



PROJECT MUSE®

---

*Greening Democracy: The Anti-Nuclear Movement and Political Environmentalism in West Germany and Beyond, 1968–1983* by Stephen Milder (review)

Martin Kalb

German Studies Review, Volume 43, Number 1, February 2020, pp. 206-208  
(Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/gsr.2020.0029>



➔ *For additional information about this article*  
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/749916>

studied at UCLA. Both these chapters illustrate the book's overall argument that there existed a feedback loop between cinema and global politics and assert the influence of non-Western film theory.

In *1968 and Global Cinema*, Gerhardt and Saljoughi put film culture into international dialogue “to renew interest in a period that has suffered from the discourse of failure attached to radical politics in what is now firmly the era of late capitalism” (17). 1968 has traditionally been oversimplified in temporal and geographical terms, too. Both these volumes make significant contributions toward overcoming these issues. *Celluloid Revolt* uses the analytical category of German-language cinema to lessen the focus on the geographical and political divisions between the two Germanies, thereby enabling East Germany's relationship with the revolutionary politics of 1968 to be considered seriously through the cinematic lens. *1968 and Global Cinema* similarly collapses the distance between the so-called First and Third Worlds by demonstrating the flow of anti-imperialist politics and aesthetics across national boundaries through the medium of cinema and its discourses.

The idea of the long 1968 is key to the books' ability to redress the discourse of failure traditionally attached to that year. The typical images of mass protest from 1968 have often overshadowed the memory of movements that made long-term gains throughout the sixties, especially the Women's Movement. Three chapters in *Celluloid Revolt* are devoted to remedying this imbalance by focusing on feminist filmmaking as political activism even before the second wave of the Women's Movement. Helke Sander is a leitmotif throughout these narratives, from her early German Film and Television Academy films in the late 1960s to the First International Women's Film Seminar, which she cofounded with Claudia von Alemann in 1973.

*Celluloid Revolt* and *1968 and Global Cinema* successfully redefine cinema's relationship with 1968 across the axes of politics and aesthetics. Although the breadth of subject matter might initially appear overwhelming, it illustrates perfectly the books' contention that 1968 cannot—and should not—be contained within a single, Western European narrative.

Catriona Corke, *University of Cambridge*

*Greening Democracy: The Anti-Nuclear Movement and Political Environmentalism in West Germany and Beyond, 1968–1983.* By Stephen Milder. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xvii + 280. Paper \$29.99. ISBN 978-1316501061.

The West German antinuclear movement is fascinating and confusing. Emerging from the ground up, diversity, fragmentations, and scope are integral to the movement's history. Scholarly studies have long tried to make sense of it all—including

its role within (West) German and European postwar history and historiography. More recently, and thanks to Andrew S. Tompkins's monograph *Better Active Than Radioactive!* (2016), discussions have shifted toward a broader emphasis on the transnational character of the movement. Now, Stephen Milder's volume *Greening Democracy* adds to these discussions by centering on "the democratic concerns of the protestors" and "transnational communities" (3). He "asserts . . . that concerns about democracy . . . enabled that locally rooted movement against nuclear energy to grow across Western Europe and take on particular resonance in high politics within the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)" (3–4). Throughout the book, he then aims to address the relationship between environmentalism and democracy by analyzing how activists probed perceived geographic and political boundaries. By doing so he tries to confirm "the nature of fracturing that is said to epitomize the final third of the twentieth century" (7–8).

*Greening Democracy* is organized chronologically, beginning with the origins of the movement and the importance of protests in the town of Wyhl am Kaiserstuhl. Milder takes the reader back to the late 1960s and early 1970s to discuss the "kitchen table" activism centered on localized concerns (29); he also captures the slow start of the movement in general. He seeks to situate the origins within larger debates, an effort that might have benefited from thinking about the not-in-my-backyard framework so widely popular within discussions of environmental justice. At the same time, Milder touches on "transnational-community building" (53) when he highlights "how anti-nuclear activists imagined the Alemannic community" (51) without overlooking national, regional, and local issues. A section Milder titles "A Movement of Provincials" (67) opens additional avenues for individual characters and stories reminiscent of historian Celia Applegate's discussion of German *Heimat*; this segment also first introduces readers to growing opposition to the proposed construction of a nuclear power plant in Wyhl. A photograph, for instance, shows local reactor opponents carrying a coffin with the word "democracy" written on it (78). This image suitably encapsulates a growing distrust of democratic processes. Protests eventually escalated, culminating in the occupation of the construction site. In that sense, misgivings about the planned nuclear power plant in Wyhl had existed prior to this moment; Milder points that out throughout his narrative and he wrestles with the myth that arises from the events there. After all, that takeover became the origin story of the movement, not least because it gained publicity well beyond the region. He adds many details as he retells these and other events, and he is ultimately successful in showing "that grassroots protest had the potential—over time, at least—to initiate profound cultural changes, which might eventually alter citizens' political outlook" (162).

The trends that emerged after Wyhl are the next focus of *Greening Democracy*. Milder traces debates and events, transnational networks, and the rise of different

initiatives and organizations, but never losing sight of personal stories and concerns: for these became increasingly important as bottom-up environmentalism came to shape discussions. Not surprisingly, the rise of the Green Party plays a key role here, with Milder illustrating how national politics soon overshadowed the role of grassroots antinuclear actions. More protests materialized in the 1980s, of course, but Milder spends much less time discussing these. He concludes by commenting on more recent events—Germany’s *Atomausstieg* or phasing out of nuclear energy, for example, as compared to the expansion of nuclear power in neighboring France. He also assesses “the significance of these new democratic subjectivities” (242), emphasizing the unifying character of the movement as it stitched together “individuals from a wide range of backgrounds who previously had little in common” (245).

In the end, *Greening Democracy* is an important read for those interested in social movements, democratization, antinuclear protests, and the rise of the Green Party. Milder effectively highlights connections between environmentalism and democracy by focusing on the voices of “ordinary people” (13), meaning citizens and their personal transformations. Their voices are found throughout the book, which helps readers sketch out daily routines, nuances, and complexities that characterized the organized campaign against nuclear power plants. Along the way, we get a sense of how “transnational routes and seeming detours must be conceived as essential stages” of the movement (11). Though this study fits with existing postwar narratives and other scholarship, there are many more complexities worth thinking about. Pronuclear local voices did exist at the time, and there was an array of diverse political motivations, as well as very different understandings of nature and economic futures. Moreover, a student movement was lingering in the background with its own concerns and questions. Those forces muddle discussions even more and make it at times difficult for historians to untangle a workable narrative—though all the more fascinating.

Martin Kalb, *Bridgewater College*

*The German Epic in the Cold War: Peter Weiss, Uwe Johnson, and Alexander Kluge.* By Matthew D. Miller. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018. Pp. xvi + 237. Paper \$34.95. ISBN 978-0810137325.

In his study on the modern epic in postwar German literature, Matthew Miller undertakes a comparative analysis of the narrative reactions of three major postwar German authors to twentieth-century catastrophe. Peter Weiss (1916–1982) wrote his three-volume *Ästhetik des Widerstands* (published 1975–1981) over the space of a decade, chronicling antifascist resistance. The tetralogy by Uwe Johnson (1934–1984), *Jahrestage. Aus dem Leben von Gesine Cresspahl*, appeared between 1970 and 1983, featuring daily commentary from mid-1967 to 1968 on the subject of German division,