Chapter 3

Consumer Society under Fire: The Militant Targeting of an Abstract Enemy

“consumption is the system’s power”
—Ulrike Meinhof (1973)

The popular and scholarly memory of West German “terrorism” is dominated by the events of the “German Autumn” in 1977: the assassination of attorney general and former Nazi Party member Siegfried Buback; the failed kidnapping and murder of banker Jürgen Ponto; the kidnapping and murder of Hanns Martin Schleyer, who served as president of two influential associations of German industrialists and had been a member of the SS from 1933 to 1945; and finally the hijacking of a Lufthansa airplane by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which demanded the release of ten Red Army Faction (RAF) members detained at the high-security prison at Stuttgart-Stammheim. These acts were carried out by the so-called second generation of the RAF, whose main objective was to force the release of the imprisoned members of the first generation—Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, Ulrike Meinhof, Jan-Carl Raspe, and their associates.

At this point, the RAF’s critical focus on issues of consumption had already receded into the background. However, it is indispensable for an understanding of how the young rebels around the department store arsonists became such unbending enemies of the state. It is worthwhile to briefly


2. The literature on the RAF is vast but rarely based on comprehensive archival research. An overview is provided by Klaus Weinhauer, “Linksterrorismus der 1970er Jahre: Ein Literaturbericht zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland und zu Italien,” in Die bleiernen Jahre, ed. Hürter, 117–25. For a critical position on the mainstream of “terrorism research,” see Narr, “30 Jahre Deutscher Herbst.”
Consumption and Violence

recapitulate what the first generation did to trigger the vehement response from the authorities. The main assaults attributed to the first generation resulted initially from direct confrontations with the police: the shooting of police officer Norbert Schmid when he attempted to arrest RAF supporter Margrit Schiller in Hamburg in October 1971 and the shooting of police officer Herbert Schoner in a bank robbery in Kaiserslautern in December of the same year; the fatal wounding of Hans Eckhardt, commander of the police special task force commissioned to arrest the “Baader-Meinhof gang” when he arrested RAF member Manfred Grashof in March 1972. The RAF’s major offensive of politically motivated attacks unfolded in May 1972 with the bombing of a U.S. barracks in Frankfurt, killing soldier Paul A. Bloomquist; the bombing of a police station in Augsburg and of the Bavarian State Criminal Investigations Agency in Munich, wounding five police officers; the bombing of the car of federal judge Wolfgang Buddenberg in Karlsruhe, injuring his wife; the bombing of the Hamburg branch of the Axel Springer Verlag, where despite warnings the building was not evacuated, leaving seventeen people wounded; and the bombing of the Heidelberg headquarters of the U.S. Army in Europe, killing soldiers Clyde R. Bonner, Ronald A. Woodward, and Charles L. Peck. At this point, the police had already shot and killed several RAF members and supporters: Petra Schelm, when she tried to drive through a police roadblock in July 1971; Georg von Rauch, when police tried to arrest him in West Berlin in December 1971; Thomas Weisbecker, during an attempted arrest in Augsburg in March 1972. In June 1972, British sales representative Ian McLeod was mistakenly killed when police fired through a closed bedroom door during a house search in Stuttgart. The RAF leaders on the run did not hold out for very long: Mahler was arrested in October 1970, and the other leading members were caught in June 1972. Holger Meins died as a result of a hunger strike in November 1974; Meinhof was found dead in her cell in May 1976. In the so-called Stammheim trial (1975–77), Baader, Ensslin, and Raspe were sentenced to life imprisonment on six counts of bomb attack in coincidence with four counts of murder and thirty-four counts of attempted murder.

The previous chapters have shown how abstract intellectual critiques of regimes of provision and concrete practices of political action cross-fertilised each other. The Frankfurt department store arsonists, two of whom became leading members of the RAF, set a much-noted precedent. This chapter shows that issues of consumption were also central to the activists’ further trajectory. Their acts, especially their attempts to legitimise their violent opposition, were intrinsically related to issues of consumption. This chapter provides an unprecedented systematic analysis of the statements and writings of the first genera-
tion of the RAF about regimes of provision, but goes further by doing the same for Movement 2 June and its precursors and for the autonomist groups of the early 1980s that continued the militant focus on consumption through different means. The chapter contextualises these activists’ desire to overcome the individualism and moral deficit they saw as integral to consumer capitalism.

The fact that these groups emerged as a driving force in the militarization of critiques of regimes of provision must not be seen in isolation. Not only did interactions with the authorities play a decisive role, but a much broader radical milieu challenged their contemporary regimes of provision via drugs and theft or the politics of broken glass. The highly publicised “terrorists” were closely interlinked with popular protest campaigns such as the fare increase revolts, activism against Springer tabloid journalism, squatting, and the precursors of criticism of globalisation. In many respects, RAF, Movement 2 June, and the autonomists emerged from these movements seeking to radicalise them.

The Tupamaros’ Arson Attacks

A few days before Christmas 1969, a “Command Red Christmas” placed an incendiary device in a shoe box, wrapped it in red Christmas paper, and left it in the women’s clothes department of KaDeWe. The package was then taken to the lost property office, where it exploded without injuring anyone, without causing any major damage, and ultimately without causing much sensation.3 The explosive matter—a mixture of sodium chlorate, sugar, and herbicide—did not fall under the Explosives Act.4 A similar Christmas package had been placed at the Europa-Center, a shopping centre with an adjacent international-style high-rise tower that had become a symbol of West Berlin’s and West Germany’s “economic miracle” and successful integration into Western consumer culture.5 Radicals sent threats by phone and letter, calling on the management of West Berlin’s department stores to close their stores on the Saturday before Christmas: “If, despite the warning, the bosses still want to hedge

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their bets with consumer terror [Konsumterror] and not with the distribution of goods, they will no longer have anything left to give away in the afternoon.”

The authors of the threat used the word Reibbach, which is of Yiddish-Hebrew origin, to refer to profits and thus added potentially antisemitic connotations to their criticism of consumer society.

Responsible for the attack on KaDeWe were the Tupamaros West-Berlin, which Dieter Kunzelmann, Georg von Rauch, Thomas Weisbecker, and others had formed in November 1969. They emerged from a group calling itself the Zentralrat der umberschweifenden Haschrebellen (Central Council of Vagabond Hash Rebels) and became a precursor of the Bewegung 2. Juni (Movement 2 June).7 The Tupamaros, who took their name from an Uruguayan urban guerrilla organisation, committed a series of arson attacks on various targets, including the Jewish Community Centre, the Berlin branch of the Israeli airline El Al, the Amerikahaus, and the Club 50, which was frequented by American soldiers.8 Thus, two and a half years after Kommune I passed out its department store leaflets, one of their authors, Kunzelmann, was involved in this less well-known attempt to put the fantasy into practice. In some respects, the Tupamaros’ amateurish attacks involving alarm clocks and beverage bottles were attempts to defeat consumer society with its own products: “To build small solidarity groups in all areas of life that begin to resist with means that—if they are not found in the street—can be purchased at any department store is an idea of cultural revolution.”9

In 1969, the underground publisher Nova Press issued four pamphlets: the first was a German translation of Peter Kropotkin’s Law and Authority, while the fourth was a translation of Herbert Marcuse’s lecture “On the New Left,” in which he had called for the formation of local and autonomous protest groups.10 The translator was Bradley Martin, who also authored the second pamphlet, a sixteen-page Beatnik-inspired document that called for the dismantling of department store culture.11 The frontispiece consisted of a red linocut showing a man throwing a bundle of dynamite sticks, fuse burning, towards the viewer. In terms of content, the observations on “department store culture” were in line

11. Martin, Blaue Wirklichkeit.
with Subversive Aktion’s earlier forays into the subject but were more fragmented and erratic. Thus, the motif persisted, and activists likely felt a constant need to outperform previous manifestations.

Another arson attack against the KaDeWe took place on 6 May 1971, when a timed incendiary device ignited the men’s clothes department, slightly injuring three customers and causing material damage amounting to five hundred thousand deutsche marks, with the damage caused mainly by the sprinkler system. On the same day, an arson attack targeted an American bank in Frankfurt. The 1971 attacks are sometimes attributed to the student movement or the RAF, but the arsonists were never identified or caught.12

Drugs and Theft

A crucial ingredient in the emergence of more militant forms of protest could not be purchased at department stores: illegal drugs. Some of the political rebels who committed arson attacks were keen consumers of hashish and LSD; a few also took to mescaline and heroin. Society criminalised this alternative form of consumption, and unpleasant confrontations with the authorities, such as police raids of notorious pubs, with the very tangible threat of punishment and ultimately imprisonment formed an important backdrop in the emergence of anti-authoritarian enemy images and the lowering of inhibitions to leave the realm of legality. The Hash Rebels wrote in agit 883, “The Berlin police . . . are conducting a manhunt on alleged smokers of hash. . . . The only response to state terror is counterterror!”13 Drug consumption unleashed heated discussions among the radicals about whether its destructive and “counterrevolutionary” aspects—such as dependence on dealers and market mechanisms—prevailed over its “progressive” dimension of an “expansion of consciousness” that might create a revolutionary impetus among proletarian subcultures.14

Another important source of early and ideologically charged confrontations with the police was theft. Statistics show that shoplifting was on the rise.15 Although this was a widespread phenomenon that crossed social and

political divisions, theft became particularly significant for members of the left-wing alternative milieu. Some tended to justify certain forms of theft in crude Proudhonian moral terms, often arguing that it was permissible in thriving or large shops. An emphasis on commercial semantics transcended a radical left tradition that focused on a classical proletarian discourse of distribution. Shoplifting was part of Kommune I’s ideological programme.\textsuperscript{16} The Hash Rebels and their cousins, the Knastrebellen (Jail Rebels), approved of shoplifting as a revolutionary act. A flyer for a November 1969 teach-in at the Technische Universität Berlin bore the title “Plea for a Just Distribution of Goods with the Crowbar.” It declared, “The thief crowns himself king. He makes himself free, independent of the exploiters. . . . He is no longer directed from outside.”\textsuperscript{17} A substantial brochure called for organised shoplifting as a means of mobilisation and expansion of the mind: “When we are stealing today, we are only legitimately taking back what these beasts denied our fathers and grandfathers for millennia: they have only sold us cars, television sets, food, etc. in order to make even more money from us.”\textsuperscript{18} For those resorting to routine shoplifting as part of their livelihood, private store detectives and police became tangible enemies. According to a piece of anecdotal evidence, circulated in part to discredit Joschka Fischer, he was a semiprofessional book thief in the late 1960s.\textsuperscript{19} Remembering his radical beginnings in the subculture of West Berlin in 1970, Ralf Reinders, a future member of Movement 2 June, explained that while the RAF was building up an armed group under the banner of Marxism-Leninism, he and his comrades were still preoccupied with breaking into supermarkets at night and shoplifting in the daytime.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{Conciliatory Approach}

When the Tupamaros embarked on their firebombing campaign against various targets, authorities had already embraced an approach vis-à-vis the protest

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  \item \textsuperscript{16} Enzensberger, \textit{Die Jahre der Kommune}, 107. See above, p. 41.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Knastrebellen, “Plädoyer für eine gerechte Verteilung der Güter mit der Brechstange!,” \textit{Agit} 88\textsuperscript{3} 41 (20 November 1969): 7.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Reni v. Tent, “Der Antijurist: Plädoyer für eine gerechte Güterverteilung mit der Brechstange” (c. 1969), in \textit{Der Blues}, 1:29, 31.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Christian Schmidt, “Wir sind die Wahnsinningen . . . .,” 60. On stealing, see Siegfried, \textit{Time Is on My Side}, 509–12.
\end{itemize}
movement that sought to deemphasise conflict and confrontation. West Berlin's minister for interior affairs, Kurt Neubauer (SPD), reflected this position in a November 1969 address he delivered at the invitation of the Berlin Association of Merchants and Industrialists. He gave the example of “citizen Müller,” who smashed a shop window “to make it clear that the shop’s owner is a reactionary.” While Neubauer rejected such attempts to justify “criminal acts,” he clearly understood the potential for a criminal act to be transformed into a political manifestation. He wanted to prevent “crime in its entirety being subjected to ideology” that would “contribute to the dissolution of our state.” However, contrary to his audience, whose members always called for a strong state to protect their commerce from riots, he dismissed the heavy-handed use of executive force. He argued that in a successful campaign for solidarity and mobilisation of the students, Rudi Dutschke had relied on the formative experience of provocation and police baton. Neubauer’s stance was the West Berlin variant of a larger development that culminated in an agreement by the new social democratic–liberal coalition under Willy Brandt to offer amnesty for offences committed during demonstrations that did not carry penalties exceeding one year in prison.

For radicals, the state’s conciliatory approach towards the protest movement constituted a challenge. If they wished to uphold a revolutionary impetus, they had to depict the government’s move as repressive and transcend the movement’s established strategy of limited and performative rule breaking. A discursive strategy of amalgamating geographically and historically diverse zones of grievances fit the bill.

Meinhof’s Notion of “Consumer Terror”

A far-reaching notion of Konsumterror (consumer terror) was firmly established in Ulrike Meinhof’s political thought in the spring of 1969, when Iranian author Bahman Nirumand, whom Meinhof had befriended in 1967 and whose controversial writings had carried great weight in the student movement’s criticism of the shah of Iran, faced revocation of his German residence permit. The threatened move renewed the wave of protest against the German authorities’ position vis-à-vis the Iranian regime. Meinhof pointed to West German trade

23. On performative rule breaking, see Sedlmaier and Malinowski, “‘1968.’”
interests in Iran, to diplomatic attempts to downplay the disturbances during the shah’s June 1967 visit, and ultimately to the West German government’s fawning over a dictator of an oil-rich country who was a Cold War ally. She concluded, “We have grasped the connection between consumer and police terror . . . and the interests of German capital in the exploitation of the Persian people.” In the run-up to the Iranian royal couple’s visit to Berlin, Meinhof had written an open letter to Farah Diba that was distributed as a flyer. Drawing on Nirumand, Meinhof sarcastically contrasted the picture the Iranian empress had drawn of the Iranian upper echelons’ affluent life for a German glossy magazine with the misery and destitution most Iranians faced under a programme of economic modernisation.

The world of consumption played a role throughout Meinhof’s critical thought. The television play *Bambule* (Shindy), which she finished in January–February 1970, drawing on previous fieldwork, is a story of rebellion in a closed institution for adolescent girls. Together with Baader, Ensslin, and Thorwald Proll, who had been released on parole until the revision of their case, Meinhof became involved in the *Heimkampagne*, which sought to challenge the repressive conditions children and adolescents faced in institutions of care. The screenplay revolved around the personal experiences of a group of adolescent girls who challenge the daily regime in their West Berlin institution. Issues of consumption and department stores featured only marginally, but imagery from the commercial sphere contributed to Meinhof’s analysis of the political background she held responsible for the misery and violence experienced by the young women, some of whom resorted to sex work. In one scene, a punter in a car offers twenty marks to one of the girls if she will become his steady girlfriend. All he gets, however, are a few minutes in the car park of Neckermann, one of West Germany’s major mail-order companies. Meinhof explained in a foreword that the authorities cared only about the fact that girls prostituted themselves, not that they “did not have the clothes that advertisement ordered.” Gisela, one of the protagonists, finds a job arranging cups at a Karstadt department store. At the same time, the department store is hosting a police exhibition, which Meinhof introduces to metaphorically interlace consumer goods and governmental authority: “In front of Gisela a puppet of a policeman on a stand with wheels is passing by. The puppet begins to sway and falls exactly in front of Gisela onto the packing table, crashes into the cups. The

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puppet’s stupid gob lies among the fragments of the cups.”

Meinhof apparently became frustrated with the project during the actual production, declaring that her work had been turned into a consumer item. She later self-critically reflected on her own role as an intellectual and producer of texts in a system in which “even language is a commodity.”

*Bambule* was to be shown on German television in May 1970, but the showing was called off because Meinhof was already wanted for her role in Baader’s escape from prison, during which a library clerk was severely injured.

**Broken Glass**

In early 1970, the smashing of shop windows had become a frequent form of political protest. Following a demonstration on Berlin’s shopping boulevard Kurfürstendamm, the militant underground newspaper *agit 883* reported 137 broken shop windows, 7 demolished showcases, 19 injured policemen, and 24 damaged police cars. Harking back to anarchist precursors, the ideological justifications of these riots attempted to walk the tightrope between friendly consumption and hostile consumption: “When we use the term ‘bourgeoisie’ we don’t mean it in terms of the French individualist anarchist Emile Henry, who, around the turn of the century, threw a bomb into a café and in his justification in court claimed that each bourgeois who could afford a cup of coffee shared responsibility for the exploitation of the workers. Last Wednesday, however, only those cafés were attacked that are known to discriminate against comrades with long hair or Mao badges, refusing them service. . . . Other places that do serve comrades were of course spared.” At this point the typesetter inserted a comment: “This differentiation . . . is nevertheless problematic because the comrades who threw stones into the upper floor of Café Kranzler could not know whether they would injure the manager or only a tourist having coffee.”

The prototype of conflict between nonconformist consumers and the management of traditional cafés originated in September 1968 with the “cake battle” at Café Laumer in Frankfurt. A group of young people including SDS

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member Paul Gerhard Hübsch had been denied service because of their “unkempt appearance” and unconventional behaviour. The manager of the café called the police, who manhandled some of the young people and cordoned off the premises with several police vans. The young people were punished for resisting law enforcement officers (section 113 StGB), and a Provo-inspired protest campaign resulted. A week later, Hübsch used the SDS delegates’ conference in Frankfurt to emphasise the issue as a chance to politicise long-haired youth. This time, media star Fritz Teufel was served by the manager himself, but police observing the events were pelted with whipped cream and chocolate sweets. Most of the attackers were sent to prison.

By March 1970, *agit 883* had identified easier targets than cafés: banks, motor shows, boutiques, furriers, and jeweller’s shops and beauty parlours were “hubs of consumer terror” that had to be attacked with stones and Molotov cocktails. The justification is again interesting since it introduced another level of critique, seeing violence as an attempt to stop the commercial co-optation of alternative lifestyles: “a response to industry’s attempts to commercialise clothing and lifestyles of the extraparliamentary opposition and to offer to satisfy comrades’ needs at brazenly high prices.” However, the activists concluded that only militancy would stop the process, a conclusion that was perhaps too optimistic and underestimated capitalism’s flexibility: “Even during the biggest economic crises, it did not occur to the textile industry to offer the uniforms of the Rotfrontkämpferbund [the paramilitary arm of the Communist Party of Germany, created in 1924] as the *dernier cri*.“ Of course, in most cases, motivations and justifications for smashing shop windows were less explicit.

The RAF Seeks to Address Those Excluded from Consumer Society

One of the RAF’s first declarations was also printed in *agit 883*. The revolutionary message sought to justify the forcible freeing of Baader from prison and was addressed to those who remained excluded from consumer society: “You have to communicate the act to those who don’t receive compensation for the exploitation they suffer by way of standards of living, consumption, saving with a building society, consumer credit, midrange cars.” This Marcusian figure of thought could easily be projected from a local to a global level and

formed a central argumentative framework in the RAF’s founding document: “You have to communicate it to those who don’t get anything from the exploitation of the Third World, from Persian oil, Bolivia’s bananas, South Africa’s gold, who have no reason to identify themselves with the exploiters.”\(^{32}\) The amalgamation of the two levels enabled the revolutionaries to point to international liberation movements and scenarios of Third World suffering, but they were mistaken about the number of people who were entirely immune to the temptations of better living standards and midrange cars. The RAF even conceived of false or insufficient consumption as diametrically opposed to armed resistance that sought to overcome these conditions: “Who doesn’t die will be buried alive: in prisons, in foster homes, in the holes of Kreuzberg, Wedding, Neukölln [working-class districts of West Berlin], in the stone coffins of the development areas . . ., in the perfectly equipped kitchens of council flats, in bedroom palaces that have not yet been paid for.”\(^{33}\)

In “The Urban Guerrilla Concept,” written in April 1971, consumption was central to the RAF’s ideological attack on its main enemies: the institutions of state violence and the Springer corporation.\(^{34}\) The notion of “consuming” served as a general means of dismissal—for example, in contemptuously referring to those on the political left who the RAF believed acted as free riders: they just consumed the RAF instead of contributing to the struggle.\(^{35}\) Nevertheless, the RAF acknowledged its roots in the broader student movement and approvingly quoted one of its central political slogans: “Resist Konsumterror!”\(^{36}\) People still had to put up with hierarchical exploitation at the workplace despite the fact that increased productivity already created enough wealth to satisfy their basic needs. From this perspective, a consumer society that kept the real wealth back from the masses was part of a repressive system manifesting itself in “prisons, . . . consumption in instalments, . . . Bild and BZ, urban fringe tenement housing, immigrant ghettos.”\(^{37}\)

Horst Mahler, who had been arrested in October 1970, wrote an article for Der Spiegel in January 1972 addressing the authorities’ strategy of ostentatiously treating RAF members as mere criminals while denying them political status. He declared that revolutionary politics were inevitably criminal. As a lawyer, he presented a Marxist interpretation of the state as a managing com-


\(^{33}\) Ibid., 2.

\(^{34}\) “Das Konzept Stadtguerilla,” in Rote Armee Fraktion, ed. ID-Verlag, 27–48.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 29.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 35.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 47.
mittee for the interests of the propertied classes: “The state’s penal power de-

rives historically from the protection and perpetuation of the rule of propertied

minorities over the unpropertied and exploited majority of the people.” This

system of legality had been responsible for the “scientific and methodical ex-
termination of people,” the threat of nuclear devastation, and millions of deaths

by starvation in the Third World. In addition to emphasizing the revolutionary

significance of the Third World, Mahler argued that the developed world’s

wealth was only make-believe and ignored widespread poverty among the dis-

advantaged. For Mahler, high living standards appeared as a “mess of pottage,

for which we have sold our birthright as subjects of our societal fate.” Alluding

to the RAF’s bank robberies, he declared that the guerrillas would take the

means required for their struggle from those “who have acquired and monopo-
lised . . . at the expense of the people.” They would thus turn against “the rich

and powerful and spare the unpropertied and exploited.”

The RAF’s next major manifesto, “Serve the People: The Urban Guerrilla

and Class Struggle,” made only marginal reference to issues of consumption.

However, consumption as a domestic analogue of imperialist expansion was

firmly established in the RAF’s ideological repertoire. In this perspective, “the

system” tried to uphold the status quo by “stringing the working class along via

formation of wealth and promises of reform.” These mechanisms created the

illusion that the workers received their share of the common good via the

“means of consumption” while remaining excluded from the means of produc-
tion. “The system” refused to differentiate between these different types of

property. Similarly, the failure to differentiate between revolutionary and self-

interested attacks on property reduced the former to mere crime. A glimmer of

hope seemed to come not so much from intellectual critics but from those who

refused to strive for “petty percentage and stupid consumption.” In late May

1972, the RAF hoped that as people recognised the Vietnam War as a crime of

U.S. imperialism, they would also realise that “consumption in instalments
does not make them happy.”

The RAF’s applauding statement on the attack on members of the Israeli

team during the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich was authored primarily by

Meinhof. The militant Palestinian Black September Organisation had detained

39. “Dem Volk dienen: Stadtguerilla und Klassenkampf,” in Rote Armee Fraktion, ed. ID-
Verlag, 134–36.
1972,” in ibid., 149.
Israeli athletes and officials, initially killing two, in an attempt to obtain the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israel and more broadly to respond to the violence the Palestinian people had suffered at the hands of Israeli military forces. The German security forces’ failed rescue attempt at NATO’s Fürstenfeldbruck air base turned the event into a disaster for both sides, with the remaining nine hostages, one German policeman, and five of the eight members of Black September killed.

The RAF’s document is primarily known for its fatuous construction of a connection between “the fascism of developed imperialism”—of which the Federal Republic of Germany was a part—and “Israel’s Nazi fascism.” The equation of German “nationalist extermination policies” with “Israeli extermination policies” shows a conflation of the RAF’s theoretical premises based on a concept of fascism that subsumed all forms of governmental authority and an understanding of National Socialism as merely a transient manifestation of a more comprehensive imperialist system. The RAF considered Black September’s Munich hostage taking to be “antifascist” and “anti-authoritarian,” part of a worldwide anti-imperialist strategy. The RAF’s third major declaration was written after its main cadres had been arrested and imprisoned, with Meinhof suffering the harsh conditions of “isolated” internment in the “dead wing” of Cologne’s Ossendorf prison. The whole tone is more ideological than previous statements, more ready to amalgamate even the most disparate contexts in an ambitious—and at times hazardous—effort to justify the group’s continued attempts to wage “guerrilla warfare” from inside prison walls. Even more than before, the RAF was drawing on Manichaean worldviews. Despite their feverish activities, the interned cadres of the RAF misjudged their position of weakness, which they sought to overcome with a far-reaching claim of leadership that depicted themselves as a revolutionary vanguard even relative to their comrades still at large.

Under the heading “Oil and Road Casualties” the Black September statement tried to bridge two revolutionary scenarios: global imperialism in the Third World and its reflection in the everyday life of highly industrialised societies. Not unlike Marcuse, the RAF pointed to automobile production resulting in 170,000 road casualties in West Germany over ten years; in 1972, the

42. “Aktion des »Schwarzen September«,” 171.
43. See Bergstermann, “Von ‘Isolationsfolter’ und ‘Vernichtungshaft.’”
44. See Biermann, “‘Metropolenguerilla’ contra ‘Schweinesystem.’”
United States was expected to suffer 56,000 road casualties, with 20,000 more in West Germany, “for the benefit of . . . the oil and automobile corporations” that realised their profits at the expense of the Third World.45 These numbers seemed to dwarf the number of casualties that resulted from the actions of the RAF and Black September.

The RAF was desperately looking for the cracks in the shiny surface of consumer society. The group had to find a way to instil fear that the “vicious circle of consumption—the anarchy of capitalist production . . . only for the market, not for the people’s needs—might meet the limits of people’s psychological flexibility.” Optimistically, the activists thought that “loyalty on the basis of nothing but . . . ‘consumer shit’” had already started to crumble.46 Looking for the revolutionary subject, the document tried to go beyond Marx by pointing out that in modern affluent society, the powerful had a much more comprehensive grasp on the workers’ life than just depriving them of surplus value: “Their physical exploitation at the factory has been supervened by the exploitation of their feelings, thoughts, wishes, and utopias . . . by the despotism of the capitalist in all areas of life via mass consumption and mass media.” Exploitation was thus not limited to the sphere of production but extended to the sphere of consumption: “With the introduction of the 8-hour day, the system’s 24-hour day of ruling the worker has started its triumphant advance— with the creation of mass purchasing power and high income groups, the system has started its triumphant advance over plans, needs, alternatives, fantasy, spontaneity.”47 In many respects, this was a radical reading of the conditions that Alain Touraine had labelled “postindustrial society.” Touraine also highlighted that all levels of social life, including education, consumption, and information, had been turned into productive resources and thus into objects of political design. In Meinhof’s view, this constellation had corrupted people to such a degree that they had lost any class consciousness, becoming ready “to tacitly accept every crime of the system” in return “for a car, a few rags, a life insurance policy, and a mortgage.” They were hardly able to imagine or desire anything beyond “a car, a holiday trip, a tiled bathroom.” Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg, and Mao had simply not known these conditions since they were not facing the readers of Springer tabloids, television viewers, motorists, mail-order commerce, and “quality of life.” In a worldview that saw capitalism’s quest for profit as the mainspring of political manifestations, consumer society

45. “Aktion des »Schwarzen September«,” 156.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., 166. See Touraine, Auf dem Weg zur postindustriellen Gesellschaft, 104.
appeared as analogous to fascism: “not openly fascist, but via the market.”48 On a list of factors hindering liberation, “consumption” and “the media” ranked first.49 This approach ultimately placed a morally justified and ascetic path of revolutionary violence in diametrical opposition to a highway of opportunism paved with material goods.50

Meinhof’s emphasis on consumer society and a revolutionary subject in the metropole met with criticism from Mahler, who confronted it with his own belief in the revolutionary masses in the Third World. His Arbeiteraristokratie-papier (Worker Aristocracy Paper) featured a detailed discussion of Lenin’s theory of imperialism, unfolding a concept of embourgeoisement that sought to explain the lack of revolutionary impetus among West German workers. Not entirely unlike Meinhof’s approach, his reasoning was also based on an analysis of regimes of provision. Mahler thought that affluent societies were characterised by what might be called an inverted Malthusian trap: “As producers of material goods, human beings become superfluous on the whole. The value of products falls in relative and absolute terms. The volume of affluence . . . increases by geometrical progression. Fewer workers in material production reproduce a constantly growing number of unproductive consumers.”51 This led to his crucial point: a significant proportion of the “unproductively consumed revenues” were sucked away from the Third World, where poverty and the “dirty work” concentrated, the real mainspring of embourgeoisement.52 On a global scale, the polarisation of society that the classics of socialism had predicted had become a reality, while in the highly industrialised societies, it had been damped down and even turned into its opposite.53

The difference between Meinhof and Mahler was one of setting priorities. Meinhof sought to establish revolutionary consumers: those who remained at the margins of consumer society. Refusing to write off the masses in the metropole as a revolutionary subject, she thought that the process of embourgeoisement that Mahler described still excluded crucial parts of the population of industrialised societies. Mahler had already developed his concept of the worker aristocracy in a long statement delivered at the opening of his trial in West Berlin in October 1972. While emphasising the liberation movements of

48. “Aktion des »Schwarzen September«,” 166. See also Fetscher and Rohrmoser, Ideologien und Strategien, 56–57.
50. See Fetscher and Rohrmoser, Ideologien und Strategien, 58.
52. Ibid., 10.
53. Ibid., 13.
the developing countries, he also highlighted immigrant workers and fringe groups in the industrialised countries as possible revolutionary agents. He was thus not so far removed from the position Meinhof came to adopt.54

**Meinhof: “Die Massen und der Konsum”**

During the first half of 1973, the contradictions of affluent society were Meinhof’s key concept for overcoming the RAF’s isolation from the masses. She sought to understand the mechanism of embourgeoisement rather than resigning herself to its inevitability. She thought that “consumer society, i.e. privileged repression”55 had to be an integral part of revolutionary theory and practice because “consumption is the system’s power,” and without “consumption the system’s sway over the people will collapse.” Why, Meinhof asked, could the system so ill afford unemployment? Her answer was that the unemployed did not consume and thus highlighted a crucial gap in legitimisation. She clearly stated that it was impossible to abolish consumption, which was not evil per se; the task was to crack its mechanism, its capitalist application.56 Meinhof put the emphasis on the destructive side of capitalist consumption: “It is important that a part of the wages paid to the worker so that he can reproduce himself, is again taken away from him via consumer shit. He thinks he is reproducing himself and will only notice years later that he is exploited not only at the factory but on top of it in his reproduction. Obsolescence, psychological destruction through television, compensatory satisfaction of needs.”57 Targeting consumers’ increasing individualisation,58 Meinhof recognised that revolutionary analysis remained in its infancy concerning this topic. So far, it had

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54. Horst Mahler, “Erklärung zum Prozeßbeginn am 9.10.1972,” in *Bewaffneter Kampf*, 184–97. On the conflict between Mahler and Meinhof, see Mahler, *um die reihen zu schliessen*; Bernhard Gierds, “Das Konzept Stadtguerilla: Meinhof, Mahler, und ihre strategischen Differenzen,” in *RAF und der linke Terrorismus*, ed. Kraushaar, 1:248–61. Gierds reconstructs the differences between Meinhof and Mahler on a rather narrow basis of primary sources. His argument is that the controversy resulted from Mahler focusing his political views on a revolutionary subject—that is, the people of the Third World—while as a consequence of the deprivations she suffered during the early phase of her confinement, Meinhof allegedly only tolerated self-referentiality, especially the imagined identification with Auschwitz, as a legitimate political framework. Gierds denies Meinhof any further theoretical linkage.


produced only a few cues, among which she jotted down “the destruction of retail markets by the department store companies, generally the department store companies.”59 To address this lack of insight, Meinhof produced a fourteen-page typewritten paper, “Die Massen und der Konsum” (The Masses and Consumption) that was probably meant to become a collective strategy paper. However, she withdrew it after criticism from her comrades. This and many other documents were confiscated by the authorities on 16 July 1973, during the first major search of the RAF inmates’ cells.60

The paper departed from what Meinhof considered the central problem of the New Left and of the RAF: they were isolated from the masses. She resorted to Marxism to tackle this problem and tried to identify the masses’ most important interests.61 Opinion polls suggested stable prices and secure jobs, but she wanted to go further. Asking “What occupies people?,” she wrote a lighthearted and impressionistic overview of the year, with each month represented by some consumption-related small talk: “They say that the whole thing is rubbish and that prices are particularly high in December and the entire Christmas rush is actually only there for business and department stores and that it is rather stupid to join in, but what can you do—is what they say and they go shopping.”62

The topic of consumption seemed omnipresent: “Children like nothing better than watching commercials. . . . Everyone talks about consumption. Day and night, morning, noon, evening. . . . Consumption, consumption, consumption.” Meinhof was not prepared to simply dismiss this as false needs. If the masses wanted the goods, a Marxist was in no position to blame them for it. She asked rather self-critically, “We say: advertisement. Advertisement is an exterior cause. . . . What is the interior cause of consumption? . . . What is the contradiction in consumption?”63

Meinhof was touching on a crucial point: clinging to manipulationist theories, militant protest had targeted exterior manifestations of consumer society and had lost sight of the question of why people embraced its products. She now openly acknowledged that increased consumption had fostered equality between people: “C&A, Karstadt, Neckermann, Quelle, Kaufhof, Hertie—they all offer the same clothes, everyone buys them there. Workers, employees,

60. Ulrike Meinhof, “Die Massen und der Konsum,” first half of 1973, BAK, B/362, 3369.1, IX/31–44. Thanks to Kerstin Schenke at Bundesarchiv, who helped me to locate these documents in the records of the Bundeskriminalamt.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
pupils, apprentices, students, intellectuals.” The problem was that this equality had not reduced competition; quite the contrary, consumption added fuel to competition as people aspired to property. Meinhof’s understanding of consumption was ambivalent. She acknowledged it as a real need that could not be theorised away; however, she also set out to highlight the drawbacks and limitations of capitalist affluence, adopting a tone reminiscent of conservative despair of civilisation: “Millions of women go to the factory to get ahold of consumption. Parents neglect their children. Morality has disappeared.”

Like most of her contemporaries, Meinhof was not prepared to view all humans as consumers in one way or another. To her mind, consumption was a new phenomenon of the twentieth century: “In the past, there was no consumption. There was food, clothing, and a roof over one’s head. . . . And thousands died of starvation.” People who lived today still remembered these conditions and noticed that conditions were better than in the past. They enjoyed the reduction in working hours, but one constant remained: exploitation through the absorption of surplus value. What had changed was that people could buy infinitely more in return for more intensified work; their wages sufficed for more than food, shelter, and clothing; they had more time; and they no longer went to the Workers Educational Association. The workers of the nineteenth century dreamt of sufficient vital goods, while today people dreamt of unnecessary goods.

Meinhof interlaced two types of critiques of regimes of provision. When analysing the existing conditions, she stuck to a classical critique of consumer society, to which she attributed a depoliticising power: “People no longer go to the . . . Socialists, to Marx, Engels, Bebel, Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg. . . . Instead they only think of consuming.” In a preliminary note that tied in with the Black September statement, she emphasised that in the old days, the alternatives had been socialism and utopia. Along with the worker’s external misery, utopia had been eradicated, so that today’s alternatives were “job change, Mallorca, colour television, car.” Meinhof assumed a deeper motivation below material interest: “It is not consumption that the masses desire, think about day and night, risk their lives for, fight, make each other’s lives miserable, abuse their children, violate the law, are completely crazy, nuts—It is the realm

64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
of freedom.”69 Adopting Marx’s expression and following Marcuse, she main-
tained a more profound goal for human endeavour. Realising that the reduction
in working hours had not produced the realm of freedom that Marx had imag-
ined, Meinhof argued that workers were in fact facing a twenty-four-hour day,
the analysis of which held a “wholly unexplored dimension.”70 Consumption
meant in fact more work and diverted people from real, noncommodified lei-
sure. Capitalist consumer society had conquered Marx’s realm of freedom by
annexing it to the realm of necessity.

When trying to find a revolutionary subject that would break this mecha-
nism and help to establish a true realm of freedom, Meinhof resorted to the
second, more optimistic and forward-looking critique of regimes of provision.
Certain consumers could, for all intents and purposes, become revolutionary
subjects: “Police prevent the masses from doing what is otherwise a matter of
course for them: going to the department store . . . and simply getting what they
need.” According to this view, the regime of provision was ultimately upheld
not by people’s moral convictions but only by state violence that separated the
people from the goods and drove “them into the forced labour of the factory,
under the despotism of capital.”71 She saw widespread shoplifting as a mani-
festation of revolution: “The revolution has already broken out! The masses
have already consciously emancipated themselves. . . . They are stealing!”72
People had two options: “The legal path to consumption went via the factory,
the office, the exploitation, the university . . . , the abominable, exploitative,
repressive path.” The other option was theft: “Most people . . . do both: they
earn money and steal; . . . they give themselves into the grip of consumption by
toiling busily . . . ; on the other hand they swipe something here and there.”73
To her mind, the system had already started to disintegrate over its own concept
of property.74

Meinhof was not the first to treat shoplifting in conjunction with the RAF.
Her intricate filing system for newspaper clippings—the comprehensive clas-

IX/31–44.
70. Ulrike Meinhof, “noch was zu münchen paper und der Kritik daran,” quoted in Fetscher and
Rohrmoser, Ideologien und Strategien, 79.
IX/31–44. Marx had also emphasised that, in essence, labour under capitalism always remained
forced labour (Kapital, MEGA section 2, 15: 793–95).
IX/31–44.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
sification listed rubrics on mail-order trade, department stores, retail, and consumption—contained articles from a series on “plant security” from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, among them “Fire, Bombs, Theft—Dangers That Department Stores Are Facing” and another reporting that the number of shoplifters caught had doubled between 1967 and 1970 and that they were causing damage of at least seventy-five million deutsche marks per year.75

In her attempt to come to grips with the problem of embourgeoisement, Meinhof sought to augment classical Marxist class analysis with a “class analysis of the consumers.” The classics of socialism had simply not known or foreseen the conditions of affluent society. Drawing on Marx, she introduced two parts of consumption: “1) The first part is the part that is absolutely essential to life—food, clothing, shelter. 2) The second part is the part that is not absolutely essential to life. The indulgences. The car. The fun. The television. A treat for the eye. The furniture and wallpaper.”76 She thought that students, apprentices, women, pupils, and foreign workers—those who were furthest removed from the second part of consumption (nonvital goods)—would take the lead in the first phase of the revolution.77 The second part of consumption was ultimately the central battleground of the revolutionary struggle in the metropole. While clearly focusing on sections or margins of society, she still resorted to the delusive notion of revolutionary “masses.” This obscured her attempt at differentiation.

While assuming a revolutionary impetus in the desires of the marginalised, Meinhof also called on people to rid themselves of their consumerist chains. Since most people no longer had cows or vegetable gardens, they had become completely dependent on wage labour. The proletariat allegedly had nothing to lose but their chains; however, those chains were also difficult to untangle: “the consumer shit, . . . the private microcosm inside the living holes, the balancing acts on the ladders of prestige, the careers of anxiety, the reified hopes, . . . the holiday plans, the debt.” The first revolutionary step was to free oneself from these chains.78 This pointed to those who had already arrived at a certain level of critical consciousness vis-à-vis consumption, those who were

77. Ibid., 12.
ready to say “consumer shit.” Meinhof apparently hoped for an alliance between the masses, who longed for freedom but sought to realise it via consumption, and critical individuals who had already started to debunk the myth of consumerism.79

An alliance between critical intellectuals and people suffering from the psychological strain of affluent society was not mere fiction but had found expression in the international antipsychiatry movement. One group that was part of that movement was the Informationszentrum Rote Volksuniversität (IZRU, Information Centre of the Red People’s University), which had been founded by former members of the Socialist Patients’ Collective (SPK) in July 1971. The SPK had emerged when patients in the psychiatric outpatient department at Heidelberg University Hospital protested the dismissal of their attending doctor, reformer Wolfgang Huber. In the midst of the conflict with the clinic management, the SPK came under suspicion of supporting the RAF. Huber and others were convicted of participation in a criminal organisation. A number of former SPK members subsequently joined the RAF.80 Huber believed that the only effective way to combat mental illness was by abolishing the “morbid commercial-patriarchal society.”81 The imprisoned RAF cadres took an interest in the IZRU’s theoretical endeavours.82 In a brochure that Meinhof kept in her files, the IZRU established explicit connections among addictive disorders, reified labour, the culture industries, and social democracy: “Bourgeois inwardness is the profitable sales market for the entire rubbish of the consumer goods industry, . . . entertainment and pharmaceutical industry. . . . Food has also become such a crutch in this so-called affluent society, namely a narcotic, a means of distraction and occupation: the human being as wage labourer is dispossessed of any self-determined productive activity . . . and is supposed to replace this deprivation with excessive consump—

79. Ulrike Meinhof, handwritten notes on freedom and consumption, BAK, B/362, 3370.2, XVI/165.
80. Explanations for why SPK members joined the RAF vary. Dieter Spazier and Jörg Bopp see it as a consequence of criminalisation, while the study commissioned by the Interior Ministry—authored by the wife of the clinic manager responsible for Huber’s dismissal—assumes from the outset that the SPK constituted a “preliminary stage of developed terrorism.” See Dieter Spazier and Jörg Bopp, Grenzübergänge: Psychotherapie als kollektive Praxis (Frankfurt, 1975); Wanda von Baeyer-Katte, “Das Sozialistische Patientenkollektiv in Heidelberg (SPK),” in Baeyer-Katte, Claessens, and Feger, Gruppenprozesse, 184–316; Kornelia Brink, “Psychiatrie und Politik: Zum Sozialistischen Patientenkollektiv in Heidelberg,” in Terrorismus in der Bundesrepublik, ed. Weinhauer, Requate, and Haupt, 134–53.
81. SPK, Aus der Krankheit.
tion activity. Consequently, many people are constantly eating, boozing, even if they don’t want to—obesity!"83

Meinhof suggested that statements by her and her comrades had clumsily revolved around the idea of analysing consumers for the previous five years. She thus pointed back to 1968. Just as in her konkret article on the Frankfurt department store arson, she now invoked black looters in America who were allegedly as much in need of the revolutionary theory she was hoping to forge as those marginalised by affluent society in the Federal Republic of Germany or Japan. She apparently thought that the protest movements that had emerged globally since 1968 constituted the first phase of an anti-imperialist revolution. She maintained that this “revolution” had broken out not only because producers were separated from their products but also because consumers were separated from consumption.84 She thus addressed not only the people who remained excluded from the blessings of affluent society but also the idea that desirable consumption constantly moved beyond reach, thus alienating people from the consumption at their disposal.

Meinhof thought that her revolutionary theory of the consumer held an educational message. Guerrillas would demonstrate to people how to overcome the relations of violence separating them from the desired consumption and ultimately from the realm of freedom. To this end, she envisioned a rather opaque plan for a major propagandistic action: “It is possible and easily imaginable to make open [offen machen] for two to three days all department stores in the F[ederal] r[epublic] with a single action of a few men without the police intervening.”85 It remains unclear how this endeavour might have worked, but she apparently intended to teach the masses how to loot and to ignite mass disturbances. In her preliminary notes, she jotted down, “Storm the department stores.”86 Meinhof believed that the masses would thus join the revolutionary struggle and even come to understand Marxism-Leninism. Similar to her konkret column on the Frankfurt department store arsons, she wanted to avoid having bombs destroy goods and endanger people. However, she considered the possibility that the authorities would place bombs in department stores and blame the damage on the RAF. At the same time, she had some clear-sighted visions of future themes and practices of political expression in the sphere of

85. Ibid., 11.
consumption, pointing to squatting and to what today would be called subverting: “Advertisement will be put into the service of the revolution. . . . With modest means one can alter nearly every placard, every advertisement. . . . The price is crossed out. The weapon . . . stuck on. The speech bubble declares the theory of liberation.”\textsuperscript{87} She also thought that questions of housing would become acute, pointing out that “countless squatters live illegally.”\textsuperscript{88} What had started as an ambitious attempt to integrate several critiques of capitalist regimes of provision petered out in the final pages when Meinhof, rather than cracking the contradictions of consumption, simply held out the hope of help from the People’s Republic of China.

It is easy to see why this document encountered criticism from her comrades: it mixed harsh self-criticism with vague action plans and appeared to switch from direct action back to propaganda of the deed. At the same time, Meinhof’s complicated attempts at differentiation while evoking the masses were not intuitively clear, especially since other members of the RAF had already abandoned the project of mobilising the protest movements. At some point, Meinhof explicitly withdrew her paper. Exercising self-criticism, she apologetically pointed to the harsh detention conditions she had suffered at Ossendorf.

An important theoretical backdrop for the RAF’s emphasis on consumer society in 1973 was Marcuse’s \textit{Counterrevolution and Revolt}. A document confiscated from the cells of RAF inmates in mid-July shows Ensslin suggesting to the prisoners several texts, among them \textit{Counterrevolution and Revolt}, a “concrete job for the continuation of the campaign.”\textsuperscript{89} Ensslin made it clear that the RAF wanted to go beyond Marcuse, regarding him as an inspiration, not a blueprint.\textsuperscript{90} Apparently, part of the criticism of the Black September statement had been that Marcuse’s treatment of the topic was superior to Meinhof’s. For her part, Meinhof was flabbergasted that \textit{Counterrevolution and Revolt} unfolded arguments that she thought resembled her own. In a seven-page handwritten paper, she embarked on a detailed comparison of quotes from the Black September statement with quotes from \textit{Counterrevolution and Revolt}. She emphasised that both texts focused on how consumer society dominated the entire human being, including the psyche. Moreover, both texts seemed to

\textsuperscript{87} Ulrike Meinhof, “Die Massen und der Konsum,” first half of 1973, BAK, B/362, 3369,1, IX/31–44.
\textsuperscript{89} Gudrun Ensslin, “an die anwälte und gefangenen,” AHIS, KOK 007,002.
\textsuperscript{90} Gudrun Ensslin, note, 7 July 1973, quoted in Fetscher and Rohrmoser, \textit{Ideologien und Strategien}, 57, 331.
look for a new type of class analysis and a new language that might break the
system’s hold over a false consciousness.91 The internal debates over the Black
September statement had thus led to “Die Massen und der Konsum,” with
the latter representing an attempt to specify and improve the former. Meinhof ulti-
mately thought that her argument was reinforced by Counterrevolution and
Revolt and by Marx’s Grundrisse, which were new to her, and she set out to
integrate the passages highlighted by Marcuse into her position.92

“Die Massen und der Konsum” and other documents confiscated during
various searches of the RAF inmates’ cells were available to the members of an
expert committee, which the federal Ministry of the Interior established in
1978, not least to legitimize its position in the fight against terrorism via schol-
larly expertise. Between 1981 and 1984, this committee published five volumes
on the sociological and ideological contexts of terrorism in West Germany,
which, although the Interior Ministry tightly controlled the scholars, remain
the most scholarly treatment of the topic to this day. The expert committee’s
interpretation proved enormously influential, and hundreds of other studies
have relied on the volumes. Frankfurt political scientist Iring Fetscher and his
assistants, Herfried Münkler and Hannelore Ludwig, coauthors of the first vol-
ume, offer an analysis of certain aspects of “Die Massen und der Konsum.”93

Subsequent scholarship on the RAF has completely ignored the document.

An unprejudiced assessment of Meinhof’s intellectual position requires a
critical examination of the official interpretation published five years after her
death. Fetscher, Münkler, and Ludwig accuse Meinhof of shrinking Marx’s
class analysis to the level of mere incomes and consumption, culpably neglect-
ing the sphere of production. They discard her emphasis on the sphere of con-
sumption as naive, declaring that Konsumkritik—which they neither define nor
contextualise—could be adopted only by individuals, never by the masses,
who could at most be critical consumers. While this idea could still pass as a
more or less accurate assessment of the leverage of Konsumkritik in terms of
early 1980s realpolitik, it went further by mounting an apodictic claim that the
economic realm could never be effectively moralised or politicised from the

91. Ulrike Meinhof, “Der Imperialismus ist ein Herrschaftssystem,” BAK, B/362, 3369,1,
III/37–43.

92. Ulrike Meinhof, handwritten notes, BAK, B/362, 3369,1, IV/31 (reverse side); Ulrike
Meinhof, “nochmal zu münchenpaper,” BAK, B/362,, 3370, XV/11. Meinhof learned about the
Grundrisse from Martin Nicolaus, Konkurrenz und Mehrwert: Zur Klassentheorie bei Marx (Ber-
ginal note on Mahler’s Arbeiteraristokratiepapier that pointed to the “Grundrisse on consump-

93. Fetscher and Rohrmoser, Ideologien und Strategien, 78–82.
consumer’s end. Rather keen to establish contradictions and idiosyncrasies in Meinhof’s writings, Fetscher, Münkler, and Ludwig see in her “new” emphasis on consumption a “brusque ideological volte-face.” However, their heavy-handed criticism of Meinhof’s argument hardly does justice to the line of reasoning adopted in her paper. Irrespective of one’s political or moral judgment of the RAF, a clear line of continuity exists in the group’s major documents: affluence had allowed the state to conquer the consciousness of the masses, but this apparent satisfaction was incomplete and had started to crumble. Since the June 1970 statement, “Build the Red Army!,” an important if unrealistic plank in the RAF’s programme had been to mobilise the downtrodden within affluent society. Meinhof’s ambition in the first half of 1973 was to explain how capitalism had prevented the polarisation of classes that Marx had predicted. Moreover, she was unwilling to relegate revolutionary struggle to the Third World alone. But this did not mean she was unaware of the crucial role the means of production played in any Marxist thinking or did not agree with the principle of solidarity with various revolutionary movements in the developing world.

The authors of the study commissioned by the Interior Ministry seem to be saying that her approach was ultimately like a nineteenth-century revolutionary setting his hopes on the Lumpenproletariat, “an amorphous agglomeration of low-income sections of the population,” which was unstructured and locked in internal competition and consequently would never be capable of acting. However, in Marx’s days, the Lumpenproletariat lacked the crucial function for the economic system that the integrated consumer had in the demand-driven Keynesian economics of late capitalism. And the sections of society Meinhof had in mind—students, apprentices, women, foreign workers—were indeed crucially involved in social movements, which, while not toppling capitalism, eventually did exert considerable political pressure.

When treating Meinhof’s fascination with shoplifting, Fetscher and his assistants deny her even the remotest claim to any Marxist credentials since she apparently did not understand that “individual maximisation of economic benefits” by illegal means only replicated capitalist morals. The socialist revolution as Marx had conceived it was far different from the competition over limited goods by nonpeaceful means. Fetscher, a leading scholar of Marxism, pointed out gleefully that Marx had produced a theory of value creation and a theory of distribution, while Meinhof reduced the whole theory to just the latter. Curiously, Fetscher himself had once looked for the revolutionary subject in the realm of consumption. In his address to a 1968 summer school on Marx

94. Ibid., 82.
and Revolution he approvingly quoted Marcuse and emphasised: “The attitude of the passive consumer (whose buying motive is determined by the psychology of competition) and that of the active revolutionary are diametrically opposed to each other. How should the latter take the place of the former?”

Thirteen years later, Fetscher and his coauthors took the differences between Meinhof and Mahler—one taking consumption as an indicator of the masses’ captivation by the system, the other taking consumption as evidence of their willingness to revolt—as a blatant example of “the internal inconsistency of the ‘RAF’ ideology.” Despite the emerging personal tensions among the imprisoned RAF members, they still conceived of themselves as a collective based on relentless openness and mutual criticism in strategy debates, which they conducted via their intricate system of circulars delivered by their defence lawyers. Mahler’s emphasis on crime being rooted in society made him in fact share Meinhof’s affirmation of theft: “Nowadays, anyone who does not steal from imperialist monopoly capital is either too stupid or too craven for it.”

Mahler differed from Meinhof in demanding improvements to the prisoners’ living conditions with television, cigarettes, and coffee; in the larger picture, they disputed the strategic implications of a shared theory of affluence that stifled revolutionary consciousness. The question was how and where to overcome the problem. While mobilising a reserve army of shoplifters was certainly rather unrealistic, Meinhof was in good company with other revolutionary theorists who had prematurely interpreted their contemporary social upheaval as the first stirrings of imminent revolution. To suggest that Meinhof was imagining a postrevolutionary society where people simply stole from the supermarkets is misconstruing the theoretical endeavours of someone who desperately sought to challenge the state’s monopoly on violence by mobilising those who broke the law of the propertied classes.

Meinhof was seeking to mobilise an existing social movement, which, in the wake of the student movement, had continued to expound the problems of everyday life in affluent society. Shoplifting justified by crude Proudhonian terms was a widespread practice in the emerging alternative milieu. Meinhof likely read about a shoplifting action by the occupants of a self-managed and collective housing project for homeless young people established in an aban-

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96. Ibid., 81–82.
doned building in the Kreuzberg didtrict of Berlin in March 1973. In many cities—particularly in Italy but also in Germany—fare dodging, rent strikes, and “proletarian shopping” had become signs of a developing counterculture based on different moral values and lifestyles. Subsequent chapters analyse this wider context.

According to Fetscher, Münkler, and Ludwig, Meinhof realised the weaknesses of her emphasis on consumption and shifted the argument away from distribution back to production. It would be more accurate to acknowledge that she tried to analyse how the two phenomena were connected. A speech written primarily by Meinhof but possibly coauthored by other RAF members was delivered by Astrid Proll, the younger sister of Thorwald Proll, at her trial in early October 1973. This text focused on automation and took up ideas from “Die Massen und der Konsum,” again emphasising property crime as an indicator of economic crisis: “The people are stealing at department stores in large quantities . . . exchange values in the billions are annually carried off from the department stores.” The speech began with a tirade that Meinhof might have been directing at her posthumous critics: “What the opportunistic rats, the pseudorevolutionaries, the desk Marxists, the Marx aesthetes, the revisionists have been doing for 100 years is turning Marxism into a commodity. . . . The revolution is not a commodity.” Drawing on Marx, she interpreted automation as driving a process that hollowed out the exchange value of mass-produced goods. She interpreted people’s propensity for theft as an intuitive realisation of this devaluation. The nature of the productive process made the claim of the “moneybags” to ownership of goods anachronistic and obsolete. The people no longer accepted the distribution of the gross national product on the basis of “wages, interests, and rents” and the “separation of wage labour and capital.” She pointed to American statistics showing that people stole ten billion dollars per year in office supplies and faked receipts and expense claims. Closer to home, people demanded free rides on public transport. The idea was to let the entire system collapse. As before, she clearly stated that consumption was not per se bad: “There is no reason at all to rant about consumption. It is,
however, messed up, a product of the development of the means of production. It replaces natural needs with historically created needs, as Marx says. The consumer shit is not only ‘shit.’”

Drawing on Marx’s *Grundrisse*—on the same passage that Marcuse cited on the third page of *Counterrevolution and Revolt*—Meinhof continued to focus on the impact of machines. Not unlike Marcuse, she saw the technological potential 115 years after *Grundrisse* as a possible source of egalitarian liberation. She interpreted the historical development of the twentieth century as a process of capital reappropriating the surplus value that automation had produced, partially divorcing it from labour and eventually diverting it from the realisation of real needs. In terms of revolutionary strategy, Meinhof by no means ignored the developing countries. She focused on sabotaging the “logistics of imperialism,” the networks, such as oil pipelines, in the hands of multinationals, which linked developed and developing societies. Invoking the notion of “structural violence,” with reference to Johan Galtung, she envisioned an offensive against the supply networks of Western Europe going beyond the RAF’s previous attacks against the U.S. Army. This was in line with her earlier endeavours to somehow disrupt capitalism’s economic resources of legitimisation. If attacks disrupted the supply of oil or electricity, she could conceivably hope for repercussions on prices and the security of supply, which might shift the political balance in favour of the dissatisfied and eventually revolutionary consumers she sought.

Meinhof also interpreted the crimes of National Socialism as resting on the production of consumer goods, on surplus products that went beyond basic needs: “Without cars, radios, and planes, they would not have succeeded in gassing six million Jews, destroying the organisation of the German workers’ movement, and starting the second imperialist world war.” To her mind, the Nazis’ extermination policies were in line with the general principles of capitalism, implying a clear continuity between Auschwitz and “the genocide of the Vietnamese people”: “Transformation of living labour into things, reify life, life time into things, turn into a thing, make dead, by quantification, divide, fragment, make interchangeable, turn into a commodity. . . . Everything

104. Ibid., 16.


106. Ulrike Meinhof, “Widerspruchspapier” delivered by Proll at her trial, 2 October 1973, 15, AHIS, KOK 02,010.
into commodity, into money, into illusion of reality, to turn reality into illusion, into paper, without use value, into nothing: . . . that was Auschwitz—that is Auschwitz.”107 In this worldview, Keynesianism was the system’s trick to capitalise its surplus product even in times of crisis, and fascism was the means to put it through to the masses. She seemed convinced that this mechanism was now finally at the end of its tether: “The crumbling away of exchange value cannot be undone with consumerism.” However, she also had her doubts about “whether they will manage yet another time, this time with computers, helicopters, and transmission systems without any crackling in the line. . . . With the B52s alone they won’t manage. The Vietnamese people have proved it.”108

Within these parameters, Meinhof was eager to see continuities with the National Socialist past: the Olympic Games of 1936 and 1972, consumption, and “the old and the new fascism” all belonged together. She went so far as to assert a line of continuity between Auschwitz, Vietnam, and the German authorities’ disastrous attempt to free the Israeli hostages at Fürstenfeldbruck. She even used the term *verjuden*, with its highly antisemitic connotations, to characterise what she saw as the system’s effort to buy out the people with people’s shares and asset formation.109

Meinhof explained her position in a historical argument: the antisemitism of the Nazis went much further than the reactionary anticapitalism of the declining petty bourgeoisie, who mistook Jews involved in trade and commerce as the cause of the petty bourgeoisie’s historically necessary plight. Instead of abolishing the real cause, the Nazis sought “to abolish” the Jews, as if they really were what they only represented: “the money—the money system—the system.” She maintained forcefully, “Fascism turned the historical, the human solution of the contradiction—which would have been civil war—revolution—dictatorship of the proletariat—communism—into the antihistorical, inhuman final solution: Maidanek, [sic] Treblinka, Sobibor, Belczek, Bergen-Belsen, Auschwitz.”110 Meinhof then quoted at length from Karl Marx’s *On the Jewish Question*, in which he asserted that human emancipation was hindered by economic inequality: “Emancipation from huckstering and money. . . would be the

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107. Ibid., 24.
108. Ibid., 16.
self-emancipation of our time. . . . The Jew is perpetually created by civil society from its own entrails.”

The RAF’s Consumer Politics

At first, it might appear that Meinhof was alone in the RAF in emphasising matters of consumption, and indeed, evidence indicates that the topic was controversial among the RAF prisoners. A published compilation of clandestine circulars exchanged between RAF inmates between 1973 and 1977 does not show consumption as a topic of overriding importance; the correspondence was primarily concerned with a collective search for options of political activity under the conditions of imprisonment. However, a closer analysis of the internal discussions shows a good deal of common ground concerning consumer politics as part of the imperialist system and thus of guerrilla politics.

In early 1973, Ensslin apparently thought along similar lines as Meinhof, asking, “What can the vital correspondence with the masses (the consumer) look like”? She pointed out that konsumenpolitik was a form of domestic imperialism that assigned the role of the subject of the profits, while humans were reduced to the object. Within this relation, consumers were subject to reification and commodification, leaving them with a status somewhere in between physical object, animal, and human being. Under “consumer politics,” Ensslin subsumed the global politics of money and resources, which were domestically executed by the double standards of “Social Democratic masks”: “This culmination of history—made by the globally organised . . . bourgeoisie—explains literally everything. Their values are the commodity and the market. . . . Human beings the international currency.” Invoking Marx, she concurred with Meinhof in interpreting the “workers’ aristocracy” as potentially the final trump in the bourgeoisie’s hand. This meant the revolutionary proletariat of the capitalist metropole had a chance: “The 3. world’s claim to leadership is no longer the final word of the revolution.”

Conceiving of consumption as an integral part of self-alienation, she decried “this entire dirty universe

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113. Bakker Schut, das info.
of property + consumption.” Ensslin believed that the RAF would serve as an example that would get the masses to understand how the relationship towards consumption becomes the relationship towards oneself. However, she also defamed her desired audience: “As long as there are only consumers, there is nothing to publish.” What counted were deeds, not words.

Referring to Marcuse, Ensslin brought everything into a simple equation: “technological progress = growing societal wealth = higher servitude.” From this equation she concluded the existence of an “objective revolutionary situation in consumer society.” She perceptively diagnosed the ambivalent nature of this struggle: the fight within consumer society and the fight against it. Identifying reification as the main issue of the armed struggle, she thought that television’s “fiction of freedom” was a major factor in the battle for consciousness. During the first historical step of the materialisation of human existence—shelter, food, clothing, and so forth—the antagonism between capital and labour could seemingly disappear, which brought Social Democracy to the peak of its bourgeois power. The Social Democrats then drummed into people the idea that the state and the status quo were the only way to obtain “quality of life.” Bourgeois society was highly flexible in terms of ideology. It could remove all taboos except that on violence. Only the second historical step of materialisation brought reification—“the disease of the system”—fully to light. The system was unable to shed this disease; the only alternative was the proletarian revolution. Ensslin then asked whether this had not been what Meinhof meant in her “consumption paper.” In what appear to be explicit comments on “Die Massen und der Konsum,” Ensslin reflected on the proletariat’s relationship with consumption, which had completely shaped the proletariat’s relationship with itself. Like Meinhof, Ensslin took the phenomenon of theft to indicate the limits of mass consumption’s integrative powers. Capital had no answer other than state violence in the form of police and judiciary on the domestic level and genocide on a global scale. A similar line of reasoning can be found in another paper presumably authored by Ensslin.

Marxism seemed stuck in “dumb materialism” for the past century. She championed Mao Zedong’s emphasis on the peasant, which “preserved the countryside” and did “not fetishise the city.” In her opinion, this policy encapsulated the final stage of historical development: it unfolded the “realm of freedom” during the dictatorship of the proletariat, thus making sure that the idea did not die.\textsuperscript{124} With their idealising gaze on Maoist China and the Cultural Revolution, which seemed to promise a nonbureaucratic, non-party-led revolution in everyday life, Ensslin and Meinhof were not alone among the radical left of the early 1970s.

For Jan-Carl Raspe, like Meinhof, imprisoned at Ossendorf, consumption was not the most prominent topic, but it featured importantly in some passages of his comprehensive diary-like reflections on issues of ideology and everyday politics. On the day before the early Bundestag elections in November 1972, which in some respects had turned into a referendum on Brandt’s Ostpolitik, Raspe observed that consumer politics constituted the main ideological challenge to the states of the eastern bloc. His recommendation on how to fend off this threat harked back to Mao’s China, the early Soviet Union, and the early German Democratic Republic: “The revolutionary answer would be the cultural revolution, . . . the revolution in the superstructure, in the domain of ideology, which would debunk consumer shit etc.”\textsuperscript{125} The question was whether the socialist countries’ economies had not already been so completely directed to the production of consumer goods that an economic about-face was impossible. Concerning the socialist countries’ ability to transform themselves, Raspe seems to have been more optimistic than Marcuse.

This assessment apparently leaned on the compilation work \textit{Civilizace na rozcesti} (Civilisation at the Crossroads) by Czech philosopher Radovan Richta. This large-scale project involving sixty interdisciplinary scholars attempted to analyse the social and human implications of scientific and technological development. In the context of attempts at restructuring the Czechoslovak economy, the aim was responsiveness to market-based consumer demand within the planned economy. The reformers drew on unorthodox western Marxists such as Marcuse and Erich Fromm. The impulses emanating from this project ultimately contributed to the establishment of a “communist mass consumer society” in Czechoslovakia during the 1970s.\textsuperscript{126} Raspe focused on Richta’s argu-

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\textsuperscript{124.} Gudrun Ensslin, “Von Kroetz stammt das Gleichnis,” AHIS, KOK 07,002.
\textsuperscript{125.} Jan-Carl Raspe, “Ad Ostpolitik,” 18 November 1972, BAK, B/362, 3371, 10b/5.1.1.
ments concerning the relationship between consumption and consciousness: “If R.R. is right, the passive acceptance of the cycle of consumption is only possible because capital is forced to dispossess consciousness via its agents—the state including its institutions as well as advertisement.” According to Raspe, this acceptance neutralised any desire for communism despite capitalism’s recurring crises. In this context, he, like his comrades, assumed a duplication of exploitation in the sphere of consumption and a deeply rooted desire of the masses for freedom and equality. He interpreted fascism as a symptom of failed integration through mass production and mass consumption. Echoing Meinhof, he stated, “Business will run only if the masses consume.” Arguing that the system mobilised the masses via consumption, Raspe clearly thought along Marcusian lines. He was convinced that material security was an absolute precondition for the functioning of capitalist society. Compared to earlier forms of political ideology, there was an important novelty: “The values have acquired a material guise + identification loses its ideal character, gains material character. It will thus be much more difficult to break it away.” According to Raspe’s anti-imperialist outlook, the masses of the developing countries that suffered in the interest of capital appeared to be the price for “progress + peace + consumer freedom here.” He attributed the “ politicisation” that he observed “not among the masses, but among large parts” of the population to people becoming fed up “with the surrogates of consumption, absolute privatisation etc., which the ruling class have offered as gratification for the strict anti-communism of the masses since the 50s and 60s.”

When it came to determining the RAF’s defence strategy at the Stammheim trial, which began in May 1975, Baader apparently made the decision not to focus on consumption. His key concept was “the war”: “You cannot explain the war via your needs, but you must be able to comprehend and explain the processes that determine the war, from which it (+ those for whom it [sic] fights) derive.” Only a long-lasting war would bring forth a new society, new values, and new humans. Baader ultimately equated the RAF and “the war” with the revolutionary subject. Purpose and legitimisation—which featured in Mein-
hof’s papers on consumption—took a backseat. However, Baader still shared some of the RAF’s perennial convictions in assuming a “complex structure” consisting of “production process, consumption, mass communication” that inhibited the “mobilisation of the masses.”132 At one point, Baader lamented that political consciousness was a “pitfall of commodity society—the pitfall consisting of alienated production and alienated consumption.” From this perspective, the state’s measures against the militant prisoners, which they called “isolation torture,” appeared to constitute the system’s attempt to forestall any noncommodified identity.133 Ensslin similarly embraced revolutionary violence as a “productive force.” Armed politics appeared to be the only possible competition for “state monopoly capitalism.”134

In 1975, Meinhof also seems to have come around to a position that put the notion of struggle—“guerrilla/conflict/liberation”—at the ideological centre. But she was still looking for criteria to define this state. It was no longer “theft” but “renunciation of property,”135 which she now used to define revolutionaries who subordinated their entire personalities to the goals of the collective. The RAF inmates thus qualified as guerrillas without property—the diametrical opposite of affluent consumers. At one point, Meinhof wrote to her lawyer, Eberhard Becker, “If anything the pigs are ready to pack our cells with consumer shit rather than integrate us into the jails.”136

The 195-page statement that Baader, Ensslin, Meinhof, and Raspe read at the Stammheim trial on 13 January 1976 again shows an analysis of affluent society as a central plank in the RAF’s attempts to justify its acts. For them, the Old Left, including trade unions and the SPD, were not up to the task of drawing the right conclusions from German history since they had succumbed to the consumption and privileges that a highly industrialised society offered.137 The RAF ideologues thought that West German mass consumption had emerged only in the mid-1950s and hence only added a “material basis” to anti-communism—the original mainspring of the colonisation of the masses’ consciousness by U.S. imperialism. Mass consumption itself did not explain the

132. Ibid., 219.
133. “andreas am 18.6.,” in texte, 90.
masses’ negative attitude towards socialism. The RAF cadres believed that consumption served as a pointer to imperialist contexts. The vast quantities of commodities that the Marshall Plan furnished—not least with the intention of undermining the appeal of communist parties—served “as vehicles for the transport of U.S. imperialist ideology.” Quoting Marshall Plan administrator Richard M. Bissell, whose later career at the CIA made him a plausible target, the defendants tried to show that at least initially, the Marshall Plan was far less generous than was often assumed. In this interpretation, a purposeful expansion of Europe’s capacity to consume was adopted only from 1949 onwards, when the United States realised the full economic potential of a constellation that addressed overproduction within the United States and channelled profits towards American companies. The aim was to deliver not food but the industrial reconstruction of Europe in accordance with U.S. interests. Had the Marshall Plan simply supported the interests of European consumers, it would have been a losing deal, a mere shifting of capacity to consume from the United States to Europe. The concerted expansion of European consumption capacities, however, generated profits while forestalling communism and letting the United States appear to be a benefactor. West Germany was the bridgehead in this endeavour.

In this context, the “Korea boom”—the boost of the West German economy as a result of the increased demand in armaments induced by the Korean War in 1950—exemplified West Germany’s integration into the “imperialist cycle” as well as the connections among armaments, war, and economic upswing. The Korean War ultimately appeared to be a “precondition for the effectiveness of the anticommunist offensive in consumer culture.” West German industry’s subsequent export orientation was then, at least in its initial phase, interpreted along the lines of a classical theory of social imperialism: the expansion of consumption capacities via increasing real wages was achieved by shifting capitalism’s contradictions to the periphery, a process that resulted in a “harmonious development” of class relations within West Germany.

The document referred to the United States as “the centre of transnational corporations,” highlighting American development schemes: John F. Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress and Walt Rostow’s takeoff model. The former aimed to establish economic cooperation between the United States and South Amer-

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138. Ibid., 21.
139. Ibid., 37–38.
140. Ibid., 42.
141. Ibid., 45.
ica against the backdrop of the Cuban Revolution, seeking to prevent Latin American collaboration with the Soviet Union and rhetorically coupling material progress with freedom. In *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1960), Rostow envisioned an age of high mass consumption as the ultimate goal of industrial modernisation, thus defining the American norm as integral to the economic progress of all developing societies. Rostow was again a somewhat plausible illustration for the RAF’s worldview: a staunch anticommunist involved in the development of the Marshall Plan and a main figure in the Vietnam War as national security adviser to both Kennedy and Lyndon Baines Johnson. The defendants at Stammheim only mentioned these schemes, going into little detail, and castigated their “demagogic function” when highlighting the millions of people who, according to statistics by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, suffered from malnutrition. These huge figures implicitly were also meant to dwarf the four cases of murder and the fifty-four cases of attempted murder of which the RAF leaders were accused.

Baader, Ensslin, Meinhof, and Raspe argued that capital tried to force all countries into “imperialist accumulation” and embraced propaganda to create the corresponding “ideological climate”—for example, via “fascist Hollywood hero series.” Leaning on an article in *Der Spiegel*, the Stammheim defendants explained that American TV series—*Kojak, Columbo, Bonanza*, and *Kung Fu*—reached five hundred million viewers in ninety-five countries. They quoted a UNESCO study showing that “television with its universal language had proved to be an efficient instrument for the spreading of the ideology of consumption.” For the analysts of “soft power” avant la lettre, the ideology of consumption was made for “objects resigning themselves to their repression.” The category of consumption as an abject indicator of imperialist power structures was firmly established in the RAF leaders’ thinking. It was no longer a question of proving this connection, but of applying it to diverse contexts: “bureaucracies gobbling up national income . . . , luxury consumption, equipment, prestige objects, imperialist systems of communication and the corresponding programmes of brainwashing, the police apparatus, and first and foremost armaments purchased from imperialist corporations.” The reformist impulses within the Warsaw Pact appeared as an “attempt at reconstructing the global

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142. Ibid., 96.
market . . . to arrive at a convergence of the systems via consumerist strategies.” Ostpolitik—a “social democratic project of neocolonialism”—appeared to be a new variant of a much older constellation that put the pressure on the Soviet Union. According to the RAF, imperialism’s “destructive potential” had encircled the Soviet Union and thus forced a specific “model of accumulation” upon it: the “development of heavy industries and consumer goods industries, surplus production to be utilised in armaments, thus surplus destruction with the consequence of aggravating shortages in consumption.”

In her final writings, composed just weeks before her death, Meinhof still located the RAF’s struggle in a framework of the “manipulation of the masses” consisting of “a postfascist state, consumer culture, chauvinism of the metropole, . . . the media, psychological warfare, social democracy.” She accused the Legal Left of merely marketing and consuming the memory of anti–Vietnam War activism. This construction swallowed the masses’ revolutionary impetus, turning mere indignation into a blunt weapon that necessitated armed struggle. Historically, she located a fateful convergence in New Deal Taylorism, which she understood as a method of splitting the proletariat: economic struggle was shifted into the sphere of the state, social policy preempted class struggle with a depoliticising effect, and finally consumer culture—that is, mass production of consumer goods via assembly line production—entailed high wages at the price of an intensification of work.

The RAF’s treatment of the Western Cold War strategy and of market-oriented policies since the New Deal is an interesting example of inversionary discourse: the radicals addressed many of the crucial tactics and strategies that policymakers in Washington and Bonn embraced, but from an anti-imperialist worldview, the successes of the Marshall Plan and Keynesianism appeared to be negatives since they contributed to the stabilisation of the system. There was agreement that stabilisation had occurred, but one side welcomed it and used it to legitimise its position in the postwar world order, while the other side embarked on a historical inquiry into the origins of the hated system of a depoliticising materialism, which it sought to delegitimise.

In marked contrast to the scholarly literature, a few contemporary observ-

145. Ibid., 129.
146. “brief von andreas an die gefangenen, 3 fragmente aus der ‘erklärung zur sache,’” in texte, 197–98.
149. “brief ulrike—discussion hier,” in ibid., 26. See also Jacobs, “‘Democracy’s Third Estate.’”
ers highlighted the RAF’s far-reaching critique of consumer society and its corresponding culture revolutionary plank. East German dissident Wolf Biermann, who in 1969 had donated ten thousand deutsche marks to Horst Mahler for the legal defence of West Berlin students, stated in July 1972, “Lenin said that the first shot must only be fired when the revolution starts. The communists from the Baader-Meinhof-Group risk their lives for the contrary position: that is to say, they want to prove that if at long last the first shot does not go off, the revolution will be slumbered and gorged away.” Social psychologist Peter Brückner went into more detail after he had been temporarily suspended from his university professorship under the terms of the 1972 Radikalenerlaß, which banned people deemed to be political radicals from public service positions. Brückner argued that the social-revolutionary revolt of the early 1970s implied a focus on the segments of society not integrated into the capitalist relations of work and consumption. This went hand in hand with radical resistance against this destructive integration. What was often criticised as a contradictory approach of trying to cater to both the privileged and the poverty-stricken was in fact an ambitious attempt to call the allegedly universal benefits of economic affluence into question and thus address the entire spectrum of the working population as potential opponents and victims of the capitalist system. Brückner points to contemporary phenomena such as increases in property offences, squatting, citizens’ initiatives, and “revolts against pressure to perform and consumption.”

The RAF’s early 1976 writings represent an end point to its critical focus on issues of consumption. January 1976 was the last time that the RAF’s attempts to legitimise its position vis-à-vis the authorities and the public focused so explicitly on consumption. A quantitative analysis of the most comprehensive published compilation of RAF statements, Rote Armee Fraktion: Texte und Materialien zur Geschichte der RAF, provides a clear message: the term Konsum and its derivatives appear on 40 of the 379 pages covering the time between “Build the Red Army!” (June 1970) and Germany’s reunification in October 1990. Only three of these references come from after Meinhof’s death in May 1976. In December 1984, RAF prisoner Brigitte Mohnhaupt came back to the historical analysis given in the January 1976 statement: consumption was as a strategy to undermine the socialist states and the working

151. Peter Brückner, “Politisch-psychologische Anmerkungen zur Roten-Armee-Fraktion” [1973], in Brückner, Über die Gewalt, 47.
152. Ibid. See also Fetscher and Rohrmoser, Ideologien und Strategien, 282.
class, and a 1986 declaration used the term *Konsumterror* to address a totality of social control. With Meinhof’s departure from the scene, the most agile mind that had chosen to focus on issues of consumption no longer delivered impulses in this direction. Moreover, the culmination of the conflict between the RAF and the state during the German Autumn overshadowed the first generation’s project of a wide-ranging intellectual analysis as a backbone of their revolutionary endeavour. The second generation’s attempts to free the imprisoned cadres left a legacy of self-referentiality, and the successors did not attain the same intellectual scope.

**Movement 2 June**

The tradition of an explicit militant focus on issues of consumption was continued by Movement 2 June, which took its name from the day Benno Ohnesorg died. This group was allied with the RAF but developed its own, more anarchist, ideology, at times criticising the tactics of its prominent comrades. The February 1975 kidnapping of the Christian Democratic Union’s candidate for mayor of West Berlin, Peter Lorenz, by Movement 2 June was not perceived in the context of resisting regimes of provision, since the militants demanded the release of several imprisoned comrades, including Horst Mahler. However, in seeking to justify the kidnapping, Movement 2 June drew on issues of distribution and moral economy. In a leaflet with a print run of thirty thousand, the activists explained how the paperwork that Lorenz carried showed him to be indifferent to price increases for public utilities. More specifically, he had no time for the distress calls of a mother of a child with Down syndrome who was in financial trouble while Lorenz earned in excess of twenty thousand deutsche marks per month. Adopting a Robin Hood pose, the kidnappers sent seven hundred deutsche marks they found on Lorenz to the woman. They wanted to redirect a party donation of ten thousand deutsche marks per month.

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155. Der Blues. This is a nonscholarly thousand-page edition of sources related to Movement 2 June, compiling various documents from the West Berlin social-revolutionary subculture of the 1970s. In some cases origin, date, and/or author remain unclear. Available sources are much thinner than for the RAF, but there is still a lot that existing research has ignored. See Tobias Wunschik, “Die Bewegung 2. Juni,” in RAF und der linke Terrorismus, ed. Kraushaar, 1:531–61; Rollnik and Dubbe, Keine Angst vor niemand; Viett, Nie war ich furchtloser; Meyer, Staatsfeind; Reinders and Fritzsch, Die Bewegung 2. Juni.
marks from building tycoon Karsten Klingbeil to an aid organisation for disabled people. The kidnappers stressed that Lorenz “buys up houses and land in urban renewal areas to demolish the old buildings and build apartment houses that no one can afford, or concrete blocks like Märkisches Viertel or Steglitzer Kreisel, where he was involved as a notary.” Then they asked, “How many shifts does a worker have to knock off to reach Peter Lorenz’s standard of living?”

The authorities gave in to the militants’ demands and set the prisoners free, although Mahler refused to be exchanged. The kidnappers were eventually arrested. During their pretrial confinement in the summer of 1978, former member of Kommune I Fritz Teufel, Ralf Reinders, Gerald Klöpper, and Ronald Fritzsch gave an interview to the journal *Stern*. When asked what personal and political experiences had led them to go underground and join the urban guerrillas, they included issues of consumption: “Family, school, factory, office, business, university, jail, concrete blocks, the entirely ordinary terrorist insanity of capitalist everyday life that drove youths onto the barricades all over the world, experimenting with new forms of struggle and of living together. The wish to lead an autonomous life. Not to be a dress-up doll, a little cog, a robot, a manipulated consumer idiot in a social as-if nature controlled by profit-seeking interests.”

During their lengthy trial, members of Movement 2 June explained their ideological outlook. They considered violence an intrinsic feature of capitalism. Not unlike Meinhof, their historical perspective harked back to the New Deal, “the system that turned one’s own workers as consumers into a selling market.” Movement 2 June, openly declaring itself anarchist, believed that the principles of the ruling class would inevitably lead to the destruction of the planet. Despite apparent similarities with the RAF’s concept of violence, Movement 2 June differed in its outlook towards people representing the hated system. Reinders claimed that Movement 2 June saw Lorenz, who had been released after five days of confinement in a basement, not only as an enemy but

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156. Movement 2 June, “Die Entführung aus unserer Sicht…” (March 1975), http://www.bewegung.in/mate_zeit.html (accessed 24 February 2011). Märkisches Viertel is a housing estate of about 17,000 flats with chains of high-rises built between 1964 and 1974 by a publicly owned building society. To critics it became a symbol of inhuman concrete brutalism. The Steglitzer Kreisel is a high-rise office complex built between 1968 and 1977. It became a major construction scandal with the state of Berlin losing a major loan guarantee; several local politicians were suspected of corruption.


also as a human being, and he had been treated accordingly. Reinders believed that attacking the state or its representatives was insufficient. Resistance had to enter the realm of political economy and had to involve an alliance between militant groups and social movements: “First, we will squat in houses and keep them, and then entire districts. . . . We will first occupy the factories and then manage them ourselves. . . . We will scrap nuclear power plants just like all medium-range missiles and any other dreck.” Reinders acknowledged the Polish Solidarity movement as an explicit example. The task was to prevent isolation from social movements. The authorities must not be allowed to sever the bond between the forces of counterviolence and nonviolence. These thoughts clearly originated from a critical analysis of the RAF’s fate.

However, the two militant groups had many parallels in their goal of a better world. Movement 2 June thought that two conditions had to be met so that human beings could find self-realisation: a just distribution of the goods and the abandonment of any manipulation of needs. This implied a positive image of human nature: “Man realises himself in creative, autonomous, thus non-alienated work and not in hanging around.” Reinders—again, not unlike the members of the RAF—gave an overview of Germany’s postwar history. Capitalism had steadily gained strength relative to socialism. His outlook on the so-called economic miracle was decidedly negative: “a system that drilled people in Konsumterror, that always went along with debt and made sure that not only fathers but mothers had to go to work as well.” According to Reinders, humans were subject to comprehensive compulsion: anyone who resisted was deprived of work or even prosecuted. In addition, the media led a veritable “war against the minds,” hammering into people “how important consumption was, how futile resistance would be, and how everything that did not conform to the beat-up capitalist norm posed a danger to the monthly instalments.” Movement 2 June interpreted the contemporary economic situation as state monopoly capitalism, raising prices to the detriment of consumers, who had to resort to shoplifting. In times of crisis, the state had to support the corporations, to the detriment of the social infrastructure: “The interests of the entire society have to take a backseat to the interests of the capitalists. Fewer doctors, fewer teachers, bad hospitals and schools, expensive public transport, bad resi-

160. Ibid., 879–80.
162. “Schlusswortmarathon im Lorenz-Prozess,” 865.
dential and recreational spaces are the consequence.”

Soaring unemployment figures meant that critiques of Konsumterror were receding into the background. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, the Trilateral Commission, and other such institutions seemed to uphold peace in their division of the Third World, but in reality, they fostered “wars of steel, cars, textiles, and currency.”

During their trial, the members of Movement 2 June split into three factions: those who wanted to continue as before, those who joined the RAF, and those who embraced a concept of resistance harking back to the traditions of subversive action. When writing on the crisis of the Left in 1979, Teufel, one of the main advocates of the third approach, still used notions of consumption when invoking a radical identity. Adopting the tone of cowboy-and-Indian westerns, he addressed his “red sisters and brothers,” praised “collective freedom and collective happiness,” and associated them with intangible values: “Our love and solidarity, our fantasy, our courage, our patience, our determination, our cleverness, our tenderness, our ability to criticise and self-criticise, our hope is stronger than everything that palefaces can buy for money.” In 1980, when he coined the term Spaßguerrilla (fun guerrilla), Teufel was still adhering to the old commune concept of gaining publicity via the calculated breaking of rules.

This approach met with criticism from comrades who saw in this strategy and in the kidnapping of Lorenz only “short-lived victories” and “consumable rituals.” They wanted to dissolve Movement 2 June and join the RAF. This debate led to reflections on their history. A discussion paper by the imprisoned members clung to the established strategy and identified the protest movement, the first to embrace socialist ideas “after twelve years of Nazi terror and 20 years of Cold War agitation,” as the root of the struggle. Glorifying “proletarian youth” who took up militant resistance in the early 1970s, they characterised their fight as opposing three types of evil: heteronomy and oppression; indifference to genocide and imperialism; and finally “the insane capitalist consumer apparatus distorting human needs into the grimace of alien profit.”

164. Ibid., 721.
166. “Schlusswortmarathon im Lorenz-Prozess,” 878.
168. AG Spass muss sein!, Spaßguerilla.
Those who wanted to continue Movement 2 June favoured social-revolutionary goals over a “fetish” of violence. Drawing on Régis Debray’s *A Critique of Arms*, written in the context of South American guerrilla movements, members of this camp identified a distinct trajectory of decline of armed revolutionary struggle, beginning with the separation of “the violent method from its economic and social areas of application” and ending with “left-wing terrorism” that remained aloof from the people.\(^{171}\)

On 13 October 1980, Ralf Reinders, Roland Fritzsche, Till Meyer, Gerald Klöpper, and Andreas Vogel received prison sentences of between ten and fifteen years for the kidnapping of Lorenz. Teufel was acquitted on the kidnapping charge but was sentenced to five years in prison for membership in a criminal organisation.\(^ {172}\) Simultaneously, police experts had to “defuse” what appeared to be high-risk explosive devices at KaDeWe and Deutsche Oper Berlin. However, each package turned out to contain just an alarm clock, a bottle of water, and some Negerküsse (a candy similar to a chocolate marshmallow), which, a note suggested, should be given to the children of the explosives expert.\(^ {173}\) Movement 2 June had pioneered the distribution of Negerküsse when trying to calm down customers during the robbery of two West Berlin banks in the summer of 1975.\(^ {174}\) The candy subsequently became an oft-repeated symbol for a limited and “human” use of militant means. A confession about the fake bombs was printed in the journal *radikal*, explaining that Deutsche Oper was not only “a place for pseudo-educated consumers of culture” but also the stage for the Iranian shah’s 1967 visit, during which Ohnesorg had been shot. The hoax at KaDeWe was meant to make it clear that “Mrs and Mr Clean cannot buy their junk goods completely undisturbed” while Movement 2 June comrades were sentenced “to languish in high-security areas.”\(^ {175}\) An article printed in the same issue of *radikal* took a similar line, criticising the myth of armed struggle, which created hierarchies within the radical left. The author emphasised forms of everyday resistance and emblematically praised an unnamed cheese thief at a Karstadt department store.

\(^{171}\) Ibid. Cf. Debray, *Critique des armes*.


The Autonomists

An emphasis on the everyday dimension of resistance, a subjective concept of the politics of the first person, and a refusal of hierarchies are characteristic of the Autonomen, a social movement that emerged in West Germany in the early 1980s, chiefly in the context of the squatter movement. It is difficult to ascribe an unambiguous political or social ideology or a stringent theory to the only loosely federated autonomist groups. They acted not only in many local initiatives and campaigns but also as militant wings of the antinuclear movement and the peace movement. The variety of topics they addressed went along with a range of legal and illegal practices of protest, from conventional demonstrations to property damage and sabotage. Their ritualised militant confrontation of the authorities frequently ran the danger of becoming an end in itself. Their eclectic theories combined elements of neo-Marxism, poststructuralism, and anarchism. As a matter of principle, they conducted their debates anonymously, often using colourful pseudonyms. The authorities heavily criminalised their publications, such as the journal radikal, which declared its explicit sympathy with Movement 2 June.

Radikal dedicated its December 1980 issue to the topic of consumption. A number of long letters to the editors discussed the significance of consumption in the alternative milieu, thus outlining what might be called autonomist critiques of regimes of provision. The main focus was on negative effects of consumption, which resulted in the “repression of real needs,” turning “people into emotional cripples” and thus enabling the ruling classes “to prevent any resistance at the outset without openly employing any violence.” One author identified a new consumerism among the members of the Left, which he interpreted as a response to the more ascetic lifestyles of the 1970s. He observed insightfully that the professionally established adherents of the student movement formed the potential for a new market segment. To this observer, the term Konsumterror still identified an important issue—the “dictatorship of the commodity,” which was “more effective than any other form of authority”—but it was discredited through dogmatic use. He called on the Left to undertake an “appraisal of its own needs” to regain the capacity to act politically: “A Left

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that seriously wants to fight the system of the jail and of the commodity must start very seriously to crack its own imprisonment in the net of consumerism and closely connected careerism.”

Another contribution represented a shift away from issues of violence by putting the focus on individual change in left-wing lifestyles. Based on Erich Fromm’s best-selling book, *To Have or to Be?*, the author diagnosed an “alternative ideology” characterised by a search for a “recovery of intensity and use value.” This ideology argued for the replacement of the “grim greed for commodity-sensual stupefaction” with “self-awareness and self-liberation,” which, however, still appeared in the form of commodities, resulting in an alternative “consumer ethos of the simple but nevertheless discerning . . . life.” At the same time, the author detected the downside of such a breakthrough: increased commercial exploitation of alternative lifestyles. These considerations were explicitly inspired by Marcuse’s notion of “repressive desublimation” and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of “deterritorialisation.”

The analysis led to a pessimistic but prophetic vision of the future: “What will remain is the part of alternative life, with which the anxiously inhibited masses can almost cope: the alternative consumer ethos.”

While this author offered no suggestions for how to deal with the dilemma, a statement by a group calling itself the Smoking Bulldoozers [sic] of Alaska forcefully rejected the alternative movement’s consumer ethos. The Bulldoozers did not want to consume differently; they wanted to liberate desire from the capitalist economics of exchange value, which in their view caught any liberating impulses in a “net of consumption.” They sought to confront this inevitability with a concrete utopia of the here and now and a radicalised politics of the first person that uncoupled itself from the long-term objective of liberation: “We no longer prepare for our liberation or the world revolution . . ., we simply play . . . getting ourselves the hi-fi system we have always been keen on . . ., setting fire to Karstadt, not to protest against the murdering in El Salvador; no, the winter is too cold for us, and this way it will get a little bit warmer on Ku[rfürsten]damm . . . and all of a sudden even the level of use value is left behind.” This was meant to be a radical departure from the alter-

native milieu and its ideals of 1968. In September 1982, an autonomist group reappropriating the name Movement 2 June attempted an arson attack on a supermarket in Berlin’s Kreuzberg district. The incendiary device in a washing powder container did not go off. A statement of responsibility put shopping centres and supermarkets in the context of urban renewal and the hunger strikes of imprisoned comrades: “Supermarkets . . . will burn as long as they exist.”

With an increased commercialisation of the public sphere as part of a boom in shopping centres and pedestrian zones, retail and business associations sought to ban undesirable elements— punks, hippies, homeless people—from shopping streets and enclosed malls. This effort was backed by rules of conduct for patrons that were enforced by private security agencies and ultimately by the police. The “undesirables” did not always go along with the new rules, and the realm of commerce became a contested terrain, raising far-reaching questions about the legal status of public streets and the semipublic sphere of retail. In November 1982, a meeting of punks protesting the new regime in the commercial centre of Wuppertal ended with a massive police operation using batons and mace, countered by paint bombs, a campfire, and a quest for “job security among the glaziers.”

A week before Christmas of that year, a group calling itself Revolutionärer Morgen (Revolutionary Morning) attacked Wuppertal’s “centres of consumption”—that is, department stores and large clothing shops—with butyric acid, an action that the perpetrators conceded was not particularly successful because they did not use enough of the unpleasant-smelling chemical. However, they declared that they wanted to attack “organised inhumanity,” which resulted in people “missing out on their real needs, and basically only existing to secure the affluence of a few by working and consuming for them—by allowing them to determine our entire life.”

The alternative daily paper taz dedicated an entire page to “Troublemakers in the Pre-Christmas Period,” reporting on attempts to disrupt commerce at KaDeWe by involving shop assistants in endless sales conversation, on violent encounters between punks and police in Hannover’s inner city, and on demonstrations in a Bochum department store. In some cases, police officers in riot gear shielded shop windows and conducted security checks at entry points. Such activities had al-

ready become an annual routine: at Christmas the preceding year, the Kurfürstendamm had been the scene of collective action, including the burning of Christmas trees, smashed windows, traffic blockades, and organised shoplifting. Activists were asked to send Christmas packages to prisons.189

Fourteen years and nine months after the Frankfurt department store arsons, an incendiary device ignited the men’s clothes department of the Wertheim department store on the Kurfürstendamm. A statement of responsibility by a group calling itself the Hungernden Psychopathen (Starving Psychopaths) was printed in *radikal*. There were clear parallels with the events of April 1968: the device had been planted without warning but had been timed to go off during the night, avoiding injury to people but causing considerable material damage. The authors of the statement articulated a rather strong but diffuse discontent with affluent society: “We meant to crack down on the ‘hunky-dory atmosphere’ right in the prestige heart of the pigs. . . . Just at the time of the annual Christmas junk, we’ve decided on a department store at the largest and most grotesque consumer racecourse of the Wild West city to add some flaming authority to our permanent puking feeling.” The protest also included smashed windows at banks and supermarkets.190 Parallels ended when it came to publicity: department store arson barely received notice in newspapers in 1982, perhaps because of fear of copycat arsonists. Only a fortnight later, a similar attack occurred in Munich, where an incendiary device was set off at the Hertie department store shortly before closing time, causing material damage amounting to ten thousand deutsche marks. Rather arbitrarily putting the attack in the context of a struggle to prevent computers and data surveillance from taking over society, *radikal* commented that the attack was inappropriately timed during business hours, but nevertheless, no one was hurt.191 A statement of responsibility appeared in the journal’s next issue, stressing that the attack was meant to demonstrate that resistance was possible even in staunchly right-wing Bavaria. However, the belated justification seems primarily to have been intended to fend off criticism. While agreeing with much of the RAF programme, the perpetrators denied that they were just fellow travellers since they avoided injury to human beings. The explanation that they had set the fire on a staircase to avoid hurting anyone was dubious unless they counted on the

sprinkler system to extinguish the fire.\textsuperscript{192} The perpetrators of the 1982–83 department store attacks were never caught.

Awareness of radical practices targeting the commercial sphere was more pronounced among retail organisations in the early 1980s than in the late 1960s, when the relevant professional journals more or less ignored it.\textsuperscript{193} A commentator fulminated that “a subculture of those who refuse to work and pay their rent is forming, and they, with the assistance of governmental funding and the occasional illicit employment, squat in houses, loot shops, devastate streets . . . and blithely and parasitically survive without contributing anything useful to the economy.” However, the author also acknowledged that even the Young Socialists of the SPD had opted for the socialisation of the department store corporations and for a transition to socialist forms of production.\textsuperscript{194} Another outraged commentary by a retail functionary reported on “directions for shoplifting by leftist troublemakers” in an autonomist journal: “Perhaps we can soon learn from these columns how to build Molotov cocktails, how to . . . set fire to department stores, how to organise demonstrations in the main shopping streets, including the smashing of windows and showcases and subsequent looting to buy drugs?”\textsuperscript{195} Unbeknownst to the indignant tradesman, all of these radical practices were indeed debated in autonomist journals.

In the spring of 1983, a collective shoplifting spree took place in Berlin’s Kreuzberg district. People in black leather jackets took groceries from supermarkets and, posing as modern-day Robin Hoods, distributed the goods to passersby.\textsuperscript{196} In November 1983, \textit{radikal} reported on a multipronged attack on KaDeWe: protesters dispersed butyric acid in the food hall, poured waste oil over toy tanks, and destroyed clothes with sulphuric acid.\textsuperscript{197} In March 1984, an arson attack targeted the West Berlin branch office of IKEA, causing material damage of ten thousand deutsche marks. The act protested the Swedish retailer’s “pseudo-leftist image” and its use of cheap prison labour in the production of its furniture.\textsuperscript{198}

\textsuperscript{192} “München: Im Herzen der Bestie,” \textit{radikal} 113 (February 1983): 28.
\textsuperscript{193} This contention is based on a systematic search of the journals \textit{Ffh Mitteilungen, Mitteilungen Verein Berliner Kaufleute und Industrieller,} and \textit{Der Einzelhandel: Fachorgan des Landesverbundes Einzelhandel des Landes Rheinland-Pfalz for 1967–69 and 1981–83.}
\textsuperscript{197} “Handschriftliches: Einkaufen macht Spaß,” \textit{radikal} 122 (November 1983).
\textsuperscript{198} “Berlin/Wallau: IKEA abgebrannt,” \textit{radikal} 126–27 (March–April 1984): 46. The article also insinuates that a major fire on 13 March 1984 that destroyed IKEA’s administrative hub at
The people analysed in this chapter did not belong to the very poor. They did not seek to fulfil their own needs but liked to think of themselves as acting on behalf of the downtrodden, the excluded, and the oppressed. They took an active part in social groups that had begun to move forward to new conditions of life. Beneficiaries of West Germany's affluence and members of a broad protest movement that rather successfully claimed cultural and political influence, members of left-wing intellectual circles powerfully sought to reassert moral values developed against the backdrop of the horrors of World War II and Cold War confrontation. However, they found their path to the society and the regimes of provision they imagined blocked. Their desires and ambitions were not completely implausible under the circumstances, given the breadth and impetus of the protest movement, and given the scenarios of a “realm of freedom” and communist society drawn up by eminent thinkers.

The concurrence of militant forms of protest and theoretical critiques of regimes of provision analysed in this chapter led activists to embrace ever more abstract and comprehensive notions of consumption and of consumer society. Especially for the RAF, the latter became an abstract political enemy that combined social evils on many levels. The idea was to overcome consumer society—or even consumption—as such, not simply to consume differently. The regime of provision they targeted was capitalist consumer society in its entirety, including its global repercussions. The intellectual coupling of issues of consumption with affluent society’s inherent structures of violence—as pioneered by the broader protest movement—became a matter of course that no longer required explicit justification.

This chapter’s close reading of hitherto neglected documents and theoretical fragments such as Meinhof’s “Die Massen und der Konsum” and Raspe’s observation that consumer society gave a material quality to idealistic bourgeois values has established an idea previously overlooked by the existing literature: issues of consumption and critiques of regimes of provision were vital to the theoretical framework of the RAF’s first generation. A central goal in the RAF’s actions was overcoming the moral deficits its members saw as integral to consumer capitalism: alienation, exploitation, and destruction. Simultaneously, they perceived their peer group (the New Left) and the hoped-for revolutionary subject (“the masses”) as mired in the mechanisms of consumer society and thus forced to reproduce the counterrevolutionary values of material progress and personal freedom. The antidote they prescribed was the

Wallau, near Frankfurt, causing material damage in excess of seventy million deutsche marks was also caused by arson, but this cannot be verified.
collective enterprise and discipline of system-transcending armed resistance. In a position of relative weakness, especially when imprisoned, the cadres of the RAF increasingly hoped that the marginalised, those who remained excluded from consumer society, would come to the activists’ revolutionary rescue by acting out their real needs. However, these hopes were frustrated by the reluctance of the vast majority of their contemporaries to pose the question of violence against a regime that seemed much less terrible than its predecessor. From this perspective, the oft-cited disunity and inconsistency within the RAF seems less pronounced, since a good deal of common ground and continuity existed in the imprisoned cadres’ ambitious project of a militant neo-Marxist critique of capitalist consumer society. Differences occurred over questions of priorities and tactics. Meinhof’s attempt to differentiate between external and internal incitements to consume—that is, advertisements or pressure to buy as opposed to genuine desires for freedom and equality—marks a significant departure from the student movement’s broader theories of manipulation or depoliticisation and is not as naive as her official critics contended. Her emphasis on theft and other forms of illegal disobedience as a process of moral emancipation aimed to reestablish a connection with the neoanarchist subculture of the early 1970s and with the militant parts of the social movements. In many respects, the RAF’s critique of capitalist regimes of provision helped to integrate their heterogeneous ideological portfolio, which, next to these neoanarchist influences, contained elements of communism, especially Maoism; the neo-Marxism of the Frankfurt School; the anti-imperialism of a proletarian internationalism; antifascism; and the concept of a revolutionary avant-garde in the urban guerrillas’ armed struggle. A critical analysis of consumer society promised to actualise these ideologies, some of which had their roots in the past and in developing societies. Concrete pointers to issues of consumption helped to communicate abstract and at times contradictory ideas, especially with regard to the discursive strategy of amalgamating geographically and historically diverse grievances and forms of political violence in an attempt to legitimise the desperate revolutionary struggle.

After Ulrike Meinhof’s death, a related focus on issues of consumption was embraced by Movement 2 June and the emerging autonomist movement, which walked a tightrope between solidarity with and criticism of the RAF and conceived of self-empowerment as bridging the gap between genuine needs and political resistance. They embarked on a battle against the commercial adaptation of alternative subcultures and the commodity character of life-

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199. These considerations are inspired by Dahrendorf, “Politics of Frustration.”
styles. Causing material damage by triggering the sprinkler systems in large stores with rather limited incendiary devices became a repeated strategy for throwing spanners into the works of capitalist consumer society. Arson attacks on department stores occurred in the context of the squatters’ movement—December 1980 in Göttingen and July 1982 in Berlin—and as part of the protests against the meeting of the International Monetary Fund in West Berlin in September 1988. These events are further contextualised in the following chapters.