

The Western Connection

Western Support for the East German Opposition

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Without help from the west, the small East German opposition, such as it was, never would have achieved as much as it did. The money, moral support, media attention, and protection provided by western supporters may have made as much of a difference to the opposition as West German financial support made to the East German state. Yet this help was often resented and rarely acknowledged by eastern activists. Between 1988 and 1990, I worked with Arche, an environmental network created in 1988 by East German dissidents. During that time, the assistance provided by West Germans, émigré East Germans, and foreigners met with a level of distrust that cannot entirely be blamed on secret police intrigue. Outsiders who tried to help faced a barrage of allegations and criticism of their work and motives. Dissidents who elected to remain in East Germany distrusted those who emigrated, and vice versa, reflecting an unfortunate tendency, even among dissidents, to internalize elements of East German propaganda. Yet neither the help and support the East German opposition received from outside nor the mentalities that stood in its way have been much discussed. This essay offers a description and analysis of the relationship between the opposition and its outside supporters, based largely on one person's first-hand experience.

Between Two Worlds

The small and embattled East German opposition suffered from bitter internal conflicts, and Arche was no exception. Arche emerged

out of the Environmental Library (*Umweltbibliothek*) in East Berlin, a lively and rather anarchic center founded in 1986 that included a library of forbidden West German and foreign literature, a café, performance and exhibition spaces, and a loose network of young environmental activists. Like many of the dissident and “alternative” groups that sprung up in the 1980s, it formed under the umbrella of the Lutheran church, and was even housed in a church office building in the dilapidated working-class district of Prenzlauer Berg. The UB, as it was called, published a magazine with information on environmental issues and other topics not otherwise available in East Germany; though it was technically legal, as an “inner church” publication, its publishers frequently faced government harassment. The UB was even raided and several members arrested in late 1987, sparking an unprecedented outpouring of protest.

The founders of the UB—which soon spawned independent offshoots in many East German towns and cities—were longtime dissidents in their thirties and forties who had found environmental issues a useful platform from which to criticize the government. Peace and human rights movements could be persecuted by the regime as subversive of state security. But while environmental data were treated as state secrets, the problems—from catastrophic air and water pollution to the death of forests to the deterioration of beautiful old buildings and city centers in places like Potsdam and Dresden—were so obvious and all encompassing that no government could entirely demonize those working for their betterment.

But some of those same old-time activists found the loose, educationally oriented format of the Environmental Library dissatisfying and envisioned a more organized, regionally focused network of environmental activism that could unite and support the many environmental groups that had formed independently throughout the country. They hoped to exercise more concrete political influence. Some even dreamed of using the opportunities they believed East Germany’s own political structures provided—such as formation of parties and election monitoring—and of entering the institutions, as had the West German Greens, in order to change them. But their attempts to form such a network within the UB brought them into conflict with the anarchic tendencies of many of the UB’s members, who were suspicious of any kind of authority or structure. In 1988,

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the conflict escalated, the “heretics” were expelled from the Environmental Library, and Arche became a separate organization.

To observers from outside East Germany, the battles that raged between these opposition groups seemed relatively unimportant; we were not part of that world. Most of us had gained entrée into East German society through personal and often accidental contacts, and whom we helped depended on the same happenstance. When I arrived in West Berlin in 1987, eager to get to know the alien communist east, a journalist friend introduced me to environmental activists in East Berlin. Arche did not yet exist, but its future founders were already mulling the sensible idea of establishing networks between the various environmental groups in East Germany. The purposeful disruption of communication in East Germany by the state was, after all, one of the fundamental obstructions to the development of some form of civil society. To an outsider, Arche’s attempt to bring the environmental groups together, to share experience and knowledge, and eliminate the constant need to reinvent the wheel, seemed logical, as did their interest in working with the western media, with an eye to its significant East German audience.

At the start I was just one of a motley group of people from various countries who enjoyed spending time in East Germany. The living room of East German activist Carlo Jordan served as an informal meeting place for many of us. Jordan, a shaggy-haired, bearded man with a stubborn, direct personality, was a construction engineer and student of philosophy in his late thirties with a firm commitment to environmental activism and to East Germany. He had read Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* as a young man and, unable to travel to the west, made do with extensive travels in the east, hitchhiking through the Soviet Union, Poland, and other countries of the eastern bloc. Later he participated in various dissident groups and finally cofounded the Environmental Library. His activism eventually earned him a prohibition on travel, and by the late 1980s, Jordan was essentially a prisoner in his own country. But he had no desire to emigrate. Instead, as he put it, “I let the world come to me.” The various visitors who frequented his home could often be convinced to smuggle something to the west, make a phone call to someone on the other side of the Berlin Wall, or deliver information to West German contacts. This eagerness to help stemmed partly from a sense of adventure

and partly, also, from shame: visitors inevitably found themselves embarrassed to enjoy the warmth and hospitality of eastern friends, given their own privileged lives in the west, and wanted to give something back. The easterners, for their part, were at least vaguely aware of this feeling, and were certainly more than willing to take advantage of it.

In summer of 1988, one of Arche's cofounders, Ulrich Neumann, a psychologist, emigrated to West Berlin, thus initiating a new phase in Arche's work. Neumann began working in the west with Roland Jahn, a former dissident from Jena who had been thrown out of East Germany in 1986, chained inside a train to ensure that he would not return. Jahn had become a television journalist, producing pieces about the East German opposition, coordinating underground dissident media activities, and helping supply the opposition with money and materials. Like most political émigrés, neither he nor Neumann was permitted to travel to the east.

Neumann and Jordan asked me to take on a new role as a go-between between their two worlds, and I agreed. The cause was a good one, and, perhaps more important, I liked the people. Both Neumann and I were lonely expatriates in a strange culture, and we enjoyed spending time together. At the beginning of 1989 we were joined by Andrea Dunai, a young Hungarian woman whose boyfriend, Falk Zimmermann, belonged to Arche's inner circle. Zimmermann was one of the few East Germans to have studied advertising, and he was efficient, westernized, always up on the latest technology. He was also a Stasi informer, doing his best to obstruct what we achieved, but there was no way any of us could have known that at the time. Dunai's Hungarian passport allowed her to shuttle easily between East and West Berlin.

Dunai and I never really had a complete overview of the situation in the east and how our work fit in. In part, this was a security precaution—after all, we were dealing with a paranoid dictatorship, and there was reason to be secretive. But another reason for our somewhat limited access to information was that we were working exclusively with men—the leadership of the opposition in both west and east was primarily male—and they simply did not take women entirely seriously. This was frustrating, but it could also be an advantage, since the same prejudice also made us less obviously threatening to the state.

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Dunai and I crossed the Berlin Wall for Arche several times each week between 1988 and 1989. We brought over news that could not be passed on over the bugged telephones, carried messages in both directions, and helped organize meetings and cooperative activities. We were rarely asked to smuggle concrete materials such as letters, newspapers, or books, which were generally carried by diplomats and journalists with special entry privileges; these channels were jealously guarded by the few who had access to them, and we knew little about them. Perhaps our most important task was far more abstract: to transport the atmosphere, the human side of life, from one side of the wall to the other, and thus keep the most important channels of contact alive.

This attempt to act as go-betweens for two worlds proved more difficult than one might expect, given the close proximity of East and West Berlin and the increasing permeability of the Berlin Wall in the late 1980s. Arche's "coordinating council," the semiformal inner circle that met regularly to plan and organize the group's work, consisted of young environmental activists, most of whom had never seen the west. It was almost impossible to make them understand the difficulties that had to be overcome in working in West Berlin and the problems facing Neumann and Jahn in trying to organize media attention for their friends in the east. At the same time, the battles over power and responsibility being fought out in the east, about which we were constantly informed on our visits, seemed trivial from a western perspective. A major theme in the east, for example, was the tension between the Arche leadership in Berlin and the regional representatives, who distrusted what they saw as the Berliners' "centralist" tendencies. This was understandable from an eastern point of view: it reflected resistance to East German centralism in general as well as resentment of Berlin's favored position in the national distribution of money and goods. But none of this held the significance for observers in the west that it did for the easterners.

East-West Prejudice

Arche never gave Neumann independent responsibility for his work in the west, despite his unflagging efforts. The eastern Arche

attempted—in all seriousness, and against all reason—to supervise and oversee his work in West Berlin from the east. Thus Dunai and I were, for example, placed in the immensely frustrating position of having to mediate a discussion over how Neumann was to present himself when he appeared in television pieces on Arche. Should he call himself an Arche member, or an Arche representative, or could he say he was an Arche cofounder? The easterners seemed unable to comprehend what Neumann and Jahn tried repeatedly to explain—how hard it was to get a piece about Arche on television at all, and how much more important this was than what Neumann called himself.

Indeed, although most East Germans watched western television and received a great deal of their information through it, significant hostility also existed toward the western media and those East German dissidents and emigrés, like Neumann, Jahn, and Jordan, who attempted to use it. Dissidents accused western and émigré journalists who reported on East Germany of exploiting their subjects and condemned Arche's leaders for supposedly using their relatively infrequent appearances on western television as a form of self-promotion. But while it may have been true that a need for personal recognition played a role in the activities East German opposition leaders undertook, it was also true that Arche's increased presence in the media provided protection to all the activists in the east, as well as brought in money and supplies.

It is difficult to adequately explain the origins of these recriminations. They may have resulted from the inability of people raised in a noncapitalist society to understand the power and influence of media images. Or they may have sprung simply from envy; if more had been written and shown about grassroots environmental groups in Dresden or Leipzig and people there had been able to see themselves on television, their hostility might well have evaporated. But the logistical situation in East Germany made reporting from outside East Berlin very difficult.

Another cause may have been East Germans' fear of being coopted by the west, in an apparent internalization of East German paranoia about the west in general. But whatever the reason, many people resisted the idea of cooperating with western media and viewed it with great suspicion. This brought consequences that sometimes seemed completely nonsensical from a western perspective. In 1988,

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several Arche members, in cooperation with West German journalists and at great personal risk to themselves, made an unprecedented clandestine film about the horribly polluted East German chemical center of Bitterfeld. When it finally appeared on western television, where it was viewed by a huge audience of East Germans, Ulrich Neumann was criticized for “allowing” the film to be shown in the west—before it had a chance to premiere in an East Berlin church!

Arche’s leadership also showed its distrust by insisting on seeing receipts for money spent—money they only had because Neumann had collected it—while at the same time constantly demanding computers, cameras, portable electronics, measuring instruments, tape recorders, and other western equipment—at a time when Neumann himself still had no computer.

Dunai and I tried our best to describe the situation in the west to those in the east and to soften the criticisms we passed along to Neumann, but he also received calls and letters from colleagues in the east that conveyed the same suspicions. The Stasi doubtless helped instigate some of the resentments, but they fell on fertile soil, fueled by a curious yet typically East German anger at emigrants, an unspoken accusation of betrayal. The barrage of criticism wounded Neumann deeply; he was not a person who could simply ignore such hostility. He worked conscientiously and meticulously, felt a great obligation to Arche, and craved in return its trust and perhaps also its gratitude.

But criticisms of the east from a western perspective could be equally one-sided, particularly when every visit to the east revealed just how much Arche was achieving there. Once they reached the west, émigrés from the east tended to remember what they had left behind as childish and backward, as though they had forgotten the obstacles against which they, too, had once struggled. The efforts necessary to produce Arche Nova, Arche’s informative semi-underground publication on the environment, for example, without copy machines, telephones, decent printing presses or even sufficient paper were overwhelming. The publication, printed under the aegis of the Lutheran church, strove to present serious scientific reporting on East German environmental issues in the broadest sense: air pollution, factory farming, nuclear power plants, the death of forests, city planning and the deterioration of housing stock. It occasionally

made forays into even more risky terrain, such as the history of Stalinism. In contrast to other underground publications, most of its authors openly signed their names to their work. Using old-fashioned mimeograph machines, the organization produced 1,500 to 2,000 copies of this 50 to 100-page publication, which were sold at church events and then passed from hand to hand. Each copy was most likely read, in true samizdat fashion, by dozens if not hundreds of people.

Arche strove, against all odds, to build a communications network in a country that tried its hardest to disrupt communication. In the process, it battled a lack of resources, pressure from above, and, as if this were not enough, petty criticisms from its own ranks. Arche's leaders were frequently accused of centralization, self-promotion, and even of trying to create a Politburo. As in all organizations, some people were more willing to take on responsibility than others, thus ending up with leadership functions, and this was resented—not an uncommon response, but an unfortunate one in such a small dissident community. But despite these criticisms, Arche was anything but centralized. Indeed, one of its founding principles was regionalism. It was divided into regional sections, following the old German state borders that had been abolished by the Communist regime. Each region had its own coordinators, activists, and publications within the larger organization. Because of the technical difficulty of communication, too, members and leaders of Arche traveled constantly from town to town to meet with member groups, interacting with people locally, and keeping abreast of concerns outside of Berlin.

This communication also worked in reverse. A wide variety of people sought out Arche, and they were received with great openness. Unlike other opposition groups, for example, Arche did not close its doors to *Ausreiser*, people who had applied to emigrate. Such people raised suspicion elsewhere; they were known for becoming involved in dissident activity merely to increase their chances of obtaining permission to leave. But many were well-educated young scientists, academics, and other professionals frustrated by the lack of opportunities in East Germany. Ulrich Neumann himself, for example, came to the group as an ambitious psychology PhD who had applied to leave the country. Arche ultimately benefited from

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integrating these Ausreiser into the group and giving them a chance to put their talents to constructive use.

Nor did Arche spend inordinate amounts of time worrying about Stasi informers, unlike other groups that expended energy in periodic purges of suspected spies. Arche did have informers in its ranks, and the core leadership exercised a degree of caution in spreading word of cooperative activities with western groups. But in response to concerns about infiltration, Jordan liked to assert, "We aren't doing anything illegal." That might not have been literally true from the East German government's standpoint, but it gave Arche a sense of confidence and thus the courage to be open.

Western Responses

Support from the west also meant support from the West German political parties. Yet for West Germany's mainstream parties, solidarity with their unfortunate "brothers and sisters" in the east, as East Germans were frequently and patronizingly referred to, remained a pleasant but relatively meaningless concept. After all, eastern dissidents insisted on criticizing harmful West German as well as East German behavior, rather than sticking to the more sympathetic role of critics and victims of communism that would have endeared them to West German officialdom. For example, when East and West German environmentalists discovered that West Germany was paying East Germany to take toxic waste off its hands, Arche wrote an official letter of complaint to the CDU minister of the environment, Klaus Toepfer. Toepfer's office never responded. Government officials clearly preferred dealing with government officials, whether communist or capitalist. In general, it was the Greens, rather than the SPD or CDU, that provided at least rudimentary concrete support to the East German opposition.

But even the Greens and their Berlin sister party, the Alternative Liste, the most open and liberal of the parties, suffered from a fundamental ignorance of all things East German. In February 1989, Jordan was allowed to take a two-week trip to the West—his first opportunity to travel in years, ostensibly to celebrate an uncle's eightieth birthday. He traveled through West Germany on a sort of

Arche publicity tour, meeting with Greenpeace, the Greens, and the environmental organization BUND. In the process, it became shockingly clear how little even these progressive West Germans knew about the east. An environmental group, showing off their offices, asked casually whether Arche could hook up to their Green computer network. At that time, dissidents in East Germany would have been happy to have telephones! Another group displayed their fax machine—relatively new technology at the time—and offered to send communications to Arche via fax. Perhaps most distressing was a Green party conference in the Ruhr region at which Jordan, the oddity from the east, wasn't even asked to speak. The fact that even Green party members were unable to recognize and capitalize on the unique opportunity to hear about ecological problems in East Germany from an involved eyewitness was further evidence of western German ignorance and disinterest in regard to the East German dissident movement. Perhaps they were not so different from their eastern counterparts in this inability to look beyond party politics and internal disputes.

The West German left looked back on a history of conflict with the reactionary, anticommunist right, including the unregenerate ex-Nazis who held powerful positions in West Germany well into the 1960s, and this conflict had often placed them in the position of defending the East German state. Perhaps for this reason, many left-leaning westerners preferred not to know about or deal with East German realities, and especially not with East German dissidents who called their own system into question. Anything from “over there” was thus viewed by many with smug condescension, if not total disinterest. Thus on his trip, Jordan was treated as an exotic creature, passed from hand to hand, admired and exclaimed over. Only a handful of people really seemed to take him seriously—especially the few who occasionally visited the east themselves, such as Green Party founder Petra Kelly.

Neumann, for a long time the only Arche representative in the west, tried to counter this ignorance with the limited means at his disposal, using the media as much as possible. Soon after his emigration, and solely due to his efforts, Arche began to make a name for itself in the west. Neumann hoped to increase its level of recognition—in order to protect people in the east and to make it easier to

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obtain materials (money, paper, ink, video equipment, computers) and other support.

My contribution included hours of copying fifty-page Arche Novas to send to interested people in western Europe and abroad, always in hopes of a donation. I also compiled an increasingly thick press folder on Arche so that people in both east and west could get a sense of how and to what extent the media reported on Arche. When the underground film on Bitterfeld appeared, I translated it into English and tried, largely in vain, to create some interest in the United States. In general, to Americans at the time East Germany represented little more than a mysterious black hole, as it would remain until the Berlin Wall fell on 9 November 1989.

Scandinavian journalists had better luck: in 1988 and 1989, Gitte Merrild, a Danish journalist, and Anne-Christine Jansson, a Swedish photographer, reported frequently together on East German environmental problems, while also occasionally smuggling Arche Novas over the border. Merrild helped organize a meeting between Arche and the Danish environmental minister when the minister paid an official visit to East Germany. A Danish friend smuggled an invitation to the minister, Merrild reported on it, and the unusual meeting did in fact take place. Meetings of this sort had particular importance, as they lent Arche a degree of international recognition—and not incidentally, also very much annoyed the East German government.

Ulrich Neumann always counseled caution. At the time I thought his concerns were exaggerated; today we know the paranoia was probably justified. In any case, one had to follow certain rules when crossing the inner German border: never name names over the telephone, not even in the west (names were replaced by descriptions such as “our red-haired friend” and “our bearded friend”), never bring address books when going to the east (as border guards could and would photocopy them), and always talk about important things outside, never indoors. As exciting as this may sound in retrospect, the reality proved both annoying and upsetting, even though the only danger an American faced was a ban on travel to East Germany.

But Arche had Stasi informers in its own ranks, and so, despite all the precautions, in February 1989 my name was also added to the East German border guards’ computers. This meant long waits at passport control, while the primitive Robotron computer checked out

my name and people on line behind me threw dirty looks as though it was I, and not the repressive East German system, that was at fault. It also meant long questioning and searches at the border. Like most Americans who spent time in the east, I appear in the Stasi files as a possible CIA agent (rumors of this sort were also passed on to the East Germans with whom I worked). Ironically, the Stasi had difficulty imagining why any American would want to spend time in East Germany without an ulterior motive. In addition to private details, the files also contain the remark that “Cooper takes almost all her notes in a very strange code.” This was not entirely false—I did, in fact, take most of my notes in shorthand English. Andrea Dunai had it even better: she noted down everything in Hungarian, which probably seemed even stranger to the internationalists at the Stasi.

Arche Activities

Much of Arche’s activity involved assembling the most basic, concrete data on environmental issues—not an easy task in a country where all kinds of information constituted a state secret, and revealing it a crime. Here Arche’s contacts with experts and scientists, many of them working in institutions that allowed them access to such information, had its most significant results. A project group on water performed water quality analyses, held informational seminars, and obtained government directives on environmental secrecy that were published in the Arche journal. Doctors assembled information on rates of childhood respiratory illness in particularly polluted regions. City planning experts found information on the state of housing stock.

Arche also tested the opportunities provided in East German law but rarely taken advantage of. Its representatives sent petitions to government offices on a variety of subjects, from the demolition of buildings to the right to travel, and even met on occasion with government environmental officials. In 1989, utilizing the provisions of East German electoral laws, an Arche project group succeeded in monitoring local elections, proving that the 99 percent electoral victories regularly announced by the government were false.

More immediately relevant to outsiders, however, were the concrete “actions” Arche undertook in cooperation with western sup-

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porters. In general, few people could be privy to their planning, which contradicted Arche's claim to be a democratic organization, but couldn't be helped; it would have been foolish to ignore the omnipresence of the Stasi. The Bitterfeld film was among the most important east/west collaborations, involving coordination between western journalists and eastern environmentalists. Another significant project was a cooperative effort with Greenpeace. The organization hoped to send out 12,000 letters in East Germany containing information on the death of forests (those kinds of environmental data were state secrets in East Germany), accompanied by a preprinted postcard addressed to the East German minister of the environment, Hans Reichelt, calling for public access to environmental data. The first attempt failed when the courier bringing the material over was caught on the autobahn. Roland Jahn then brought Greenpeace together with Ulrich Neumann and Arche, and Greenpeace decided to try again with Arche's assistance. The Arche coordinating council accepted the proposal, and Greenpeace members met with their Arche counterparts in Berlin.

As in all such actions, the details had to be thoroughly planned, down to addressing the envelopes in such a way that not all of them would have the same handwriting, which would have drawn immediate suspicion. Siegbert Schefke, a well-connected, resourceful, and active East German supporter of various opposition groups, coordinated the task of obtaining 12,000 stamps in East Berlin. A member of the Green Party smuggled the material into East Germany by car. The mailing took place secretly, with only a few people among the initiated. Unfortunately, because Falk Zimmermann, the informer, was included in this small group, the Stasi managed to intercept 6,000 or so letters. But others got through, and Greenpeace in Hamburg received many phone calls and letters from throughout East Germany, so it was a partial success. Reportedly, too, the East German environmental minister did indeed receive some of the postcards.

Video Films

Andrea Dunai was mainly active as a go-between for Ulrich Neumann in West Berlin and her boyfriend Falk Zimmermann in the

East. Zimmerman had the Arche video camera, the most modern equipment Arche owned. It was one of several cameras supplied by Neumann and Jahn to East German dissidents, intended to allow them to collect interviews and other raw footage on unexplored aspects of East German life—environmental problems, dissident activities and the like—that could then be edited in the West and shown on West German news shows. This kind of filming, of course, was not authorized by the East German government, and producing these stories was not without danger.

But in Zimmermann's case, problems constantly arose; he seemed incapable of delivering usable films. A microphone mysteriously stopped working halfway through an interview on the impending demolition of Potsdam's historical Dutch quarter; pictures of dying East German forests came out shaky and unfocused. Although no one knew at the time about his Stasi activities, it was not entirely clear why Zimmermann was the only one who worked with the camera. No one else, it seemed, was interested, at least among Arche's inner circle. Certainly everyone wanted Arche films to be made and for Arche to get equipment, but no one was particularly eager to learn to use that equipment, even though western journalists offered to train them, and one such training session even took place. Dunai somewhat pointedly summed up the problem: "For the Arche people it was more important that the Arche Nova got printed on time and the Dresden water group held its workshop."

Those were the priorities in the east. This is not to belittle the importance of these activities, which formed the heart of Arche's work and were absolutely necessary for a network that had taken upon itself the goal of creating a functioning, independent organization in East Germany. But at the same time, the concentration on narrowly focused, internal projects to the exclusion of large-scale, broadly accessible projects, such as films, at times demonstrated a skewed view not only of the real possibilities of influence in east and west but also of the quite concrete connections between the money earned by the films, on the one hand, and the technical capabilities and other resources Arche enjoyed, on the other. Ultimately, Zimmermann kept the camera until the end, and continued to make imperfect films that drove Neumann—and the film editors he worked with in West Berlin—to distraction.

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Arche Berlin-Brandenburg (West)

The work for Arche gradually became too much for Neumann to handle on his own, since he was also trying to make a living in the west. In June 1989, he gathered several people around him to help support his efforts on Arche's behalf. Most were new immigrants from East Germany. Besides Ulrich and myself, the group consisted of Sieglinde and Charly Hieke, Reinhard Klaus and his wife Bärbel, and Jens Martens. Sieglinde Hieke was a computer expert and construction engineer; her husband Charly restored antique furniture. Sieglinde had been active in the committee attempting to monitor East German elections, and the Hieke family's application to emigrate had been hurriedly confirmed shortly before the notorious, rigged local elections of 7 May 1989. Klaus was an expert on water quality who had done the water analysis for the Bitterfeld film and left East Germany in May 1989. Martens, who came from West Germany, had studied economics and had contact, through church groups, with Arche and the Environmental Library in Grosshennersdorf, in the southeast corner of East Germany. Dunai did not participate directly in the group, but remained the go-between for Zimmermann and Neumann.

The reasons for becoming involved in Arche's western sister group had more to do with personal than political considerations, although we all considered Arche's work important. For non-easterners like Martens and myself, friendships with people in the east were the deciding factor. For the former East Germans in the group, various reasons played a role. Not untypically for East German émigré dissidents, they felt guilty for emigrating, as though they had deserted the cause and the people back home. It was important to them to keep up the contact. And the group's meetings were also social events that everyone enjoyed. The first meeting took place in a restaurant on Lehrter Bahnhof; later we met several times a month, often in people's apartments. We discussed various issues, especially the situation "over there," exchanged stories and information, and were given assignments by Neumann: people to talk to, materials to obtain and send, documents to copy, conferences to attend. With our help, Neumann made sure that computers, printing materials, and other technology made their way to Arche in the east,

and that media and government in the west remained aware of the environmental and human rights concerns raised by Arche in East Germany.

This Arche support group was to our knowledge the first, and perhaps only, western wing of an eastern group. The Berlin Environmental Library worked with people in the west but had no organized support group. Later attempts to organize a New Forum West, during the euphoric weeks prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, quickly ran afoul of the same resentments and accusations Arche experienced all the time. Carlo Jordan christened the group "Arche Berlin-Brandenburg (West)." I continued to take part irregularly in meetings of the coordinating council in the east, but the western group never had any official say in Arche policy.

The Hiekes threw themselves into the work with particular fervor. They had time on their hands and a strong need for something to do in the difficult period following their immigration. Their work consisted, among other things, of collecting material and equipment for various grassroots groups in the east. They began collecting in their tiny room in the emigrants' dormitory, and for years afterwards their cellar held second-hand printing presses they managed to obtain through newspaper ads. Martens, meanwhile, secured donations from the Green Party, although the funds did not become available until shortly after the wall fell. Neumann remained the one who kept track of the overall picture, kept up contacts with people in the west who were interested in Arche, and coordinated the media work.

Arche International

One of the responsibilities Arche West took on was that of representing the group at various environmental conferences. The group always first tried to get invitations for people from the east, although they were almost never permitted to travel. Thus we spoke in their name whenever possible.

International contacts and cross-border cooperation, especially in eastern Europe, were always among Arche's main goals, more so than was the case for many other opposition groups in East Germany. Arche already belonged to the eastern European ecological

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network Greenway. The idea that Arche might seek membership in an international group in the west, like Friends of the Earth (FOE), emerged in 1988 at an FOE meeting in Poland, and the groundwork was laid that same year by Neumann at another FOE meeting in Italy. The next major FOE conference was to take place in September 1989 in Washington, DC. As usual, it was impossible to get permission for East German representatives to go, and our west group decided instead to send Reinhard Klaus, the last one to leave East Germany, and me, because of my English. In Washington, we presented information about the environmental movement in East Germany, the environmental libraries, and Arche. FOE was very interested in eastern Europe; Poland had become a member, and some Estonians also took part in the Washington conference. With Arche, East Germany became the third eastern European country to have a group accepted as an associate member. FOE issued a statement about the environmental situation in East Germany, a level of international publicity that could only help the movement. Klaus and I did our best to distribute regional addresses and information, as well as the central Berlin contact information, in order to include the non-Berliners and offset their envy of Berlin.

In summer of 1989, Charly Hieke represented Arche at a conference of grassroots groups in Holland, where he showed the Bitterfeld film. The same year, Arche had a stand at the Protestant church conference in Berlin, where Edgar Wallisch, an émigré East German doctor and Arche member, Klaus, Martens, and I sold Arche Novas and press folders. When the Berlin Wall fell on 9 November 1989, Sieglinde Hieke was in Italy representing Arche at a FOE meeting about eastern Europe. She presented data and facts about coal mining and the east-west trade in toxic waste and encountered great interest and concern. These were all small steps, and they reached far fewer people than Arche's television appearances, but the group tried to take advantage of every opportunity for publicity.

The End

After the Berlin Wall fell, the first and last meeting between the core Arche leadership from the east and our support group in the west

took place in November 1989 in Neumann's apartment. The air was thick with tension. The fall of the wall had wreaked havoc on everyone's nerves, and all the problems within Arche rose to the surface. For most of us in the western group, Arche had lost its function as a necessary opposition group in the east; enough large, well-organized groups existed in the west that were concerned with the environment. Even if Arche's existence was still justified, we certainly saw no need for the continued existence of a western support group. In our view, the purpose of the meeting was to transfer documents and money so that Arche East could manage itself. Also, members of the western Arche group needed to air long pent-up frustrations and anger. The emigrants in the group were annoyed about the envy they had felt all along from the East Germans and their inability to comprehend the situation in the west, the daily struggle to survive. Neumann hoped finally to put an end to all the recriminations, and maybe also to determine why the eastern video efforts had so often failed so miserably. Those of us not from the east, especially Dunai and I, were also trying to deal with a certain disappointment, a temporary loss of purpose. As completely selfish as it was, we already missed our wall-jumping life.

The Arche members from the east, in turn, could not comprehend our attitude. For the members of the coordinating committee, Arche Berlin-Brandenburg (West) was a part of Arche, not merely a support group that had lost its purpose since the fall of the wall. The westerners' reproaches for opportunities not taken and chances missed were incomprehensible to them, even hurtful, given that they had never experienced conditions in the west. They were simply, and perhaps unavoidably, too self-involved to understand us. The same old recriminations about money came up again, especially from the treasurer, Mario Hamel, who later proved to be a Stasi informer himself. This emphasis on money seemed a bit strange, given that, as people in the east were fond of insisting, money had never played much of a role in the east. But of course, here the issue was hard western currency, a very different story. In any case, the meeting ended unpleasantly, and the cooperation between the two groups was over.

In retrospect, it is amazing how much cooperation actually did succeed, given the many obstacles that stood in the way of the west-

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ern efforts to work with Arche through the barrier of the wall. Arche first of all had to contend with the problems that came with the system: travel restrictions, non-existent or bugged telephones, a woeful infrastructure, inner-German politics, and the other well-known roadblocks thrown up by history and the East German state. Added to this was the constant tension caused by the emigration of friends and by Stasi betrayals. But one also found obstacles that could only indirectly be blamed on the system, the so-called wall in people's heads: distrust and self-involvement on the eastern side, and in the west the typical tendency of immigrants to portray what they have left behind as backward and to dismiss it. Taken together, these factors made it very difficult to organize effective cooperation between those who left and those who remained behind, and in a sense pre-saged the tensions that would later divide east and west Germans after the fall of the wall.

Yet the partnership between east and west still bore fruit. Arche's appearances in the western media, the films made and distributed in cooperation with western partners and broadcast on western television by so many East Germans, the technology sent over from the west that made it possible to produce underground publications—this all contributed to Arche's success in bringing together and mobilizing people in East Germany who might otherwise never have participated in political action. Historians may debate the role the East German opposition ultimately played in the collapse of the SED regime, but the influence it did have, it owed at least in part to its reluctant cooperation with westerners and foreigners.

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