

## The pleasure and pain of passing as (dis)abled

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*The Pleasure and Pain of Passing as (Dis)Able: Rudi Dutschke's Exile in the UK (1968–1971) and the Ableism of the West German Student Movement*

Katharina Karcher

So far, questions of (dis)ability have played a marginal role in the scholarly literature on contemporary German history and culture and the movements associated with the West German “1968.”<sup>1</sup> But, this is beginning to change. The emerging field of disability history has highlighted the critical importance of disability as a category of historical analysis and a tool for emancipatory change. In this context, disability is not understood as naturally given but as socially constructed and susceptible to change. In her excellent account of disability policy in Germany, Elsbeth Bösl highlights that “disability was ultimate otherness and was primarily understood as a functional deficit in relation to someone’s productivity and ability to work.”<sup>2</sup> Whilst consciously rejecting the aims and aspirations associated with the conventional “petty bourgeois” lifestyle, student activists in West Germany and West Berlin had high expectations of themselves when it came to their intellectual productivity and commitment to a global revolution. As members of the “Action Council for the Liberation of Women” highlighted with a spectacular protest at a national student gathering in September 1968, this revolutionary lifestyle was incompatible with caring responsibilities—they demanded a joint effort to tackle the oppression of women and to provide childcare for activists

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<sup>1</sup> One notable exception is the anti-psychiatry movement and the “Sozialistisches Patientenkollektiv” (SPK) in particular. While the anti-psychiatry movement is an umbrella term for a range of different political campaigns, all shared a critical stance towards the stigmatisation and pathologisation of people with mental health problems. The SPK carried the anti-institutionalism of the movement to the extreme by calling on mentally ill to turn their illness into a weapon. “Die Erkenntnis der gesellschaftlichen Hintergründe, so lässt sich das Konzept knapp zusammenfassen, wird umgesetzt in die revolutionäre Tat, der bewusste Kranke wird zum revolutionären Subjekt *par excellence*, seine Krankheit zur Waffe.” Brink, “Psychiatrie und Politik”, 142. See also: Pross, Schweitzer, and Wagner, “Wir Wollten ins Verderben rennen”: *Die Geschichte des Sozialistischen Patientenkollektivs Heidelberg 1970–1971*; Rechlin, and Vliegen, *Die Psychiatrie in der Kritik: Die Antipsychiatrische Szene und ihre Bedeutung für die klinische Psychiatrie heute*; Gerd Kroske’s film *SPK Komplex* (2018).

<sup>2</sup> Bösl, *Politiken der Normalisierung: Zur Geschichte der Behindertenpolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 9. This and all translations are by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

with children.<sup>3</sup> As this article shows, the prevailing ideas of revolutionary activism in the West German student movement were not only sexist but also ableist.

Whilst trying to challenge capitalist notions of productivity and performance, the West German student movement cultivated the idea that true revolutionaries could and had to do it all: they were expected to be excellent political strategists, courageous street fighters, and sophisticated thinkers. Even some of the most prominent activists who dedicated their lives to the movement struggled to live up to these expectations. Hans-Jürgen Krahl, for example, was known as the most sophisticated thinker in the West German student movement.<sup>4</sup> He worked on his doctorate in Frankfurt under the supervision of Theodor W. Adorno but fell out with his mentor over student occupations and political differences in the late 1960s. Krahl was often described as a “pale and fragile young man with a glass eye,” but it is not known how he related to his impairment.<sup>5</sup> It is clear, however, that Krahl did not have the street credibility of his friend and close political ally Rudi Dutschke.<sup>6</sup> After dying in a tragic car accident in 1970, Krahl “has fallen into oblivion.”<sup>7</sup>

Today the West German '68 movement is “associated first and foremost with one man”: Rudi Dutschke.<sup>8</sup> Against this background, it is perhaps surprising that there are still significant gaps in the research literature on the life and work of the prominent student activist. Previous scholarship has focused mainly on a brief period in the 1960s when Dutschke played a leading role in the West Berlin branch of the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (SDS) and its relevance to the West

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<sup>3</sup> On 12 September 1968, the filmmaker Helke Sander addressed the conference delegates at the twenty-third conference of the SDS in Frankfurt. In her speech, Sander criticized patriarchal structures in the SDS and called for a joint effort to tackle the oppression of women. When it appeared that the SDS board members wanted to move on to other issues without commenting on Sander’s speech, SDS member Sigrid Rüter threw tomatoes at them. Although their position was not without controversy, Sander’s speech and Rüter’s protest mobilized many women in the New Left. For a detailed discussion of the event and its consequences, see Karcher, *Sisters in Arms: Militant Feminisms in the Federal Republic since 1968*.

<sup>4</sup> “Der Robespierre von 68 kehrt zurück”, taz.de, <https://taz.de/Hans-Jrgen-Krahl/!5198777/> (accessed May 29, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Maiso, “Hans Jürgen Krahl”, 337.

<sup>6</sup> Apparently, Krahl and Dutschke were well aware of this fact. According to a contemporary, Krahl jokingly called Dutschke “my revolutionary circus horse,” because his political stunts attracted so much public attention. “Der Robespierre von 68 kehrt zurück.”

<sup>7</sup> Maiso, “Hans Jürgen Krahl”, 335.

<sup>8</sup> Mennig, “Rudi Dutschke and the struggle of the 1968 student movement.”

German '68 and armed leftist movements in the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> Although Dutschke did not want to establish himself as a leader of the West German student movement, he came to be seen as one in Germany and abroad, because he “embodied that curious mixture of ideological zeal and antiauthoritarian practice, romantic idealism and fashionable jargon that distinguished the German student movement.”<sup>10</sup> Photographs from this time typically show him giving fiery speeches at political rallies or protest marches in West Berlin. However, on 11 April 1968, this period of activism and agitation came to an abrupt end when a right-wing extremist called Josef Bachmann shot Dutschke in West Berlin. He survived the assassination attempt but sustained serious injuries. He lost his memory, which meant that he had to relearn the ability to speak and write. He also had a range of other health problems including epilepsy, vision disorder, and panic attacks. He never fully recovered from his injuries.

According to current social legislation in the Federal Republic of Germany, Dutschke's physical injuries and psychological trauma can be understood as a form of disability. In the *Sozialgesetzbuch* disability is defined as follows:

People with disabilities are people who have physical, psychological, mental, or sensory impairments, which interact with social attitudes and environmental barriers in such a way that they are very likely to prevent these people from participating equally in society. A disability is deemed to occur if the state of health and body condition deviate from that which is typical for a certain age.<sup>11</sup>

Even measured by SDS standards, Dutschke's expectations of himself were a somewhat extreme case. In part, they can be explained by his biography. Born in 1940 in a rural part of Brandenburg, Dutschke had engaged in competitive sports as a youngster in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). His attitudes to performance and productivity reflect his family's Protestant work ethic and

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<sup>9</sup> Of particular interest in this context was Dutschke's role in the German student movement see, e.g. Kraushaar, Wieland, and Reemtsma, *Rudi Dutschke, Andreas Baader und die RAF*; Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz?: Germany's 1968 generation and the Holocaust*; Thierbach, *Wie Rudi Dutschke zum Mythos wurde*; Cornils, *Writing the Revolution: The Construction of "1968" in Germany*; Renaud, “German New Lefts: Postwar Socialists between Past and Future.” One of the few scholarly publications that offer a detailed overview of Dutschke's intellectual and political development after 1968 is Michaela Karl, *Rudi Dutschke: Revolutionär ohne Revolution* (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Cornils, *Writing the Revolution*, 23.

<sup>11</sup> “9. Buch, §2, Absatz 1,” Sozialgesetzbuch, <https://www.buzer.de/gesetz/5856/a80821.htm> (accessed September 19, 2019).

official GDR policy. As Carol Poor highlights, GDR policymakers held the view that increased performance would raise the standard of living and create a more humane society.<sup>12</sup> Although Dutschke left the GDR in 1961, his relationship to his attitude towards his body and perceived pressure to prove himself as activist were clearly shaped by the “performance principle” propagated in the GDR and the added pressure of being a political refugee in West Berlin. In SDS circles, he was known for his ability to cope with little sleep, and he spent every spare moment studying (which is why he always carried a heavy briefcase with books and notes around).<sup>13</sup> As the diary entries and private notes examined in this article illustrate, the assassination attempt in April 1968 marked a dramatic change in Dutschke’s life: he needed a lot of rest, suffered from social anxiety, and had to redevelop his speech and writing skills with the help of children’s books. For the rest of his life, he suffered from aphasia (the inability to comprehend or formulate language due to brain damage), epileptic fits, and vision problems. And yet it is important to acknowledge that Dutschke did not want to be seen as “disabled.” After the attack, he did everything in his power to prevent journalists from seeing how poor his health really was, fearing that they would draw “the picture of a defeated, finished SDS wreck of a man.”<sup>14</sup>

Ingo Cornils has shown that the West German student movement had a symbiotic and contradictory relationship with the press. Student activists “needed the Massenmedien (mass media), which they viewed as part of the manipulative system they aimed to overthrow, to gain visibility beyond the campus, while the media, which generally regarded the radical students with deep suspicion, needed the students to fill their pages and position themselves in the market.”<sup>15</sup> Dutschke’s interactions with journalists illustrate just how symbiotic and contradictory this relationship was. On the one hand, he gave interviews on TV and in leading newspapers to spread

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<sup>12</sup> Poor, *Disability in Twentieth-century German culture*, 249.

<sup>13</sup> Hans-Jürgen Krahl cultivated a similar lifestyle, but unlike Dutschke he was known for his ability to tolerate significant amounts of alcohol.

<sup>14</sup> Dutschke, *Aufrecht Gehen: Eine fragmentarische Autobiographie*, 97.

<sup>15</sup> Cornils, *Writing the Revolution*, 152.

his political ideas beyond student circles in West Berlin.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, he was a vocal critic of the existing media landscape.<sup>17</sup> In 1967, he called for the expropriation of the publisher Axel Springer, who held a quasi-monopoly in the West Berlin print media market.<sup>18</sup> The Springer press responded with aggressive headlines and anti-Dutschke articles. Not least because of this news coverage, some began to see Dutschke as “public enemy number 1.” In the months before the attempt on his life, Dutschke and his family had to move frequently because they received death threats and hate mail on a daily basis. As soon as he was released from hospital after the attack in April 1968, the Dutschkes left the country to a secret location to avoid media coverage. Dutschke feared that journalists wanted to use images of his serious injuries as a deterrent for everyone in the Left.

The fact that Dutschke (and many other people in history) did not identify as disabled although they might have been seen as such by others, poses an interesting challenge for scholars engaging with their life and work. In an analysis of disability passing among polio survivors in the US, Daniel J. Wilson concludes that the self-perception as non-disabled gave many of them “the confidence to perform as if they were not disabled and thus ‘pass’ in both their own estimation and in the minds of others.”<sup>19</sup> As the Dutschke case illustrates, the self-perception as non-disabled can be experienced as tremendously empowering but can come at a high price for the individual. After a brief discussion of five dominant narratives of disability, the first part of the article explores how Dutschke embraced a “narrative of overcoming,” while his friends used a “sentimental narrative” of disability to mobilise support. The second part analyses the limitations of both narratives based on verbatim transcripts of Dutschke’s appeal against the Home Secretary’s decision to expel him from the UK and other archival materials. In this part, I introduce “passing” as a theoretical tool to analyse how Dutschke tried to avoid the stigma and narcissistic pity associated with disability. By passing as

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<sup>16</sup> Prominent examples include an interview in *Der Spiegel* on July 10, 1967, and a conversation with the journalist Günter Gaus as part of the ARD programme “Zu Protokoll” in December 1967. For a more detailed discussion of these and other media portrayals and interventions, see Cornils, *Writing the Revolution*, 23–26.

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed discussion of Dutschke’s position vis-à-vis the media, see Karl, *Rudi Dutschke*, 124–26.

<sup>18</sup> Dutschke, “Wir fordern die Enteignung von Axel Springer.”

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, “Passing in the Shadow of FDR. Polio Survivors, Passing, and the Negotiation of Disability,” 14.

abled in the court room, he proved to himself and the world that he was both an ambitious academic and a serious political opponent. The ableism of the West German student movement, however, remained unchallenged.

1. Violence, trauma, and an emerging narrative of overcoming (1968–1970)

While some forms of disability are the result of a long process (e.g. a slowly progressing illness), Dutschke's health condition changed suddenly and abruptly. After the assassination attempt on 11 April 1968, he was rushed to hospital. Initially even his wife and closest friends did not know whether he was still alive, and there was much speculation about his fate in the press. Although doctors at the Westend hospital were able to save Dutschke's life with complex and risky brain surgery, he was left with severe health problems. As a result of his brain injuries, he lost his ability to speak and found it difficult to answer even simple questions. Other health problems included impaired vision and motor coordination, anxiety attacks, concentration difficulties, and epileptic fits. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson rightly emphasises that "adjusting to the stigmatization and lowered social status that comes from moving into the community of the disabled" can be more difficult than "adjusting to an acquired impairment."<sup>20</sup> Desperate to avoid this stigmatisation, Dutschke reached the conclusion that he was left with two options: give up on himself or make every effort to redevelop his skills. He chose the latter and developed a sense of agency by embracing two interlinked narratives of disability: the "narrative of catastrophe" and the "narrative of overcoming."

According to Garland-Thomson, there are five dominant narratives of disability in the Western World. The "biomedical narrative" frames disabilities as physiological deviations from a "normal" physical condition that need to be rectified through allopathic measures. The "sentimental narrative" portrays people with disabilities as occasions for narcissistic pity or lessons in suffering for those who imagine themselves as nondisabled. The "narrative of abjection" sees "disability as that

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<sup>20</sup> Garland-Thomson, "Feminist Disability Studies," 1567.

which one can and must avoid at all costs.”<sup>21</sup> The “narrative of catastrophe,” which has clearly shaped Dutschke’s thinking, depicts disability as dramatic life event to which some individuals respond with fighting spirit whereas others give up on themselves. The “narrative of overcoming” frames disability as a “personal defect” that needs to be tackled by the individual. Dutschke firmly believed that he could overcome his disability with hard work and dedication. A few days after his brain surgery, he made first attempts to signal his desire to redevelop his vocabulary and political knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

While Garland-Thomson’s model can be used as a critical tool to analyse and tackle common stereotypes of disability in Western culture, the Dutschke case shows that different narratives can overlap and in ways that make it difficult if not impossible to disentangle them. Moreover, where there is power, there is resistance. Garland-Thomson rightly argues that the prevailing narratives of disability are problematic, because they “restrict the lives and govern the bodies of people we think of as disabled [and] limit the imaginations of those who think of themselves as nondisabled.”<sup>23</sup> In order to be perceived as authentic and convincing, these narratives require certain forms of passing. The sentimental narrative relies on the image of a helpless and powerless disabled person—if disabled people challenge this by refusing to embody this image or by passing as abled, they often face moral outrage and aggression. The narrative of overcoming by contrast requires that individuals with disabilities pass as able-bodied and that they convince others and/or themselves that these abilities are the result of a recovery process. However, despite all these constraints, it is important to acknowledge that dominant narratives of disability can be utilised in subversive ways. As this article shows, the narrative of overcoming can strengthen an individual’s sense of agency in legal disputes with political authorities, and the sentimental narrative of disability can be used to mobilise against the unfair treatment of disabled people.

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<sup>21</sup> Garland-Thomson, “Feminist Disability Studies,” 1567.

<sup>22</sup> In an interview with the author, Gretchen Dutschke Klotz recalled that in hospital Rudi expressed with gestures that he wanted an atlas (he had forgotten the word) to learn the names of countries.

<sup>23</sup> Garland-Thomson, “Feminist Disability Studies,” 1568.

As a mother of a young son who feared for the safety of her family, Gretchen Dutschke was less hesitant than her husband to embrace the sentimental narrative of disability. While her husband was still in hospital, Gretchen Dutschke received threatening and insulting letters such as this one:

You wretched dog it is a pity that it [the bullet] didn't hit better but next time it will work better even your whore and kids have to be destroyed root and branch. [...] i repeat a pity that [he] didn't target too well but the next time will be better. Including your dirty whore and bastard.<sup>24</sup>

After the assassination attempt, Gretchen Dutschke had no sustainable income and was the primary caregiver for her baby son and her husband. In this situation, she gratefully accepted the help and financial support of others.<sup>25</sup> After a short stay in Switzerland, which had been organised by the Protestant theologian Helmut Gollwitzer, the Dutschkes moved to Italy following an invitation from the German composer Hans Werner Henze. Supported by his wife and the psychologist Thomas Ehleiter, Dutschke spent several hours every day developing his vocabulary, historical and political knowledge, and writing skills. He made significant progress and felt optimistic about the future. The family had no regular income, but they were able to get by thanks to donations from sympathetic groups and individuals. However, after a few months, journalists tracked them down in Italy, and the Dutschkes felt no longer safe.

Friends of Dutschke's in the UK proposed to Gretchen that they come to England. The Jewish poet and political activist Erich Fried, who had lived in London since escaping from Austria during the Second World War, approached the Labour MP Michael Foot for help. Foot sent a letter to the then Home Secretary James Callaghan, in which he made effective use of the sentimental narrative of disability. He wrote:

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<sup>24</sup> Archive at the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (HIS), RUD 152, 06, "Hetzbriefe nach dem Attentat auf Rudi Dutschke", undated anonymous letter. The grammatical errors in the translation reflect the syntax of the German original.

<sup>25</sup> There are a number of reasons why Gretchen might have found it easier to accept help than her husband. One is that she was not only the primary caregiver for her husband but also for their baby son Hosea Che, which left little time for the organisation of trips abroad and other practical issues. Another is that disability and gender intersect. While Gretchen's caring role confirmed prevailing gender stereotypes of femininity, Rudi's disabilities and dependency on his wife and other people posed a direct threat to his status as a rational political subject and provider for his family.

Those assisting him [Dutschke] think that it would be advisable for him to come to London to see a brain specialist and also to avoid some of the publicity he is getting in Rome. [...] There is no question of his engaging in any political activity since he is in no condition to do so.<sup>26</sup>

Against the background of Dutschke's poor health, Callaghan granted him a one-month visa to receive medical treatment in the UK. Yet, he made clear that his admission "would be on the clear understanding that he would not engage in political activities, [...] carry out literary commitments, or [...] engage in a course of postgraduate study at a British university."<sup>27</sup> The visa was renewed several times on the same terms and conditions.

Diary entries from his time in exile in the UK reveal how fragile Dutschke's health was in the first years after the assassination attempt. He struggled with the physical and psychological consequences of the attack and found it difficult to communicate in English. A diary entry from 29 April 1969 illustrates this:

Die letzten Tage, bis heute, waren selten positive, fast immer negative, voller Depressionen, völlige 'Angst', vor Lern- und Arbeits[un]fähigkeiten. Die angeschossene Seite reagierte immer sensibler, die Gefahr von [epileptischen] Anfällen damit 'für mich' andeutend. [The last few days, until today, were rarely positive, almost always negative, full of depression, sheer 'fear' of learning and working incapacities. The injured side has always been more sensitive, the danger of [epileptic] fits appears to be present 'to me'] [...] But I think that I'm really not able to learn English if my German is not real developed. For this reason I'm thinking very often to go back to a country, in which my learning process in relation to 'my country' language more 'easier.' Gretka [Gretchen] is against a come-back to Germany, we shall see [...] ...The other side of my thinking is the question of 'an official' "Dr."-Thesis'...In the last years it was for me only a secondary problem, that's now not possible, because we must find a real new beginning of my life...It is too much destroyed in my head. My nervosity (?) is real big, especially in relation to the cars or busses, airplanes a.s.o. in the streets... Until now we have no answer<sup>28</sup>

This and other diary entries from the late 1960s and early 1970s document a remarkable recovery. In April 1968, Dutschke was unable to form simple sentences, but rather than accepting the status quo he did everything in his power to regain the lost skills and abilities. By April 1969, he had made such significant progress that he considered applying for a PhD place in the UK. However, diary entries

<sup>26</sup> IMMIGRATION APPEALS TRIBUNAL, Mr Alfred Willi Dutschke (Appellant) and The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent), Verbatim Report, "Day I – Thursday, 17 December, 1970", 9.

<sup>27</sup> IMMIGRATION APPEALS TRIBUNAL, Mr Alfred Willi Dutschke (Appellant) and The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent), Verbatim Report, "Day I – Thursday, 17 December, 1970", 10.

<sup>28</sup> Dutschke, *Jeder hat sein Leben ganz zu leben. Die Tagebücher 1963–1979*, 83–84.

from this period also show that Dutschke had not overcome his disabilities. He suffered from severe anxiety, concentration problems, agoraphobia, vision problems, epileptic fits, and had to take heavy medication. As a result, he found it difficult (and at times impossible) to pass as “abled.” As the passage above illustrates, he tried to practice his English but in 1969 his language skills were nowhere near strong enough to write a PhD thesis in English. And yet, a doctorate soon became Dutschke’s main objective. While the desire to pursue a PhD was first and foremost an expression of his intellectual curiosity and passion for politics, the doctorate also marked an important milestone in his narrative of overcoming: Dutschke wanted to prove to himself and the world that he was capable of producing research at the highest academic level.

Prior to the assassination attempt, Dutschke had begun to work on a research project about the work of the Marxist philosopher György Lukács and his period. In the UK, he returned to his studies and wanted to use them as the foundation for a PhD proposal. Friends advised him to apply for PhD places at Oxford and Cambridge, which he did. On the one hand, the planned PhD was a paramount source of motivation for Dutschke. On the other, it was a major source of stress and anxiety. Since he had left West Berlin without any formal degree and found it difficult to put together a PhD proposal in English, he found the application process difficult and frustrating. After a rejection from Oxford and a request for a three-page project description and other documents from Cambridge, Dutschke felt an enormous sense of anger and despair. On 30 May 1970, he noted in his diary:

Particularly because I am physically unable to work in a complete way, a “blow” by the paper tigers has a negative psychological impact on me; although I was able to get through the day, I “felt” bloody “conned.”<sup>29</sup>

On the next day, Dutschke suffered from what he described as a “half-attack.”<sup>30</sup> He noted:

Who knows, maybe this shit will “never” stop, but this won’t hold back my ideas! Factors leading to the attack:

- a) in the last few weeks only two pills per day,
- b) Uni- shock: rejection from Oxford, new demands from Cambridge,
- c) the situation yesterday was already difficult, I couldn’t run etc

<sup>29</sup> HIS, RUD 105,04, Kopien von Tagebucheintragungen 1970–1971, 30.5.1970.

<sup>30</sup> HIS, RUD 105,04, Kopien von Tagebucheintragungen 1970–1971, 31.5.1970.

- d) not enough sleep
- e) no pill or food in the early morning, waited too long...

Although Dutschke was painfully aware that stress aggravated his health problems and increased the risk of epileptic fits, he was determined to persist. With the help of Gretchen whose mother tongue is English, he put together a research proposal for Cambridge. He was also able to obtain two references from academics at the Freie Universität Berlin, where he had studied before going into exile. In his reference, one of his former teacher Dr Helmut Fleischer claimed

I have always been convinced that the strong intensity of the empathic experience that characterises Dutschke's relationship to history and social theory will be the basis for important intellectual achievements as soon as he has undergone equally intense practical learning processes (which he has always understood as such) and will finally find the opportunity to have a period of undisturbed academic work, an opportunity that he has been longing for even before the unfortunate attack.<sup>31</sup>

Echoing Dutschke's narrative of overcoming, Fleischer portrayed a PhD in the UK as a logical continuation of his studies in West Berlin. The reference mentions the "unfortunate attack" only in passing and does not comment on its lasting physical and psychological impact. Instead, Fleischer placed great emphasis on Dutschke's continuous willingness to learn and perform.

At Cambridge, Dutschke's application landed on the desk of the admissions tutor at King's College Dr Bob Young. After examining the research proposal, Young reached the conclusion that Dutschke's proposed study of the development of the Comintern 1920–24 was original and intellectually sound. In an interview with the author, Young insisted that he took this decision purely on academic grounds.<sup>32</sup> Dutschke's application was also assessed by the Board of Graduate Studies at the University of Cambridge. In a letter from 31 July 1970, the Secretary of the Board told Dutschke that his subject of research had been accepted and that he could start his PhD on 1 October if he could produce documentary evidence about his means of financial support. Initially, the offer was for one year only, and was subject to renewal after a progress assessment in the first

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<sup>31</sup> HIS, RUD 153, 01 KORRESPONDENZ 1969 A-Z, Brief von Helmut Fleischer vom 17.12.1969.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Maxwell Young, interview by author, February 28, 2017.

year. After the Board had received a letter confirming that the Swiss “Heinrich Heine Foundation”<sup>33</sup> would pay for his degree, Dutschke’s application was formally accepted. All he needed now was a study visa.

While Dutschke considered the PhD an important milestone in his recovery process, the doctorate did not fit into the sentimental narrative that had been the basis of his admission to the UK and that his supporters had successfully employed to obtain visa renewals. After the general election in June 1970, the Labour government was replaced by a Conservative one. On August 11, 1970 Michael Foot approached the new Home Secretary Reginald Maudling on behalf of Rudi Dutschke to request a study visa. In his reply on August 25, 1970, Maudling made clear that he was not prepared to grant Dutschke the permission to pursue a research degree in the UK:

The situation has completely changed from the time when he was here for medical treatment and convalescence. As he is now fit enough to undertake full time study I think it is reasonable to conclude that his period of convalescence is complete and that we should put a term to his stay in this country for that purpose. I am therefore arranging for the passports to be returned to him with an extension of stay until 30<sup>th</sup> September, which should give him ample opportunity to make his necessary arrangements.<sup>34</sup>

Although his diary entries reveal that Dutschke was still struggling with the consequences of the assassination attempt, he managed to pass as “fit enough to undertake full time study.” This in turn was used by the Home Office as a justification to expel Dutschke from the country. The Dutschkes, who had already moved to Cambridge, did not want to accept this decision. In a letter from September 14, 1970, Gretchen Dutschke appealed to Maudling. The letter is a striking example of how the sentimental narrative of disability can be utilised to campaign for someone with disabilities. In the letter, Gretchen Dutschke emphasised that her husband was still very ill:

Two years ago my husband could only speak a few words and not read at all. What can that mean for someone who wanted to enter a university career? The damage my husband received to his brain has not disappeared. He has greatly impaired vision which makes it

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<sup>33</sup> The establishment of the Heinrich Heine Stiftung in 1970 was initiated by Professor Gollwitzer, his friend and colleague Prof. Dr. Michael Theunissen, and a rich Swiss philanthropist. A letter from October 1969 shows that the decision to offer Dutschke a scholarship for his studies in the UK preceded the official formation of the Heinrich Heine Stiftung. HIS, RUD 153, 01, “Korrespondenz 1969 A-Z.”

<sup>34</sup> HIS, RUD 310, 08, “Initiativen zur Abwehr der Ausweisung aus Großbritannien, Bemühungen um Studienplatz in Dänemark.”

difficult for him to read. He must remain under medical supervision. We do not know what long-term damage may have been made to his survival, not only in a physical sense.

For my husband convalescence can only mean not only the healing of wounds but the regaining of the chance to pursue the university career which he wanted. His convalescence is thus now really only beginning with the chance he has to study.

Although she does not use the word “disabled” in her letter to the Home Secretary, Gretchen Dutschke emphasised the lasting physical and psychological damage that the assassination attempt had caused to her husband. One of the most remarkable aspects of the letter is how the author (consciously or unconsciously) uses her femininity and role as caregiver for two babies and a disabled husband to maximise the emotional impact of her appeal. Despite these and other appeals, Maudling remained adamant that the Dutschkes had to leave. When it had become clear that the Home Secretary would not change his view, Dutschke and his supporters made use of an appeals process that had been introduced by the Wilson government in the late 1960s.

## 2. Performing (dis)ability in the court room (1970–1971)

Since the early twentieth century, the Home Office has had the power to deny foreigners entry into the UK and to expel them if their presence in the country is seen as “undesirable.” In an attempt to improve administrative practice in immigration cases and to make the Home Office accountable for decisions, the Wilson government introduced the Immigration Appeals Act 1969 and the Alien (Appeals) Order 1970. Although the new legislation came with significant restrictions, it enabled individuals to challenge decisions by the Home Office. Dutschke was one of the first aliens to make use of this appeals process. His case was heard by an Immigration Appeals Tribunal from 17-22 December 1970. The members of the panel were chosen by James Callaghan and Gerald Austin Gardiner. Although the Tribunal acted in a purely advisory capacity and the witnesses were not sworn in, the order of events was very similar to that of a normal court case. Dutschke’s legal team (led by Basil Wigoder, QC) invited ten witnesses. Among these witnesses were medical experts, academics, politicians, and supporters from the UK. They were cross-examined the Attorney-General Sir Peter Rawlinson, who represented the Home Office. Since Maudling had justified his decision to expel Dutschke from the country on the grounds of national security, critical evidence in the case

remained undisclosed and one entire day of hearings took place *in camera*. On that day, the tribunal discussed evidence presented by Callaghan and by the National Security Service. The Tribunal presented a major challenge to Dutschke. He and his legal team had to create and perform a narrative of disability that was perceived as consistent and convincing. In other words, to win his case Dutschke had to “pass” as disabled before the Tribunal.

Generally speaking, passing denotes the process of being seen as part of a group from which one would otherwise be excluded. The concept gained prominence in African-American literature in the second half of the nineteenth century and has been used since to describe and analyse the ways in which Black people and people of mixed race have tried to avoid slavery, racial hatred and stigmatisation by passing as white.<sup>35</sup> Passing is also used in gender and sexuality studies, where it refers to the ways in which people choose (and/or have) to be perceived as a gender other than that expected. In this context, it can also be used to describe the ways in which people perform sexuality, e.g. bisexual women passing as gay and straight.<sup>36</sup> In recent years, scholars in disability studies have adopted and adapted the concept of passing. As Jeffrey A. Brune and Daniel J. Wilson highlight, disability passing occurs in different contexts and for a range of reasons:

Most often, the term refers to the way people conceal social markers of impairment to avoid the stigma of disability and pass as ‘normal.’ However, it also applies to other ways people manage their identities, which can include exaggerating a condition to get some type of benefit or care.<sup>37</sup>

Because it is never about perceived markers of disability alone, disability passing needs to be analysed through an intersectional lens. The implications of being seen as disabled vary depending on a range of other factors, including race, gender, sexuality, age, and class and can be far-reaching.

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<sup>35</sup> Prominent examples include Frances E.W. Harper’s *Iola Leroy*, Jessie Faucet’s *Plum Bum*, James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, Charles Chesnutt’s *The House behind the Cedars*, and Nella Larsen’s *Passing*. For a detailed discussion, see Ramsey, “A Study of Black Identity in ‘Passing’ Novels of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century,”; Pfeiffer, *Race Passing and American Individualism*.

<sup>36</sup> Lingel, “Adjusting the Borders: Bisexual Passing and Queer Theory,”

<sup>37</sup> Brune and Wilson, “Introduction,” 2.

Dutschke was a heterosexual white cisgender man<sup>38</sup> with academic ambitions, who wanted (and was expected) to provide for his young family. But Dutschke's desire to pass as abled was not merely an expression of his masculinity. It was also an expression of his political beliefs: taking inspiration from the political philosophy of Ernst Bloch, hope was a central category in his thinking.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, by passing as abled, he wanted to send a clear message to his political allies and opponents: I will not give in to public pressure and attacks by the far right, and I will continue to fight for political change.<sup>40</sup>

As Jeffrey A. Brune and Daniel J. Wilson highlight, passing as (dis)abled "blurs the lines between disability and normality, but those lines are not always sharp to begin with."<sup>41</sup> In everyday life, Dutschke frequently passed as "normal," but sometimes this led to problems and misunderstandings. For example, anecdotal evidence suggests that some fellows at Clare Hall considered him rude, because he joined them for lunch in College without taking his hat off. Of course, they did not know that Dutschke wore hats to hide the sensitive scar tissue on his head. Although Dutschke was almost thirty years old when he moved to the UK, he was initially too scared to leave the house without his wife. This led to anxiety attacks when he had to take the children to kindergarten, buy groceries, or perform other everyday activities without Gretchen's help. If someone moved towards him quickly and/or carried an object that could be mistaken for a gun, Dutschke feared for his life. He suffered from concentration problems, language difficulties and other health problems and had to take strong medication, but he didn't want to think of himself as disabled. However, his case against the Home Office left no room for such ambiguities and

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<sup>38</sup> While the term "transgender" is now widely recognised and used, "cisgender" is much less frequently used although the two are closely linked. "Cisgender individuals are people whose gender identity aligns with the gender assigned at birth." Anderson, "Cisgender Men and Trans Prejudice: Relationships With Sexual Orientation and Gender Self-Esteem," 373.

<sup>39</sup> Unlike other critical theorists whose works have influenced the New Left, Bloch remained a vocal defender of utopian thinking. In three volumes, his *The Principle of Hope* offered a new approach to utopia. Bloch believed "that by activating the unfulfilled claims of the past in this way, we can work towards creating a future of peace, plenty, and harmony with nature," and this hope was shared by Dutschke and other student activists. Moir, "Ernst Bloch: The Principle of Hope," 202.

<sup>40</sup> As a diary entry from 5 January 1971 illustrates, Dutschke was preparing himself for both a positive and a negative outcome and made plans for public statements that he wanted to use to mobilise against the political establishment. HIS, RUD 105,04, Kopien von Tagebucheintragungen 1970–1971, 30.5.1970

<sup>41</sup> Brune and Wilson, "Introduction," 2.

contradictions. As Camilla Lundberg and Eva Simonsen highlight, “[p]rediction, objectivity, universalism and classification occupy central decisions within the legal system.”<sup>42</sup> Within this legal tradition, individuals are categorised as disabled **or** abled, and people with disabilities need to conform to prevailing stereotypes and narratives of disability to pass as disabled.

Although Dutschke’s friends had successfully utilised the sentimental narrative of disability when applying for his medical visa and when trying to mobilise support, his plan to pursue a PhD in the UK did not fit into this narrative. A key aim of Dutschke’s legal team was thus to convince the panel that Dutschke was still very ill. Rather than being seen as evidence that he was ‘normal’ again, they argued that his plan to complete a postgraduate degree in the UK should be understood as a critical step in his recovery process. In his opening speech, Basil Wigoder emphasised this point:

This is not a matter of somebody saying: “I am quite better now, my convalescence has finished; please may I be a student?” What Mr Dutschke is saying is, with his medical advisers, is that his convalescence has now got to the stage where it is possible for him to work as a graduate student in secluded conditions. The two matters of convalescence and study are not mutually exclusive.<sup>43</sup>

John Reginald Wallace Greave, a consultant neurosurgeon to the Cambridge hospitals who had examined Dutschke several times, supported this claim. While he regarded most of Dutschke’s physical handicaps to be permanent, he argued there was a good chance that Dutschke’s speech function would keep on improving should he be allowed to pursue a PhD.<sup>44</sup> The Tribunal was not convinced by this line of argument. In their concluding statement, the panel members claimed that Dutschke could continue his rehabilitation in another country and pursue a PhD there.<sup>45</sup>

Rather than performing disability in a way that fitted into one of the conventional narratives, Dutschke wanted to prove that he had overcome the physical and psychological damage caused by

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<sup>42</sup> Lundberg and Simonsen “Disability in court: intersectionality and rule of law,” 16.

<sup>43</sup> IMMIGRATION APPEALS TRIBUNAL, Mr Alfred Willi Dutschke (Appellant) and The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent), Verbatim Report, “Day I – Thursday, 17 December, 1970,” 27.

<sup>44</sup> IMMIGRATION APPEALS TRIBUNAL, Mr Alfred Willi Dutschke (Appellant) and The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent), Verbatim Report, “Day II – Friday, 18 December, 1970,” 6.

<sup>45</sup> IMMIGRATION APPEALS TRIBUNAL, Mr Alfred Willi Dutschke (Appellant) and The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent), “Determination and Reasons,” 17.

the assassination attempt and did everything he could to pass as abled. The transcripts illustrate that he provided his testimony in English and was able to understand and answer most questions. As a diary entry from 26 December 1970 illustrates, he considered this to be a major achievement:

An altercation in a foreign language gave me much joy and pleasure. My capability for purposeful aggression showed itself, clarity and political-subversive humour came together, in part a further development of the past. The momentum of practice as the driving force revealed itself in extraordinary clarity. The “pig” worked and asked without logic, which is why it was particularly easy to attack him.<sup>46</sup>

For the most part, the interactions during the Tribunal confirmed Dutschke’s narrative of overcoming and boosted his confidence in his ability to engage in political fights. In diary entries from this period, he referred to his opponents dismissively as “pigs” and “paper tigers.” Dutschke was hopeful that he would win the case, but these hopes proved to be deceptive.

On 19 January 1971, the Tribunal declared that they supported the Home Secretary’s decision to expel Dutschke from the UK. In their explanatory statement, they claimed that the appellant’s discussions with friends and associations had “far exceeded normal social activities” and that there “must without doubt be risk in his continued presence.”<sup>47</sup> Dutschke did not conceal the fact he was interested in politics and discussed political questions with friends. He was equally open about the fact that his friends included radical intellectuals and political activists such as Ulrike Meinhof, Horst Mahler, Herbert Marcuse, Ernest Mandel, Bahman Nirumand, Aki Orr, Daniel Cohn Bendit, and Elisabeth Käsemann. Yet, he did not see that as a problem. In his view, engaging in political debates was not the same as engaging in political activity, and he saw it as a fundamental right to discuss politics:

This is not an element of political activity of Dutschke. But Dutschke has the right to be a human being in a country, to discuss where he is. If he would be isolated, Dutschke with only his kids and his wife, your country would be nothing but a dictatorship.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> HIS, RUD 105,04, “Kopien von Tagebucheintragen 1970–1971”, 26.12.1970.

<sup>47</sup> IMMIGRATION APPEALS TRIBUNAL, Mr Alfred Willi Dutschke (Appellant) and The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent), “Determination and Reasons,” 18.

<sup>48</sup> IMMIGRATION APPEALS TRIBUNAL, Mr Alfred Willi Dutschke (Appellant) and The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent), “Day III, Saturday, 19 December, 1970,” 4.

As this statement illustrates, Dutschke occasionally switched from the first to the third person when talking about himself. Interestingly, there was no obvious reason for this behaviour. When asked whether he was “plotting any sort of revolution with [Gaston] Salvatore and Nirumand,” he replied “How could I do that?.” Just a little later, he added: “Everybody knows what happened with Dutschke physically. So how could he come to plot?”<sup>49</sup> While it is impossible to assess retrospectively whether this use of the third person was intentional, it suggests that Dutschke aware of his public profile and was trying to look at himself through the eyes of others.

Although he was very composed during the hearing and managed to respond to questions and comments from his opponents in a remarkably sophisticated way, a closer look at the verbatim transcript of the hearing reveals that there were times when he struggled to pass as abled. On day 3 of the hearing, the General Attorney cross-examined Dutschke:

Q Apart from the Government of Israel, is he [Aki Orr] very opposed to the Government of France? A. Would you ask once more the question, please? I do not understand

Q He is very opposed to the Government of France as well as the Government of Israel? A. I cannot understand your question. Who is France?

Q Do you know anything about his movements in May of 1968 in Paris? A. Whose movements?

Q Mr. Orr’s? A. I know he was not in May in France—nothing more.<sup>50</sup>

It is important to acknowledge that even people without any impairments can find it difficult to remain focused during lengthy court hearings. However, as this and other passages in the transcript illustrate, there were times when Dutschke found it difficult to understand what certain words (e.g. France) mean. Interestingly enough, neither the General Attorney nor Dutschke paid much attention to his comprehension and language problems. Both continued the examination as if nothing had happened—probably because Dutschke wanted to prove to himself and the world that he had

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<sup>49</sup> IMMIGRATION APPEALS TRIBUNAL, Mr Alfred Willi Dutschke (Appellant) and The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent), “Day III, Saturday, 19 December, 1970,” 13.

<sup>50</sup> IMMIGRATION APPEALS TRIBUNAL, Mr Alfred Willi Dutschke (Appellant) and The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent), “Day III, Saturday, 19 December, 1970,” 3.

overcome his disabilities, whereas the Home Office representative wanted to prove to the members of the panel that Dutschke's continued presence posed a threat to national security. Although the Tribunal's support for the Home Office's decision to expel Dutschke meant that he lost his case and had to leave, the hearing marked an important milestone in his narrative of overcoming. Rather than being pitied, he was seen as a serious political opponent. On the last day of the hearing, Dutschke scribbled on his notepad: "We will win! We will sleep tonight! Even if we lose!"<sup>51</sup>

3. Conclusion: passing and its pitfalls and the ableism of the West German student movement

Although Dutschke lost his appeal against the Home Office, he considered it a success: he passed as abled and was taken seriously as researcher and political activist. While this shows that the narrative of overcoming can be used in ways that enable individuals with disabilities to develop a sense of empowerment, the Dutschke case also shows the limitations of this and other dominant narratives of disability. He was still confronted with the same stereotypes and expectations as many other people with disabilities. As highlighted previously, the Tribunal refused to see the ambiguities and contradictions in the life of a disabled man who did not identify as such. Essentially, Dutschke had two options: try to pass as disabled before the Tribunal to stay in the UK under the same conditions as previously *or* try to pass as abled and risk being expelled from the country. Although he wanted to stay, he was not willing to conform to prevailing narratives and stereotypes of disability and was determined to pursue a PhD. By passing as abled, Dutschke sent a powerful message to his political allies and opponents. Unsurprisingly the Tribunal saw this as evidence of a remarkable recovery and expressed support for the Home Secretary's decision that the young family had to leave the country.

After leaving England, the Dutschkes moved to Aarhus, Denmark, where Rudi continued his studies and worked as a tutor at the University. In 1973, he submitted his PhD thesis at the Free University Berlin. In the mid-1970s, he began to prepare his return to Germany. In those years, he realised that it was virtually impossible for him to get a job at a German University, and he referred

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<sup>51</sup> HIS, RUD 310, 08, "Initiativen zur Abwehr der Ausweisung aus Großbritannien/ Bemühungen um einen Studienplatz in Dänemark."

to himself as “an unemployed person (with a lot of work).”<sup>52</sup> While this meant that he was still struggling to provide for his family, he appreciated that he could dedicate a significant part of his time and energy to political struggles. In the 1970s, Dutschke developed a keen interest in feminism and environmentalism. However, there is no evidence that he engaged with the emerging disability rights movement.

While efforts by disabled people to organise themselves in groups and campaign for their rights can be traced back further in history,<sup>53</sup> the 1970s saw a global wave of disability rights activism.<sup>54</sup> In the FRG, disabled activists appropriated the derogative term “Krüppel” [cripple] in the late 1970s to highlight that they did not want to be seen as occasions for narcissistic pity and had no interest in being “normal.” A crucial moment in the formation of the German disability movement was the so-called “crip-tribunal” [Krüppeltribunal], which took place in Dortmund in 1981 on the occasion of the UN International Year of Disabled Persons.<sup>55</sup> In the tradition of the Vietnam Tribunal and other activist-led Russell Tribunals in the 1960s and 1970s, the organisers of the crip-tribunal took a very different approach from that underpinning the Dutschke Tribunal. In at the tribunal in Dortmund, it was the state and its treatment of disabled people that were scrutinised and challenged by people with disabilities. According to Heike Raab, topics included human rights abuses in homes for disabled people, sheltered workshops, and psychiatric institutions as well as problems in public transport.<sup>56</sup> The tribunal led to a range of other networks and events including the first national gathering of “crip women” in 1982 in Marburg, which activists used as a platform to discuss the specific experiences of discrimination and violence made by women with disabilities. More than 10 years later, the sentence “Nobody shall be discriminated because of their disability” was finally

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<sup>52</sup> Dutschke, Club 2-Diskussion, ORF, 13/14 June 1978, quoted after Karl, *Rudi Dutschke*, 476.

<sup>53</sup> Examples include veteran organisations, the National Association of the Deaf (founded in 1880), and the League of the Physically Handicapped in New York. Pelka, *What We Have Done: An Oral History of the Disability Rights Movement*, 19.

<sup>54</sup> James Fleischer and Zames, *The disability rights movement: from Charity to Confrontation*.

<sup>55</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the significance of the crip tribunal to the disability rights movement in Germany, see Köbsell, “Towards Self-Determination and Equalization: A Short History of the German Disability Rights Movement.”

<sup>56</sup> Raab, “Dis/Ability, Feminismus und Geschlecht,” 103.

added to Article 3 of the German Constitution, but the struggle against the discrimination of disabled people in Germany and many other countries continues.<sup>57</sup>

Fred Pelka rightly emphasises that the political struggle of the disability rights movement for equal citizenship “has been little short of revolutionary.”<sup>58</sup> Rudi Dutschke did not live long enough to see this revolutionary struggle unfold. In December 1979, he died a sudden and tragic death. He drowned whilst having a bath in his home after suffering an epileptic fit. The fact that Dutschke took a bath without anyone looking out for him may suggest to some that he had been so convinced by his own narrative of overcoming that he ignored key home safety guidelines for people with epilepsy. Regardless of how one narrates this tragic event, Dutschke's death did not bring about a critical debate concerning (dis)ability in the West German student movement; it rather reinforced his iconic status as a hero and martyr of the '68ers. As this article has shown, Dutschke's strong desire to live up to the ableist ideals of revolutionary activism in the West German student movement enabled him to make a remarkable recovery after the shooting in 1968. However, he paid for these ideals with his life. Future research will have to assess how the ableism of the West German student movement affected the life and work of Hans-Jürgen Krahl and other activists.

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<sup>57</sup> “Menschen mit Behinderung nicht benachteiligen,” Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/menschen-mit-behinderung-nicht-benachteiligen-409764> (accessed September 17, 2019).

<sup>58</sup> Pelka, *What We Have Done*, 4.

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