Bewegung, Papiertiger Archiv Berlin.

Indeed, the more common riots became, the less they stood out of time; they were, so to speak, reintegrated into the temporal continuum. This was the moment when activists lost interest in the riot and looked, albeit in vain, for a different terrain for transgressions.

### *Months of Exuberance*

Riots were outstanding moments during the revolt. They were brief but intense moments of exuberance and transgression that activists celebrated. But it is also possible to consider the revolt as a whole as a heterochronian period lasting several months. In squatted houses but also in the neighborhood of Kreuzberg 36 more generally, protestors created a temporary heterochronian space in which the normal temporal structure of daily life dissolved. While the beginning of this prolonged moment of exuberance was marked by a distinct day of action – December 12 in West Berlin – it is much less clear when the moment ended: it might be the death of 18 years old protestor Klaus Jürgen Rattay during a demonstration on September 22, 1981, or the eviction of the particularly radical squatters of the *Kunst- und Kultur-Centrum Kreuzberg*, known as KuKuCK, in July 1984 – or sometimes in between. For activists, this was a period of “ecstasy” [*Rausch*], as one former squatter put it to me, while another, critical about this term, described it as a “euphoric feeling of happiness.”<sup>40</sup> At least for such squatters, the months from late 1980 into the fall of 1981 stood apart from normal time.

Gaining a sense of what made these months so particular is more challenging. Whereas activists wrote long and sometimes surreal texts celebrating riots, they wrote much less about “ordinary” life during the revolt in the squatted houses or the streets of Kreuzberg. For the most part, all we have are sparse comments and reminiscences. The authors of *Autonome in Bewegung*, a book written by activists about the *Autonomen* movement that emerged out of the squatting scene, for example recall that many squatters avoided long and tiring discussions, and instead simply enjoyed the summer: “For most, the summer of ’81 is a beautiful time full of experiences.”<sup>41</sup> Yet, they do not comment on what made this summer so special. The

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<sup>40</sup> Personal conversation with G. U., and personal conversation with U. W. and G. W., Berlin November 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Grauwacke, *Autonome*, 51.

former squatter who talked about the period as a *Rausch* remembered how he and others had spent the days sunbathing on the roofs of squatted houses, though a former female squatter commented that she and other women were not particularly fond of seeing their male comrades naked day after day.<sup>42</sup> Other squatters described different bodily experiences that made those months special: the wild dancing in squatted building that made floors tremble, the allegedly promiscuous sexual life. “We had lots of sex back then,” squatter Johann Wartenberg remembered.<sup>43</sup> And not least collectively working in the squatted houses, renovating them and then preparing them for defense in case the police would assault, helped create a sense of particular intimacy.<sup>44</sup>

In the squatted houses, the normal rhythm of daily time, of working, eating and sleeping, collapsed. Talking about the *Rausch*, the former squatter recalled how he and his comrades had enjoyed breakfasts on long tables in the streets lasting until late afternoon.<sup>45</sup> For some squatters, reconquering time was indeed part of their political goals: “For us, housing struggle is more than preventing demolitions and having an impact on housing policies. ... A struggle for autonomy [*Selbstbestimmung*] means not only reconquering spaces for living, but also [reconquering] time. Time for fun, for cuddling, for any form of artistic and creative labor, time for other human beings, for one’s relations, for children, for the elderly, and so on.”<sup>46</sup> The festive atmosphere extended into the streets of Kreuzberg. “Street festivals, squatters’ action days! Theater and music in Görlitzerstraße, Scien [sic] and springtime sun!”, an anonymous author wrote in *radikal* in March 1981. A mix of people had gathered in the streets, “impostors who don’t become rich, militants whose fears of imprisonment is consoled by sunshine, dreamers whose marijuana-gaze is colorful and bloomy, junkies with no future,” and many others. It was a “colorful smorgasbord of refusal, pulled by the sun out of the housing-holes and the winter ice into the streets.”<sup>47</sup> Another article in the magazine *Instandbesetzerpost*, illustrated with numerous photos, described a festival at a children’s farm in Kreuzberg: Children of all ages hugged each other and welcomed the

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<sup>42</sup> Personal conversation with D. Z., Berlin, December 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Personal conversation with U. W. and G. W. See also Wartenberg, *Kreuzberg*, 114.

<sup>44</sup> Personal conversation with D. Z.

<sup>45</sup> Personal conversation with G. U.

<sup>46</sup> “Rückeroberung von Zeit- und Lebensräumen: Beiträge des Besetzerrats K 36,” in *taz* 17 July 1981, reprinted in *Sachsbad: taz journal Nr. 3. Häuser und andere Kämpfe*, 196.

<sup>47</sup> “Die Nacht der Steine,” in *radikal* 92, May 1981, 23.

sunny spring with “thousands of games.”<sup>48</sup> Even when no riots were taking place, it was a cheerful and exuberant atmosphere in the streets of Kreuzberg in the midst of a vibrant squatting movement.

A lengthy article entitled “love for the city”, published in the magazine *Traumstadt*, most likely in the summer of 1981, gives an impression of the dissolution of temporal structures of urban life in the early 1980s.<sup>49</sup> The text is a declaration of love for the city, specifically West Berlin, and while the squatting movement only appears in the background, the “joyful sagging” [*lustbetontes Durchhängen*] the text describes should be understood against the backdrop of the movement. For the author, an ordinary summer day in Berlin began sometimes between 11:00 and 12:30 am with a long breakfast, including champagne, orange juice, eggs, muesli, and cake. After reading newspapers, the day took its “expected – unexpected course”: the presumably male author went for a long walk with a “dear woman” to a nearby park, discovering an “ordered wilderness – the Prussian form of disorder.” People walking around looked like they were “on the search for a yet unknown world.” The otherwise common inhibitions seem to dissolve, “exchanging looks and words, attention towards other human beings seems to be more common and more normal than elsewhere...” In the afternoon, he went to Wedding to talk to juveniles at the risk of becoming drug addicts about a “meaningful way of life,” realizing that their situation did not differ that much from his own, and then decided to attend a demonstration at Wittenbergplatz. While the protest was “for the birds” [*für die Katz*], it was a nice opportunity for him to join “a bunch of Kreuzberg freaks (‘rather celebrating ill than working healthily [*lieber krank-feiern als gesund arbeiten*])’, who were above all busy making up unrealistic slogans and disturbing the marching order. Under these circumstances, the entire thing turns into a joyful urban walk, which one can accept as such as long one successfully misses the final rally.” In the evening, he read a bit without much patience for the texts, went to watch *Clockwork Orange* at night, and then walked along Tiergarten until morning. The next day, he woke up around midday – “I nearly got rid of the habit of informing myself about the time,” he commented.

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<sup>48</sup> “Veronika der Lenz ist da,” in *Instandbesetzerpost* 2, 25 March 1981, 13.

<sup>49</sup> “Liebe zur Stadt,” in *Traumstadt* 7, n. d., probably summer 1981, 5-11. On the appeal of West Berlin, see also Davis, “The City as Theater of Protest.”

Sometimes, he even thought about forming a citizens' initiative for abolishing time, though without explaining exactly what he had in mind.

Such accounts provide at least some impression of what rendered the spring and summer of 1981 a time of exuberance that so radically differed from “normal” times. In these months, order seemed to collapse, people gathered in the streets, lived collectively, enjoyed their bodies, and the normal temporal structure of the day disappeared. What might happen after the revolt was not quite relevant, as long as the game lasted. Of course, this is neither to imply that all was just fun, nor that this grasps the history of the squatting movement in the early 1980s in its entire complexity: people got badly injured, were arrested, and in one case, a protestor was even killed; life in squatted houses was never simply harmonious, there was the “house psycho,” bitter fights between squatters, and factional divides between those willing to negotiate, and those eager to militantly defend “their” houses; and drugs, including heroine, became a massive problem. Ultimately, more than a few squatters decided to move back to friends living legally, or left West Berlin altogether to go to West Germany.<sup>50</sup> There is no point in romanticizing the revolt. Yet, the sense that these weeks and months were exceptional was real, and it requires understanding.

*Revolts and Revolutions as Heterochronian Moments: Beyond the Urban Revolts of the Early 1980s*

The revolts of the early 1980s had turned, at least for a brief moment, parts of West Berlin and other cities into heterotopian spaces, places that were “absolutely different.” It equally was a heterochronian moment that disrupted the normal continuum of time, though without changing the course of history. As we have seen, questions of temporality played a crucial role for how these activists conceived of their revolts. For them, the revolts were not about accomplishing something in the future, but about creating something radically different in the present, however long that present might last – even if it was only a fleeting moment of transgression. This emphasis on the exuberance of the present and the disregard of the future did not emerge spontaneously. Activists could draw on more or less imaginative texts that provided a framework for conceiving of revolts as disruptive and exuberant feasts,

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<sup>50</sup> For a detailed and complex history of the squatting movement, with numerous personal anecdotes, see Grauwasche, *Autonome*, 36-85.

standing out in contrast to normal times. But this framework had to be filled, as it were, with actual practices of revolting that turned the abstract idea of a revolt as a rupture in time into a “lived” experience: violent encounters as well as forms of urban dwelling were crucial in this regard. Such practices turned the revolt into a heterochronian, and quite exciting, moment, not least because activists gave meaning to their practices in such temporal terms.

Is this a useful way to think about revolts and revolutions more generally? At a first glance, the revolts of the early 1980s might seem rather peculiar. The celebration of exuberant moments and the explicit rejection of any politics seeking to change the future is arguably a distinct feature of these revolts; at least, it is nothing any other revolt or revolution is famous for. If, as I have argued throughout this article, for a revolt to become a “heterochronian” moment that utterly differs from normal times, activists have to perceive the revolt in such terms, (which, it should be added, sets revolts apart from other major events such as war or a pandemic, for participants in those events arguably do not seek to create heterochronian moments), then it might indeed seem rather implausible to analyze other revolts or revolutions in such terms. In other words, does it make sense to think about revolts as heterochronian moments if participants do not describe them as “absolutely different” times? To conclude this article, I want to suggest otherwise. Even if participants did not depict their revolts and revolutions that explicitly as distinct moments for which the future did not matter, the stories they tell about “their revolution” indicate that these were exceptional and “absolutely different” moments, not so much because of what they accomplished in the long run, but because they disrupted the normal continuum of time.

A few suggestive examples taken from a variety of revolutions in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, without going into any depth, need to suffice to make this point. Writing about the “unscripted” German Revolution of 1918/19, Moritz Föllmer reports that Bavarian peasants not only illegally sold their produce on the black market, but also “ostentatiously squandered them on lavish weddings and village festivities”, while workers in Berlin spent “hours on end playing cards or joining impromptu dances.”<sup>51</sup> Jumping to the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia that brought an end to communism in 1989, James Krapfl describes how an unusual sense of solidarity and mutual trust had reigned in the streets of Prague. People

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<sup>51</sup> Föllmer, “The Unscripted Revolution,” 167.

could leave their cars unlocked without being afraid that they might be stolen, money that was lost was returned, and “strangers kissed one another on Wencelas Square”.<sup>52</sup> Discussing the Fall of Communism in Poland and Eastern Europe more generally, in a book tellingly called “A Carnival of Revolutions,” Padraic Kenney makes a similar observation: there was a tremendous sense of exceptional joy during these revolutions.<sup>53</sup> And finally moving to a very different context, a personal acquaintance from a village near Dara’a, where the Syrian Revolution had begun in March 2011, described the situation as a huge and happy “hullabaloo”. Everyone was in the streets, men, women and children. Reminiscent of Krapfl’s account of the trust between strangers that reigned in Prague in 1989, his uncle noted that he could leave his store unattended with being afraid of theft. It was a feeling akin to a huge wedding, my acquaintance remembered – a metaphor referring to a heterotopian moment par excellence, though the revolution of course was something on a much grander scale, and much less ritualized and hence confined than an actual wedding.<sup>54</sup>

Of course, all these revolutions had different consequences, ranging from the peaceful fall of the dictatorial regimes of Eastern Europe (though the neoliberal refashioning of the countries and their economies that came next was anything but pleasant)<sup>55</sup> to a tremendously violent civil war in Syria. Yet, what Julian Jackson has written about the French Popular Front might hold true for all these events: “If theatre cannot change the world, it can at least enrich it. The Popular Front too did not fundamentally change the world, but it briefly and deeply illuminated the lives of many who participated in it.”<sup>56</sup> A memory of that illumination was visible in the glaring eyes of my Syrian acquaintance when he recalled the times of revolution before the regime had taken back control.

Exploring revolts and revolutions as “absolutely different” times and spaces, as heterochronias and (temporary) heterotopias, has important consequences for writing their histories. It requires asking questions about them that radically differ from those historians usually ask. Rather than inquiring about causes and consequences, about the revolutionary

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<sup>52</sup> Krapfl, *Revolution with a Human Face*, 18.

<sup>53</sup> Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*, 4.

<sup>54</sup> On the Syrian Revolution, see only Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami, *Burning Country*, al-Haj Saleh, *The Impossible Revolution*.

<sup>55</sup> See Ther, *Die neue Ordnung*.

<sup>56</sup> Jackson, *Popular Front*, 237.

dynamics that led to a particular outcome and the perhaps unintended repercussions of a revolt – in the case of the squatting movement, one might refer to the preservation of old buildings and the emergence of a cultural scene that made the neighborhood one of the most attractive in Berlin – we would need to examine what makes that moment special: the sense of an order turned upside down, the unexpected interpersonal connections that emerge and the trust that is built, the effervescence of forming a new community as it happened in Czechoslovakia, and not least the collapse of the regular temporal and spatial order. It is a perspective that might help us to grasp the emotions and excitements during moments of upheaval.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> This builds on an argument I have made previously in Häberlen, “Sekunden der Freiheit.”

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