

Petra Kelly: Life and Legacy of a Transnational Green Activist

Stephen Milder, Andreas Jünger, Katharina Scharf, Amanda M. Nichols, Friederike Bruehoefener, and Adam Stone

This exhibition considers the transnational life and legacy of the activist and cofounder of the West German Green Party, Petra Kelly. The exhibition shows how Kelly's transatlantic childhood and education enabled her to become a transnational activist. It follows the connections to friends, companions, and fellow activists all over the globe that shaped her approach to green politics and underpinned her contributions to the peace movement. Examining how the German and international press reported on Kelly, the exhibition reflects on how her profile as a Green celebrity was shaped. An analysis of the spiritual dimensions of Kelly's green politics demonstrates how "deep green" frameworks helped the activist to think beyond the boundaries of "politics as usual." Finally, the exhibition looks at Kelly's legacy, considering how her ideas and her career have resonated differently in different parts of the world.



Introduction



The Transnational Education of Petra Kelly



Transnational Women's Networks



Green Politics and Spirituality



Timeline

Some of us who were brought together in the late summer and early autumn of 1980 in the German town of Bad Godesberg, had no intention of creating a new movement. We were gathered there for no other reason than to attend a conference on the environment. The topic was "The Environment and the Future of Europe." It was a conference organized by the German government, and we were invited to participate as representatives of the environmental movement in our respective countries. The conference was held in a grand hotel, and the atmosphere was one of formal politeness. We were seated at long tables, and the speeches were carefully prepared and delivered in a staid and official manner. The conference was a typical example of the kind of event that the German government likes to host. It was a well-organized and well-attended affair, and it was a pleasure to be invited to participate. However, it was also a disappointment. The conference was a waste of time and money. It was a typical example of the kind of event that the German government likes to host. It was a well-organized and well-attended affair, and it was a pleasure to be invited to participate. However, it was also a disappointment. The conference was a waste of time and money.

Further Readings



A Green Celebrity



Asserting Women's Power



Petra Kelly's Legacy

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About the Exhibition

Petra Kelly, social activist, cofounder of the West German Green Party (hereafter referred to by the German name Die Grünen; “Greens” with a capital G refers to members of the party), and recipient of the Right Livelihood Award (often called the “Alternative Nobel Prize”), has been the subject of reascent popular interest. A recent novel has dramatized her life, she features prominently in histories and documentary films, and she has also become an important figure for ecological activists in many parts of the world.

Were she still alive, Kelly would have turned 75 in November 2022, and the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society (RCC) took the anniversary of her birthday as an opportunity to hold a conference focused on Kelly’s life and legacy. In addition to the RCC, the conference was supported by the German Research Foundation ([Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft](#)), [Project House Europe](#), the [Lasky Center for Transatlantic Studies](#), and the Elisabeth Schwarzhaupt Foundation ([Elisabeth Schwarzhaupt Stiftung](#)). The conference also featured an accompanying program that included a film screening and the release of a graphic novel. Those events received support from the Heinrich Böll Foundation ([Heinrich Böll Stiftung](#)) and the Petra Kelly Foundation ([Petra Kelly Stiftung](#)).

The conference’s mix of academic debate and discussions with Kelly’s contemporaries, as well as with artists and activists working with Kelly’s legacy today, prompted this virtual exhibition. It includes the research of several conference participants, some of which was supported by the DFG (project no. 423371999). In addition, the exhibition features a wide selection of visual and audio sources intended to bring Kelly’s life and her legacy to a broad audience. Anne Vechtel and Eva Sander of the Green Memory Archive ([Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis](#)) in Berlin, which houses Petra Kelly’s papers, worked tirelessly to find many of these sources and to identify rights holders. The Rachel Carson Center provided support for this process as well. We would especially like to thank the Environment and Society Portal team, including Pauline Kargruber, Jonatan Palmblad, and Brady Fauth, for their excellent editorial and technical support in realizing this virtual exhibition.

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Andreas Jünger is a doctoral candidate at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society in Munich. In his dissertation project, he studies the history of organic farming in Andalusia. He previously earned his BA from the University of Bonn, majoring in history and minoring in Romance studies, and graduated from the University of Münster with an MA in history focusing on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Latin American history. His current research interests include the past and present of organic farming, ecological movements, and green parties in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, particularly in Spain, Germany, and Chile.

Katharina Scharf is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Graz. She is currently working on her research project, “Environmental Women,” a biographically oriented environmental-history study from the perspective of women’s and gender history. She holds a PhD in history from the University of Salzburg. Her dissertation, *Alpen zwischen Erschließung und Naturschutz: Tourismus in Salzburg und Savoyen 1860–1914* (The Alps between development and nature conservation: Tourism in Salzburg and Savoy, 1860–1914), was published in 2021. Katharina holds a master’s degree in history and a bachelor’s degree in German studies. Her research interests focus on women’s, gender, environmental, tourism, and regional history, and the history of National Socialism.

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Introduction



Figure 1. Petra Kelly speaks during a Green party campaign rally on Marienplatz in Munich, 18 May 1979.

Unknown photographer, 1979. © Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (signature: FO-01662-01). Used by permission.

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world today. Her transnational political biography enabled her to link together social movements and alternative approaches to life in the nuclear age in the United States, Europe, and beyond. Kelly delivered her speeches with the same vehemence and clarity, whether speaking in Munich in German (see figure 1) or in Washington in English (see figure 3). Her insistence on the interconnectedness of emancipatory struggles all over the globe challenged national political frameworks. Accordingly, the political scientist Ruth Bevan described Kelly as perhaps the first “global political theorist.” Her prefigurative approach to politics entailed a close connection between words and deeds, and caused Kelly to back up Bundestag speeches with direct-action protests on the floor of the parliament, across the Iron Curtain, and indeed all around the world.

In Germany, Petra Kelly is remembered as a cofounder and early leader of the West German Green party, Die Grünen; she served as the party’s lead candidate in four early election campaigns, as party cochair from 1980 until 1982, and as cochair of the Greens’ first Bundestag delegation in 1983. From her perch in parliament, where she remained until 1990, Kelly advocated an alternative, holistic approach to politics based on nonviolence and love. She was critical of fellow Greens who, in what she perceived as a form of green realpolitik, advocated compromises on key issues in order to make Die Grünen a viable coalition partner. Instead, in a 1982 interview with the newsmagazine *Der Spiegel*, Kelly famously described Die Grünen as an “antiparty party,” which should serve as a “fundamental opposition within parliament” while continuing to support nonviolent direct-action protests outside of parliament. Indeed, Kelly’s ideas, her approach to politics, and her influence pushed beyond the boundaries not only of business as usual in the Bundestag but also of the party she had helped to found.

It is on account of her border-crossing approach to politics that Kelly is also known around the

Hence, Kelly’s biographer Saskia Richter has argued that Kelly “is possibly the most important founding politician of Die Grünen and is one of the great politicians of her time in the former West Germany and in the international context of the alternative movements of the 1970s and 1980s.”



Figure 2. Petra Kelly at an antinuclear demonstration in London in April 1980.

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This virtual exhibition looks at Kelly’s life, her ideas, and her politics from beyond the framework of parliamentary work and party politics, showing how Kelly became an important figure not only in Germany but in many parts of the world. Following this introduction, the exhibition comprises six chapters and a timeline. It begins with a chapter on Petra Kelly’s transnational education, which reflects on the significance of Kelly’s experiences in the United States, the Netherlands, and Belgium for her political career. The following chapter maps Kelly’s transnational contacts, showing how her place within a network of women activists informed her understanding of environmentalism. The third chapter considers the interplay between Kelly’s spirituality and her

understanding of transnational green politics, demonstrating how spirituality and religious influences helped Kelly to think beyond the constraints of national politics. The fourth chapter looks at how Kelly was depicted in the press in West Germany and abroad, revealing how press reporting shaped her image as a jet-setting, celebrity activist. Chapter five considers Kelly's part in transnational antinuclear weapons and peace activism, showing how she engaged in non-traditional forms of activism that extended across the Iron Curtain and lasted beyond the hot phase of West Germany's "New Peace Movement" in the early 1980s. A final chapter on the ways in which Kelly's life and work have been remembered since she was murdered at the age of 44, in 1992, shows how her radical ideas and alternative approach to politics are gaining importance once again in the present day. Altogether, the exhibition sheds new light on the ways in which Kelly's unorthodox approaches contributed to the revitalization of parliamentary democracy during her own lifetime and on the impulses for political and social transformation that Kelly's ideas and visions continue to offer in the current era of environmental degradation and climate crisis.



Figure 3. Petra Kelly speaks at a small demonstration against the NATO Double-Track Decision at the fence of the White House in Washington on 7 July 1983. In the photo on the left, her partner Gert Bastian is seen holding a protest banner.

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The examples of Petra Kelly's international engagement included in this exhibition nevertheless represent only part of the bigger picture of Kelly as a global theorist and transnational activist. A complete picture of her worldwide political activities would also include, for example, Kelly's commitment to Tibet or her travels to countries as diverse as India, Australia, and South Africa. Likewise, worthy of mention is her commitment to opposition groups in the Soviet Union and its satellite states, as well as disarmament efforts in both the West and the East, which took Kelly on trips to East Berlin, Moscow, and beyond. By introducing visitors to the transnational contours of Kelly's biography and to some of the far-flung, transboundary networks in which she played a key part, this exhibition places one cofounder of Die Grünen into the global context in which she understood herself, her activist career, and her political work.

As a viewer of this exhibition, you are warmly invited to explore Petra Kelly's global networks and transnational travels by following the structure of the chapters or to view each chapter individually based on your own preference and interest. Each chapter is self-contained and can be read or viewed independently.

1. The Transnational Education of Petra Kelly

Petra Karin Lehmann was born to Marianne and Richard Lehmann on 29 November 1947 in the provincial town of Günzburg, Bavaria. After her father abandoned the family in 1954, her mother remarried, this time to the US serviceman John Edward Kelly, in 1958. Young Petra also took her stepfather's last name and became known thereafter as Petra Kelly. Together with her family, Petra Kelly moved to the United States in 1959. She attended high school near US military bases in Columbus, Georgia, and Hampton, Virginia, before earning her BA degree in international relations at American University (AU) in Washington, DC. In 1970, at the age of 22, Kelly returned to Europe in order to study European integration at the University of Amsterdam and then to take up a position at the European Economic Community (the forerunner of the European Union) in Brussels. Kelly had become interested in politics already as a student, but it was during her time in Brussels that she became deeply engaged in antinuclear activism and the peace movement.

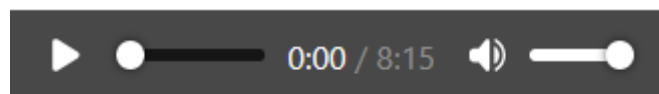


Figure 1. A picture of a Bavarian landscape that Petra Kelly drew for her friend Berkley Powell while she attended Hampton High School in Virginia (ca. 1964–1966, exact date unknown).

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Kelly's transnational childhood and education profoundly influenced her approach to politics, and indeed her ideas about life in the nuclear age. Living with her family in the southern United States, Kelly was exposed to the nonviolent civil disobedience practiced by participants in the civil rights movement. This influence from her socialization in the United States is visible in her later writings, for example when she repeatedly refers to Henry David Thoreau's ideas of civil disobedience and Martin Luther King, who for Kelly was "Thoreau in practice." After moving to Washington, DC, in order to attend American University, she became involved in political life on campus and in the capital city. Already in the spring of her freshman year at AU, she organized the university's first International Week. The event was intended to foster new discussions within the diverse student body, but Kelly also used it as an opportunity to take up conversations with prominent politicians, whom she invited to campus as part of the event. Acknowledged by the secretary of US Vice President Hubert Humphrey as "a good writer and a very prolific one," Kelly used her correspondence to build connections to leading US politicians, including Senator Robert Kennedy and Vice President Humphrey. By fall 1968, Kelly was a key student organizer for Humphrey's presidential campaign. Even amidst her precocious political participation, however, Kelly continued to process her German identity and remained capable of viewing developments in the United States from the perspective of an outsider. In a series of discussions with fellow AU student Abraham Peck, whose parents had survived the Holocaust and fled to the United States, Kelly considered the relationship between Germans and Jews after 1945.



The original exhibition includes an audio snippet here. Abraham Peck remembers Petra Kelly. Excerpts from a public conversation held by historian Belinda Davis with Abraham Peck as part of the conference "Petra Kelly at 75" in the Senate Hall of LMU Munich on 14 October 2022.

Listen to the speech here:

<https://www.environmentandsociety.org/exhibitions/petra-kelly/1-transnational-education-petra-kelly>

In a poem written in 1972, following her return to Europe, Kelly critiqued “AU’s revolutionaries” for what she perceived as a lack of seriousness and a focus on drugs and frisbee rather than hard work that might change the world.

Page 2 To A.U.'s Revolutionaries . . .

"Have you ever ^{read} Das Kapital
of Karl Marx . . . ?" I ask you
(yes, you will shake your head vigorously . . . and tell me: "Because I am
a revolutionary")
"Did it take you long?" I will ask you again
"No, no, you will laugh, I read it between studies, while playing frisby
in A.U.'s quad . . ."
". . . but it is three thick volumes. . ." I will say to you "for it
took me a very very long time"
"well, you will stammer . . ." I did jump a few chapters. . . you know how
it is . . ."

"no, I do not know how it is. . ." with AU revolutionaries. . .
I have heard you often enough on the steps of dear Mary Graydon . . .
the steps must be worn out now
since
I
left in 1970 . . .
oh, I have heard so much . . . in senate meetings, revolutionary meetings,
Panther meetings . . . methodist meetings, SIS meetings
meetings, meetings, meetings, - it is just about all one remembers
as an alumnae

your heart, it is in the right place, at least, I feel it is
when I remember how you pleaded for equal pay for cafeteria workers
or set up
emergency rooms in the student union
during Cambodia indifference shown by the President watching the
White House TV set
but I wonder where your books are . . .
in pockets as status symbol
only worn out from frisby playing
and practicing the theories of Timothy Leary?
or have
you gotten red eyes from reading Mandel, Trotsky, and Engels and
Jesus and the Upanishads and Hesse ?

I have been away from you, your platforms, and your playgrounds.
I have been now in the Old World where also I shall stay . . .
to seek roots.
But I learn that red eyes from Marx and Bloch and Orwell and Lenin
and Hinduism and Albert Schweitzer
can change more in this world we want to change (at least we scream so every
day)
than "copping out" on the system and calling pigs "Pigs" and
skipping pages in Das Kapital.

Petra K. Kelly

Figure 2. Poem entitled "To AU's Revolutionaries." Petra Kelly wrote this poem in 1972 while she was working at the Economic and Social Committee of the European Economic Community (EEC).

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Disappointed not only by student activists but also by the outcome of the 1968 election, when Humphrey lost to Richard Nixon, Kelly decided not to apply for US citizenship and set her sights instead on a return to Europe, where she enrolled in the MA program on European integration at the University of Amsterdam.

And yet, in spite of her disappointment and her move from Washington to Amsterdam in 1970, Kelly's life and her politics were deeply shaped by her experiences in the United States. In a seminar paper she wrote while at AU, Kelly faulted German 68ers for being too focused on theory and lacking the "love, community [and] human warmth" she had experienced among US student activists. More significantly, her exposure to different styles of activism as well as to electoral politics gave Kelly a fresh perspective on European politics and opened her to alternatives. In short, Kelly's transnational biography caused her to think beyond borders. It was no coincidence that Kelly decided to study European integration and that she soon sought out a job with the European Economic Community (EEC), the predecessor of the EU, in Brussels. She wanted to work toward the creation of a democratic "United Europe," with more popular engagement, including direct elections to the European Parliament. Soon after her move to Brussels, Kelly came into contact with German members of the Young European Federalists (known by its French acronym, JEF, for Jeunes Européens Fédéralistes), a group which shared many of her goals.



Figure 3. Martin Luther King, Jr. is arrested for “loitering” in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1958. Kelly, who came to the United States one year later, was inspired by the civil disobedience of Martin Luther King and other activists in the civil rights movement.

Photo by Charles Moore, 1958. [Click here to view source.](#)



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Figure 4. Kelly meets with the Vice President of the United States, Hubert Humphrey.

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It was together with her contacts in the JEF that Kelly first became engaged in grassroots political action in Europe. The border-crossing movement against nuclear reactors that French, West Germans, and Swiss were collectively building in the Upper Rhine Valley caught the attention of the JEF. The transnational protest movement seemed to be almost a model of the federal Europe to which the JEF activists aspired. Kelly was particularly moved by her experiences in the Upper Rhine Valley, and quickly began promoting the protests among all who would listen as an example of “transnational consciousness” and of highly effective “grassroots resistance.” Having perceived herself as an outsider in Washington, DC, and then in Brussels, Kelly finally felt at home among the grassroots activists who opposed the construction of nuclear power plants near their farms and vineyards in the Upper Rhine Valley. Her transatlantic education had conditioned her reaction to these protests and caused her to see them as a model for her own future political engagement, making crossing borders and alternative approaches key to Kelly’s understanding of green politics.



Figure 5. In February 1975, The Young European Federalists (JEF) released an issue of their Forum E magazine dedicated to the growing struggle against nuclear energy. Petra Kelly played a key role in the creation of this issue, which was widely distributed among grassroots antinuclear groups.

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It was for precisely these reasons that Kelly enthusiastically joined the effort to organize an ecological ticket for the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979. Kelly helped to found what became known as the Alternative Political Association: The Greens (Sonstige Politische Vereinigung: (SPV)-Die Grünen) and then served as the group's lead candidate in the 1979 election. In this role, she proposed that she would "speak up for a decentralized, non/nuclear, non/military [sic], and gentle Europe—a Europe of the Regions and of the People." She understood the alternative political association as part of a wider effort to "build Europe from BELOW and not from ABOVE." The list that Kelly led received more than nine hundred thousand votes in the June 1979 election. Unfortunately, this amounted to only 3.2 percent of the vote, not enough to jump German electoral law's "5 percent hurdle" and qualify for seats in the European Parliament. On the day of the parliament's constitutive session in Strasbourg, Kelly and other Greens marched through the streets in protest. After unfurling a protest banner from their seats in the parliament's spectator gallery, however, the Greens were ejected from the building. Though no green candidates were seated in the European Parliament in 1979, the election campaign presaged the formation of Die Grünen in 1980. Kelly's European and transnational perspectives, and her experience campaigning for the European Parliament, motivated her to participate in this process and to serve as the Greens' lead candidate in their first two campaigns for seats in the West German Bundestag, to which she—and 27 other Greens—were finally elected in 1983. Hence, Kelly's claim that "the need to act transnationally, European, and also internationally as a Green must never be forgotten" was an honest assessment of her own understanding of the new party's transnational origins and a reflection of her transatlantic education.



Figure 6. Green candidates, including Petra Kelly, march through the streets of Strasbourg, France, on 17 July 1979, the date of the constitutive session of the first directly elected European Parliament. The banner, carried by candidates Petra Kelly and Roland Vogt, reads “Die Grünen, 900,000 votes, shut out!”

Unknown photographer, 1979. © Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (signature: FO-01700-02). Used by permission.

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2. Transnational Women’s Networks: Petra Kelly and her Global Alliance of Friends and Companions

Petra Kelly—still a prominent figure today—stands for an almost unrestricted struggle for environmental protection, peace, and human rights. But she was by no means the only one. She was part of a global movement in which numerous women committed to, connected with, and supported each other. This chapter takes a closer look at Petra Kelly’s transnational connections and her companions across the world.



Figure 1. Petra Kelly and her “green” companions and friends at the first European meeting of the Green Party in Stockholm 1987. From left to right: Freda Meissner-Blau (Austria), Petra Kelly (Germany), Solange Fernex (France), Sara Parkin (Great Britain).

Unknown photographer, 1987. © Private archive Freda Meissner-Blau. Published in: Freda Meissner-Blau, *Die Frage bleibt* (Vienna: Amalthea Verlag, 2014). Used by permission.

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The environmental movement emerged in the early 1970s from the anti-nuclear, women’s, and peace movements. At that time, I was already friends with Petra Kelly, the founder of the German Green Party, and Sara Parkin, the founder of

the English Green Party. We were three women . . . who met even before the parties were founded.
—Freda Meissner-Blau in 2007

Freda Meissner-Blau (1927–2015) was not only a doyenne of the Austrian environmental movement and cofounder of the Green Party in Austria but also a friend and fellow campaigner of Petra Kelly (1947–1992). The women in figure 1 were pioneers of the green movement, activists, and politicians. They were friends and companions in their struggle for peace, environmental protection, human rights, and the women’s movement. Thus, they could establish transnational communication systems and gain strength for their causes.



Figure 2. A call by Petra Kelly and Gert Bastian to support the election of Freda Meissner-Blau as federal president in Austria in 1986. Supporters were asked to write letters to Vienna, and signatures were collected.

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When Meissner-Blau ran for the federal presidency in Austria in 1986, Kelly activated her international contacts and wrote, together with Gert Bastian (1923–1992), an appeal for support: “Freda Meissner-Blau for president!” In it, Kelly affirmed:

Freda Meissner-Blau is the first woman to run for the highest office in Austria—the international impact of this candidacy should not be overlooked. As an important symbolic figure of the Austrian women’s, peace, and ecology movements, Freda can confront the major parties with an ecological, feminist, and non-violent political dimension in this election campaign and force these parties to take a political stand.

Kelly was well aware of the cross-border implications of such a national election. Although her Austrian companion did not win the election against Kurt Waldheim (1918–2007), the transnational support network was helpful and relevant for further concerns. Mutual support in political as well as personal matters was continuously maintained.



Figure 3. Group discussion with Petra Kelly in the Rotstilzchen pub in Vienna in 1980. Kelly travelled across Austria for a lecture tour. She described it as a journey full of new hope.

Unknown photographer, 1980. © Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (signature: FO-01561-01). Used by permission.

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Neighboring Austria was particularly central to cross-border communication and networking for the German environmental movement, which also had its traditions in German and Austrian nature conservation. This included, for example, collaborations within and between the two Alpine associations and national parks, as well as the transfer of ideas.

The successful resistance against the nuclear power plant in Zwentendorf (1978) and against a power plant in Hainburg (1984), which became symbolic and formative for Austrian identity, must be considered in the specific regional, national, and transnational context of the new social movements at the time. Especially in border areas like the Bavarian-Austrian one, the resistance against nuclear power (e.g., Wackersdorf), whose damage does not stop at national borders, played a transterritorial role.

Petra Kelly was also committed to spreading her messages in Austria, maintaining many personal and professional contacts, and giving public lectures. For a lot of people in the Austrian environmental movement, she served as a role model. In 1980, Kelly called for cross-border activism: “I mean, we now also have a common task: to help our Austrian friends—be it through

the financial support of the anti-Zwentendorf movement, be it with moral help through letters and telegrams, or be it just about a forthcoming joint action.” In this regard, feminist values and women’s bonds were central elements for her.

The same applied to her efforts for peace in the GDR (East Germany) and her contacts there—for example, with the East German opposition figure and peace activist Bärbel Bohley (1945–2010), with whom she maintained an amicable as well as interest-driven relationship across the border.



Figure 4. World Women’s Congress for a Healthy Planet, Miami, 1991. From left to right: Eva Quistorp, Vandana Shiva, Petra Kelly, Mira Shiva.

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Figure 5. World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet, 1991, Miami. From left to right: Petra Kelly, Bella Abzug, Eva Quistorp.

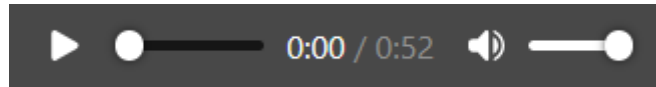
Unknown photographer, 1991. © Eva Quistorp (A-Quistorp, Eva, in: AGG, signature: FO-03762-02-cp). Courtesy of Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis. Used by permission.

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Many different approaches could be united under the umbrella of the environmental movement. On the one hand, this created potential for conflict and ambiguity of goals; on the other hand, it enabled global networks or communication systems and a transfer of ideas that would otherwise hardly have been possible. In her holistic understanding of the environment, which included peace, women's, and human rights, Petra Kelly found contact points with women from the most diverse spaces and worlds of ideas. The fact that women, in particular, could create new spaces and contacts in this diverse setting is not only obvious but relevant for characterizing environmentalism. Ecofeminist ideas managed to link some of the strands by emphasizing the suppression of women, social inequality in the patriarchy, and the exploitation and subjugation of nature. Eva Quistorp (*1945), cofounder of Die Grünen and one of the central figures of the ecology, peace, and women's movements, was one of the first women in Germany to talk publicly about ecofeminism, pointing out the degradation and objectification of women. And she was one of Kelly's crucial contacts.

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The original exhibition includes an audio snippet here. Speech by Petra Kelly at the National Organization for Women (NOW) convention in San Francisco, 1990. Kelly talks about the importance and connections between women's movements and the environment. © Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (signature: PKA, 3632, TK-A-PKE-0138). Used by permission.

Listen to the speech here:

<https://www.environmentandsociety.org/exhibitions/petra-kelly/2-transnational-womens-networks-petra-kelly-and-her-global-alliance-friends>

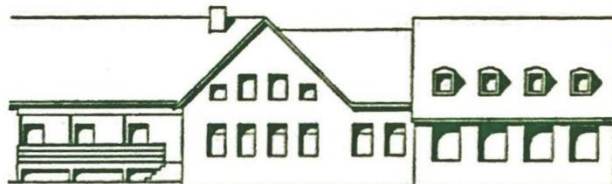
At international meetings, the most diverse, even opposing, ideas came together. Even though not everything went smoothly, and the women's movement disagreed and fragmented on many points, these meetings and women's networks formed a strong global bond and were a center for transnational transfers of ideas. International meetings and contacts, such as those with Indian activist Vandana Shiva (*1952), were undoubtedly motivated by women's solidarity and the fight against patriarchy. Petra Kelly was well aware of the clout of such connections.



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Figure 6. The logos of the World Union for the Protection of Life and the Collegium Humanum, institutions that brought together fundamentally different people, including those with right-wing ideas.

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Within the chameleonic framework of environmentalism, the most diverse motives could come together. The ambivalence of such a heterogeneous movement can be illustrated by problematic contacts such as that between Kelly and the right-wing extremist Ursula Haverbeck-Wetzel (*1928). In this respect, the World Union for the Protection of Life (Weltbund zum Schutz des Lebens, or WSL), founded in 1960 in Salzburg, Austria, and the Collegium Humanum, which was headed by the Haverbeck couple, served as rallying points. These institutions were a link between the environmental movement and the far right, between culturally pessimistic conservatism and biologicistic right-wingers, united in protest against nuclear technology. Organizations such as the WSL certainly had a unifying and networking value for the most disparate people, ideas, and motivations. Kelly was a frequent guest and speaker at WSL events. In April 1979, for example, Haverbeck and Kelly organized a seminar on “Women and family in the constraints of the environment. Can women make a special contribution to ‘Lebensschutz’ [protection of life]?”

Kelly was deeply opposed to right-wing ideas and was aware of the dangers of right-wing tendencies infiltrating environmentalism—she corresponded with Freda about this. However, the incorporating, idealistic view of the need to protect a shared environment functioned as a connector. In the case of personal contacts, several factors, such as sympathy or opportunism, can also play a role. Either way, a comprehensive historical understanding of environmentalism requires consideration of all identifiable contacts and networks, including the problematic ones. This allows for a more differentiated view of history and helps us to fathom insights relevant to the present: who engages in activism, why, and with whom.

3. Petra Kelly: Transnational Green Politics and Dark Green Spirituality

Petra Kelly was an outspoken opponent of the proliferation and use of nuclear technologies and a staunch advocate for the rights of women and minority populations. A close examination of Kelly's transnational antinuclear activism and ecological perspectives illuminates the ways in which her work was informed and shaped by her spiritual perspectives.



View of the Figure 1. Petra Kelly at a demonstration against the planned construction of Ireland's first nuclear power station, Carnsore Point, on 18 August 1978, wearing a sweatshirt that reads "Lieber heute aktiv als morgen radioaktiv" (Rather active today than radioactive tomorrow).

Unknown photographer, 1978. © Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (signature: FO-01558. Used by permission.

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As a child, Kelly was raised in the Catholic tradition and attended a Roman Catholic girl's school, the Englisches Institut (English Institute), in Günzburg, Germany. In 1958, Kelly's mother married Lieutenant Colonel John E. Kelly, and the family moved to the United States in 1959. It was there that Kelly was first introduced to feminism, civil rights, and critiques of hierarchical power

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structures in society. This early exposure to radical social perspectives proved formative for Kelly in that they contributed to the development of her worldview and later influenced her green political platform and activism. At American University in Washington, DC, she studied politics and international relations and became alert to political activism in the anti-war, civil rights, and feminist movements. There she also learned about the nonviolence traditions of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., which informed her later environmental politics.

Though Kelly eventually rejected the Catholic Church, which she saw as an “authoritarian male institution,” her upbringing in the tradition was, at least in some ways, influential, and Kelly remained a spiritual person throughout her life. She was especially moved by Tibetan Buddhism and its focus on nonviolence and nonhierarchical leadership structures, though she did not ascribe to the tradition herself.



Figure 2. Petra Kelly with the Dalai Lama in Hamburg on 8 October 1991.

Unknown photographer, 1991. © Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (signature: FO-05595-01). Used by permission.

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Kelly expanded her worldview through her work in transnational politics and antinuclear activism during the 1970s and 1980s. When Grace, her younger half sister, died from eye cancer in 1970, Kelly became aware of the impacts of ionizing radiation—which was used in her sister’s treatment—on human populations. In 1982, Kelly reflected on her sister’s death, calling it “the key point” in her life.



Figure 3. Petra Kelly pictured with her half sister, Grace, and Pope Paul VI at the Vatican in a meeting she arranged in the hopes that it would help with Grace’s battle with cancer, June 1968.

Unknown photographer, 1968. © Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis. Used by permission.

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Kelly channeled her grief into educating herself about nuclear technologies and the impacts of those technologies on human populations and the environment. She became active in a number of environmental organizations including the Bundesverband Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz (BBU, Federal Association of Environmental Action Groups) and was a founding member of Die Grünen in 1980. In 1983, Kelly was elected to serve as a representative of the Greens in the Bundestag (the

German parliament). In the Bundestag, she also served on the Unterausschuss Abrüstung (Subcommittee of Disarmament) where she became internationally renowned for her outspoken antinuclear politics.

Kelly's personal experiences coalesced with her knowledge about global, social, and political systems and with her religious perspectives. Combined, these perspectives informed the ecological worldview and vision for the future for which she fought adamantly as a green politician. An outspoken (eco)feminist, Kelly saw social disparity, inequity, and violence as the products of a patriarchal system that disproportionately impacted minority populations while destroying the planet and threatening global peace and social stability. To "rid the world of nuclear weapons and poverty," Kelly wrote, "we must end racism and sexism."

Kelly was erudite: in interviews and public appearances, she relied on scientific data and political acumen to communicate her vision for the future. She spoke avidly about her ecological vision of "restoring balance" by "living with the Earth," eliminating nuclear technologies, and employing soft technologies, which she understood as "technology for people and for life." In her 1982 two-part interview with Trevor Hyett, Kelly detailed her understanding of the inextricable connections between "ecology" and "global questions of survival, the threat of war, exploitation of raw materials, population growth, [and] misery for [hu]mankind." "These things are all interrelated," she insisted.



Her knowledge about the dangers of nuclear technologies and growing prominence in German politics furthered her engagement on the global antinuclear stage. She traveled around the world as an invited guest, speaker, and participant in numerous international antinuclear forums and peace demonstrations, including in Japan (1976), Australia (1977), Ireland (1978), London (1980),

Moscow (1983 and 1987), Washington, DC (1983), France (1986), and Spain (1986), among many others.



Figure 4. Petra Kelly marches in a peace demonstration in Hiroshima, Japan, in August 1976.

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Figure 5. Petra Kelly as a speaker at an event of the peace movement, November 1981: “Nuclear death threatens everyone.”

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In this role, she met and engaged with numerous other antinuclear activists, including the famous activist priests Daniel and Phillip Berrigan, who were among the founders of the Christian pacifist Plowshares movement in the United States. Taking their name from the Biblical passage from Isaiah 2:3–4, which states “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more,” the Plowshares practiced nonviolent civil disobedience in protest against nuclear weapons.



Figure 6. Petra Kelly pictured with the Berrigan brothers in May 1982 at a blockade at the *Schneller Brüter* (fast breeder) reactor in Kalkar, Germany. Pictured: Phillip Berrigan (second from left), Daniel Berrigan (second from right), Petra Kelly (right).

Photo by Stefan Horn, 1982. © Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (signature: FO-1346-01). Used by permission.

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The important influence of this religious perspective on Kelly is evidenced through her own engagement with the Plowshares group, and her use of their motto in her own activism. In 1983, Kelly crossed the wall into East Berlin and, along with four other activists from Die Grünen,

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unfurled a banner bearing the “Swords into plowshares” motto in Alexanderplatz. This incident led to her arrest. In part, this was because the motto, which had been employed by East German Protestant peace activists, had been banned by the Communist authorities in East Germany in 1982.





Figure 7. Petra Kelly and other activists from the West German Die Grünen in Alexanderplatz on 12 May 1983.

Unknown photographer, 1983. © Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (signatures: FO-01908-01-cp and FO-01908-03). Used by permission.

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Because of the important global networks she built, Kelly became instrumental in organizing transnational communications between governments and institutions aimed at facilitating peace around the world. These important connections supplied information that further enabled her to protest nonviolently by introducing important counterinformation—or, as Kelly defined it in *Nonviolence Speaks to Power*, information that introduces and “spotlights problems and conditions contrary to official interpretations”—into parliamentary discussions. Kelly’s activism and political

work demonstrate her dramatic influence within the broad antinuclear, religious, political, and environmental milieu of her day.

Today we might understand Kelly's views—her social, political, and environmental views—as an example of what Bron Taylor has called Gaian Naturalism. As Taylor described it, dark green religion is a form of “religion that considers nature to be sacred, imbued with intrinsic value, and worthy of reverent care.” It is “dark” due both to its “depth . . . of consideration for nature” and because of its potential to “precipitate or exacerbate violence.” This naturalistic spirituality played an important role in shaping Kelly's understanding of the interrelated nature of political, social, and environmental systems. Moreover, it motivated her transnational political efforts to change (inter)national nuclear policies aimed at eliminating nuclear weapons and helping those disproportionately affected by nuclear technologies.

Kelly's ecological thinking was grounded in a holistic understanding of the inextricable connections between social, political, and environmental systems. For her, “green politics . . . always had a spiritual base,” which meant “respecting all living things and knowing about the interrelatedness and interconnectedness of all living things.” Spiritual growth, she believed, was essential to addressing political problems, ending social disparity, and promoting peace. In her writing and speeches, Kelly often linked notions of spirituality to her activist and political commitments to people and the planet. She regularly engaged in civil disobedience and held that “nonviolence is a spiritual weapon” that can and should be used against “the existing system of dominance and privilege [to] give more conscious attention to the building of an alternative social structure.”

Today, as we look back and reflect on Kelly's political work and activism, we might understand the depth of her concern as fueled in part by her own personal grief and by her knowledge of the catastrophic implications for both humans and the rest of the living world that would follow a global nuclear-weapons exchange. She did not demur from political activism and nonviolent resistance, and she was a fierce opponent of nuclear technologies precisely because she knew what was at stake. Kelly's lifework exemplifies the role that spirituality plays in the lives of many activists, driving efforts to prevent disaster and inspire peace. Her work also underscores how spirituality, including the dark green form Kelly exemplifies, has become increasingly relevant in grassroots environmental activism and transnational environmental politics.

4. A Green Celebrity: The Newspaper Coverage of Petra Kelly in the early 1980s



Charismatic woman leads Bonn's Greens

By Hal Piper
Bonn Bureau of The Sun

Hagen, West Germany—When the Greens kicked Petra Kelly off the party leadership last weekend, she made no public complaint. After all, it had always been her idea that no Green should be more equal than others; and that meant sharing the leadership.

And the rank-and-file of the Greens, the party that catapulted West Germany's environmentalists, disarmament advocates and social activists into a key position in federal politics, certainly had no complaints about her. Miss Kelly received the longest and most affectionate ovation of the day.

And the photographers loved her. As Miss Kelly reached her seat with the other delegates down on the con-

vention floor, the flashbulbs started popping and the television cameras started turning. They stayed with her as the conference moved on to other business. When something was happening, they photographed her reaction. When nothing was happening, they photographed her mood.

Petra Kelly, 34, is the Greens' superstar and sex symbol—an anomalous role for a militant egalitarian, feminist, peace campaigner, environmentalist and champion of the oppressed.

Called to the rostrum festooned in green and gold—colors of the sunflower, the Greens' symbol—she responded with the kind of pithy, cheerleader enthusiasm she must have learned during her days in American politics.

"I just want to say that next year See KELLY, A4, Col. 1

PETRA KELLY
... superstar of burgeoning German protest party

Charismatic young woman leads growing Greens

KELLY, from A1

Dieter Burgmann [the other Green leader 'rotated' out of office with Miss Kelly] and I are going to be sitting in the Bundestag [the parliament].

She may well be. Her party is the fastest-growing in the country. After the next federal elections, probably in March, the Greens may displace the Free Democrats as the party holding the balance of power, the coalition partner needed by the Social Democrats or Christian Democrats to form a government.

The heroine of the Greens wears her celebrity without self-consciousness. She shrugs off questions about it, suggesting that it is the ideas she works for, not herself, that are attracting a following.

There is something to that. Not even Miss Kelly can bring 400,000 demonstrators into Bonn to protest the planned deployment of new nuclear missiles by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Not even Miss Kelly can create the ecology movement, whose fusion with the peace protesters and

other counterculture forces gave birth to the Greens.

But the slight, pretty, frosted-blond Miss Kelly certainly has played a major role in attracting attention to her causes.

Men respond to her waif-like fragility and earnest intensity. She is the kind of woman, the magazine Stern reported, "to whom every man would like to offer a warm jacket or some nourishing soup, but never a dirty joke."

This is because Miss Kelly's intensity—which twice this year has driven her to hospitalization for exhaustion and heart arrhythmias—appears not to be generated by hatred or fanaticism but by concern. She is deeply upset about the condition of the world.

In conversation her voice is soft, not shrill. Her words, though forceful, always address the point. She does not try to win arguments by name-calling. "Anyone who calls a policeman a 'pig,'" she has said, "is no ecologist." For Miss Kelly, President Reagan's disarmament policy is odious not because

he is a "warmonger" or a "movie actor," but because she believes the policy is wrong.

But though she is mannerly, Miss Kelly is utterly uncompromising. "How can you compromise between missiles and no missiles," she asks, "between rights for women and not rights for women, between pollution and a clean environment?"

Her zeal and her apparent purity inspire religious metaphors, and in fact her first commitment was to the Catholic Church. Bavarian-born and convent-educated, Miss Kelly grew up intending to become a nun.

She takes her surname from her American stepfather, a retired army officer. She spent her teenage years in the United States and graduated from American University in Washington, where she was politically active in all the causes of the time—for civil rights, against the war in Vietnam. She worked in the 1968 presidential campaigns of Robert F. Kennedy and Hubert H. Humphrey.

She met Mr. Kennedy after she wrote him a letter protesting the conditions of foreign students—and got invited to Hyannis Port, Mass.

Miss Kelly has made a habit of dealing directly with great men. When she broke with the Catholic Church in 1969, she wrote a letter to the pope informing him of her decision and explaining it. When she broke with the German Social Democratic Party 10 years later, she did it with a personal letter to Helmut Schmidt.

Miss Kelly lists the death of her sister, Grace, of cancer at age 10 in 1970 as the final step in her radicalization. "She was over-irradiated," Miss Kelly insists.

And so toxic substances and environmentalism joined Miss Kelly's list of causes, linking with peace, civil rights, feminism and prison conditions.

When she is working, Miss Kelly lives in a Brussels apartment furnished with an astonishing collection of kitschy knickknacks and stuffed animals. She sends most of her salary to a Tibetan orphan she adopted after the death of her sister, to the cancer-research foundation she started in memory of her sister or to her Green political party.

Miss Kelly is unmarried, but some years ago she had a publicized liaison with the much older Silvio Mansholt, a Common Market commissioner. Her closest associate is her 75-year-old grandmother, Kunigunde Birle.

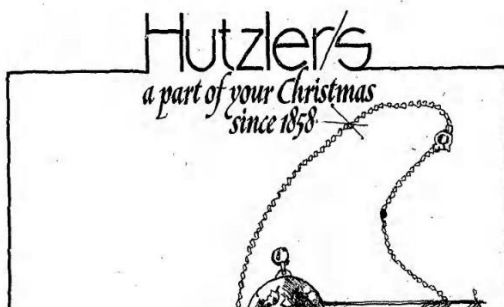


Figure 1. Article about Petra Kelly in The Baltimore Sun from 22 November 1982.

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On 22 November 1982, *The Baltimore Sun*, a popular US newspaper, ran an article titled “Charismatic Woman Leads Bonn’s Greens” that introduced the paper’s readers to Petra Kelly as the main driver of Die Grünen (see figure 1). Published in the wake of the party’s federal convention, which had taken place in the West German city of Hagen a week prior, the article asserted that Kelly was the “heroine of the Greens,” even though she had lost her position as one of the party’s three spokespersons during the event. The article’s author, Hal Piper of *The Sun*’s bureau in Bonn, argued that, while Kelly could not be credited with creating “the ecological movement” that “gave birth to the Greens,” it was she who was chiefly responsible for drawing attention to the environmental, social, economic, and political causes of the West German Green movement. According to Piper’s article, the reasons for Kelly’s ability to draw attention to herself and to Die Grünen could be found in the politician’s charisma, her attractive appearance and fascinating personality, as well as in her dedication and fervor. In addition to receiving the “longest and most affectionate ovation of the day,” the press loved her. No matter what else was going on, the journalist noted, Petra Kelly was at the center of the media’s attention: “When something was happening, they photographed her reactions. When nothing was happening, they photographed her mood.”

Piper’s article both addresses and exemplifies the broad attention that Petra Kelly received from the mainstream media at the time. In 1982–1983, when Die Grünen, which had only been founded a few years earlier, in January 1980, were competing in West Germany’s federal elections, Kelly “was at the height of her celebrity” and a constant presence in the national and international papers. As the political scientist Joachim Raschke has noted, even though the founding members of Die Grünen had vowed to do politics “without personalization and personality cult,” the press helped create and “permanently defined” a few green celebrities. Kelly was certainly *the* green celebrity. In comparison to other leading members of the federal party, she was the most recognized representative of Die Grünen, at least during the party’s early years. The media’s broad and by and large unprecedented coverage of her spanned not only Germany and Europe but also the Atlantic. Mainstream publications that introduced their readers to Kelly included local, regional, national, and international newspapers such as the *Nürnberger Nachrichten*, the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, *De Standaard*, the *Daily Mirror*, *The Irish Times*, the *Brownsville Herald*, *The Baltimore Sun*, and *The New York Times*, as well as magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *L’Espresso*, *People*, *Lee*, and *Vanity Fair*. In fact, even media outlets that did not publish pieces focused solely on Petra Kelly reported extensively on her. Especially in the foreign press, most reports about Die Grünen included one or two paragraphs covering Kelly.



Figure 2. Petra Kelly (center) with sunglasses during Chancellor Kohl's government-policy statement in the Bundestag in Bonn on 4 May 1983.

Photo by Heinrich Sanden, 1983. © picture-alliance/ dpa | Heinrich Sanden. Used by permission.

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Much of the media's fascination with Petra Kelly was undoubtedly tied to the highly visible pacifist, environmental, and antinuclear movements that spread through West Germany, Europe, and much of the world starting in the 1970s. In her rich and detailed biography of the politician, Saskia Richter emphasizes that Kelly was a "shooting star" who appeared on the parliamentary horizon of West Germany emerging from the social movements of the 1970s. Moreover, the founding of Die Grünen in 1980 and the party's stunning rise during the subsequent three years were carefully observed by the national and international press. The Greens' entrance into the West German Bundestag in March 1983—after garnering more than the required five percent of the electoral votes during the country's federal election—turned into a media spectacle. For sure, the party attracted the press's attention because of its political platform, which stood in sharp contrast to the foci of West Germany's established parties. A product of the 1970s social and protest movements, Die Grünen's political program emphasized ecology, social justice, and nonviolence as well as grassroots and direct democracy. Visually, however, it was the appearance of the Greens' parliamentarians that filled the pages. Representatives of Die Grünen entered the parliamentary halls in Bonn singing peace songs and carrying flowers or fir branches, while wearing sneakers,

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jeans, and sweaters that, in some cases, were self-knitted. Their unorthodox appearance was a visual gift for photographers and reporters (see figure 2).

Petra Kelly stood out from the press reports that covered the rise and success of Die Grünen. Many journalists, who wrote lengthy pieces covering Kelly at the beginning of her career as a leading member of the federal Green Party, started their articles with “authentic” descriptions aimed at giving readers a sense of the “real” Petra Kelly. To do so, newspapers included descriptions of Petra Kelly’s transatlantic and pan-European upbringing and education. Writing in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, a leftist mass-circulation newsmagazine that was the go-to publication for French intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s, Marie Muller explained that while Kelly was an “enfant des ruines” (child of the ruins), born in postwar Bavaria in November 1947, her family eventually crossed the Atlantic after “her journalist father left when she was four.” In a story for London’s *The Sunday Times*, Brian Moynihan and Keith Richardson reported that Kelly’s mother, after being divorced, remarried and moved with her new husband—a US army officer—and family to the United States. Lengthier pieces detailed Kelly’s journey from the classrooms of American University in Washington, DC, and the University of Amsterdam, to a position with the European Commission’s Economic and Social Committee. With this “funny international zig-zag destiny,” Marie Muller argued, Petra Kelly’s rise “as one of the stars of the Greens party” should have been fairly obvious.

Following the common format and goals of feature stories and portraits, some journalists also offered descriptions of Kelly’s behavior and personality. For example, on 18 November 1982, journalist Harry Trimborn reported in the *International Herald Tribune* that Petra Kelly—a “100-pound (45-kilogram) human whirlwind”—apologized to journalists for being 30 minutes late to a press meeting that was supposed to have started at 8:30. Kelly assured the journalists that she did not “oversleep.” Instead, she had been up since 6:00 in the morning and had completed two television interviews already. Trimborn and other reporters saw this as indicative of who Kelly really was. Because of her workload as a leading representative of Die Grünen, her dedication to the ecological, social, and political causes the party stood for, and because of her popularity, many reports noted, Kelly was constantly on the move, overworked, and thus utterly exhausted. Yet, despite several hospitalizations due to ill health, she would not stop or give up. Journalists frequently emphasized Kelly’s dedication to her work and also her physical condition. Especially because many US-based newspapers and magazines drew on press releases distributed by news agencies such as United Press International (UPI), many journalists described her with the same paradoxical combinations of terms. She was characterized as “frail” yet “fiery,” as “fragile” yet “strong,” or as “diminutive” yet “feisty.”



Figure 3. Portrait of Petra Kelly, taken by Ludwig Wegmann on 10 February 1983 in Bonn.

Photo by Ludwig Wegmann, 1983. © Federal Press Office, Germany. Used by permission.

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Though journalists like Moynihan and Richardson portrayed Kelly as a “fragile and pale creature” who was obstinate, unwavering, and “desperately overworked,” Kelly was, according to her biographer Saskia Richter, nonetheless described by some as an “attractive” and “amorous” young woman. Not surprisingly, stories and portraits focusing on Kelly and the Greens were quite often accompanied by headshots and close-ups of her that underlined the words journalists used to paint a picture of Kelly. In October 1983, the political journalist Ronald Steel concluded that the reason for Kelly’s allure could even be found in her sickly appearance. Despite unhealthy looks, Steel asserted in a *Vanity Fair* article, Kelly was still attractive because of her “short-cropped hair, her intense blue eyes, her sharp cheekbones and her sense of style.” Adding to her attractiveness were also her “nervousness,” her “incipiently anorectic” form, and her “wiry energy” that covered much of her “deep fatigue.”

Moving beyond the notion of Kelly being attractive and photogenic, some journalists, like Hal Piper, even stated that she was the Greens’ “sex symbol.” For instance, in May 1982, the cover of the West German magazine *Stern* featured a photograph of Petra Kelly in front of an enlarged

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depiction of a political button showing a peace dove and the slogan “End the arms race.” The headline read: “Petra Kelly: The green seduction” (see figure 4). Like many other newspapers and magazines at the time, *Stern* reported that Kelly, who was only 35 years old when she entered the Bundestag in 1983, had endeared herself to generations of young people who saw her as an inspiration and role model.



Figure 4. Cover of the magazine The Stern from 6 May 1982 with the title “Petra Kelly: The Green Seduction.”

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The Stern's suggestive portrayal of Kelly as "seductive" seems almost demure in comparison to some reports and imagery published in dubious tabloids and men's magazines. In 1983, for example, the Munich-based magazine *Superstars Intim*, which focused on "erotic" and sexy stories of a wide array of stars, published an airbrush painting of Kelly. Placed in the magazine's section "Star Gallery," the Green parliamentarian was depicted lasciviously posing in a seated position entirely naked, only adorned by a few tropical flowers that were positioned between her straddled legs and knees. In these cases, depictions of Kelly came close to the objectification and commodification traditionally reserved for female movie, television, and music stars.

Prominently featured in newspapers, magazines, and tabloids, Kelly certainly became a political celebrity in the early 1980s. In fact, it can be argued that she experienced media coverage that was by and large unprecedented in the Cold War political history of West Germany. Reporters and photographers offered readers, who might have bought the papers to discover the authentic or real Petra Kelly, a well-curated, larger-than-life image of a green "superstar." Newspapers created a complex and contradictory image of Petra Kelly that was of interest and accessible around the world. The image that the media created of Kelly in the early 1980s remains influential in today's perceptions of her work and legacy. Although she continued to be a constant presence in the national and international media throughout the 1980s, the coverage does not compare to the years during which the West German Green Party burst onto the political scene in Bonn. Only in the wake of the murder-suicide that ended her life and the life of her long-term partner and colleague Gert Bastian in October 1992, did the media publish a comparative number of articles about Petra Kelly.

5. Asserting Women's Power: Petra Kelly and Women's Transnational Antinuclear Weapons and Peace Activism in the 1980s

Petra Kelly's work protesting against nuclear weapons and for peace in the 1980s offers important insight into a movement that spanned the Cold War Eastern and Western blocs. Kelly was a prominent member of a diverse array of transnational women peace activists in the 1980s. These women came from different national contexts, including, but not limited to, West Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union. They regularly connected with one another across national and Cold War boundaries and worked together to advocate publicly for change in their countries' military, foreign, and domestic policies. Scholars in recent years have recognized the importance of Petra Kelly's transnational activism in relation to Green politics in particular. However, a focus on her transnational antinuclear-weapons and peace work shows that she had an impact beyond the West German Die Grünen, connected peace activists across Cold War Eastern and Western borders, and challenged traditional methods of international relations throughout the 1980s.

As a founding member and leader of Die Grünen, Petra Kelly held a prominent role in the women's transnational peace and antinuclear-weapons movements. Born in West Germany and educated in the United States, Kelly was primed for both understanding the impact that transnational, grassroots peace activism could have and for carrying out that work. These experiences created a foundation for Kelly's peace work in the 1980s by teaching her the importance of grassroots activism, helping her build political networks internationally, and fostering her belief in "popular politics." The antinuclear weapons popular political movement was comprised of people located across the globe working and thinking beyond national borders. Kelly's personal charisma was an important asset in her engaging with audiences across Europe and the United States and drawing people to her cause. She was a vocal leader of this transnational peace and antinuclear-weapons movement in the 1980s.



Figure 1. Petra Kelly speaking at an antinuclear demonstration in London in 1980 on the first anniversary of the partial meltdown of the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant.

Unknown photographer, 1980. © Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (signature: FO-01559-04). Used by permission.

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Kelly used her platform as a peace activist and politician to advocate for change in traditional politics and at the grassroots level. From 1983 to 1990, her role in the Bundestag as a member of Die Grünen meant that she held a position that offered her a prominent platform. Kelly utilized this position to advocate her positions in West Germany and beyond, regularly traveling across the globe as a representative of Die Grünen to meet with other activists. She was also an innovative thinker, regularly introducing new ideas and initiatives to push the antinuclear-weapons movement forward and connecting antinuclear activism to broader topics, like women's issues. As an outspoken leader of the women's peace movement, Kelly exemplified many of the tactics and goals of other women peace activists as she pursued a grassroots, feminist approach to mobilizing everyday citizens to action. At the same time as Kelly made demands of governments across the globe to change their nuclear weapons policies, she and other women worked together to change from the bottom up how people understood peace.

Kelly's transnational peace work was informed by and connected to the rest of her political life, namely through an interest in promoting a new way of conducting diplomacy and advocating an ecofeminist political framework in foreign relations. Much like her work as a founder and member of Die Grünen, Kelly's work as a transnational peace and antinuclear-weapons activist was focused on disrupting traditional methods of governance through grassroots mobilization of a Green way of thinking. In 1982, she received the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the Alternative Nobel Peace Prize. Accepting the award, she argued that everyday citizens needed to take initiative and conduct foreign policy with one another: "if the governments do not take these first steps [to disarm], we shall take these first steps for them! We must work towards a disarmament race." This new style of doing international relations often came in the form of rallies, public seminars, or small group meetings about specific issues, a more democratized and publicly available way of conducting international diplomacy than elite diplomatic summits.



Figure 2. Petra Kelly and Gert Bastian (right) sit with fellow protestors against atomic and nuclear bombs in Hiroshima, Japan, August 1981. Petra gave speeches in Tokyo and Hiroshima and coordinated with Japanese activists on this trip.

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Along with her work in the West German Bundestag, Kelly's political activism reached across national borders as she physically traveled to different countries and kept up robust letter-writing efforts discussing antinuclear-weapons politics and peace politics with everyday citizens, activists, and politicians alike. For example, a visit Kelly took to Japan in the summer of 1981, during which she met with Japanese antinuclear-weapons activists and survivors of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, shows how women activists like Kelly both worked and thought globally. Kelly gave a speech in Tokyo and Hiroshima titled "Euroshima, Mon Futur?" (Euroshima, My Future?) in which she discussed the myriad efforts that European and US-based activists were taking to do "all we can to avoid a 'Euroshima'." "Euroshima" invoked the horrors of nuclear war found in Hiroshima as a rallying cry against a nuclear weapons buildup in Europe in the early 1980s. Protesters were particularly energized by the US Pershing II and cruise missiles slated for deployment across Europe in 1983–1984 as a NATO response to the Soviet SS-20 missiles first deployed in 1976. Combining Europe and Hiroshima created a link between Europe and Japan that both invoked fear of nuclear destruction in Europe and sympathy for victims in Japan. Concerns about these missiles and the wider threat of nuclear war catalyzed hundreds of thousands to protest across the globe in the early 1980s. These included numerous events where Kelly spoke about the need to continue protesting against nuclear weapons, including to 130,000 people in Hamburg, West Germany, in June 1981 and 15,000 to 20,000 protesters in Philadelphia in the United States in October 1983.



Figure 3. Petra Kelly, alongside other peace activists like Eva Quistorp, Gert Bastian, and Rudolf Bahro, holds up a banner saying “For a nuclear-weapons-free Europe” in Bonn, 1980 or 1981.

Unknown photographer, 1980 or 1981. © Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (signature: FO-0726). Used by permission.

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Many accounts of antinuclear-weapons activism in the 1980s end with the deployment of the cruise and Pershing II missiles in the winter of 1983–1984. Studying Kelly and other women activists shows that their transnational peace and antinuclear-weapons work continued later in the decade and engaged both grassroots activist audiences and elite political figures, consistently arguing for a redefinition of international relations and of peace. In a speech at the University of California, Berkeley, campus in October 1984, Kelly argued that antinuclear-weapons and peace politics in international politics was “about abolishing power as we know it and redefining power as something common to all . . . Peace means more than just an absence of war.” She explored this line of thinking further in a series of letters to the East German Socialist Unity Party General Secretary Erich Honecker in 1984, written as a representative of the West German Bundestag. She pushed him to consider how the “Peace movement’ not only has to do with nuclear or chemical disarmament, but also with standing up for the democratic rights of the individual.” She reiterated the need for a new idea of peace and freedom when speaking at a European Nuclear Disarmament rally in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in July 1985. Activists in Western Europe could not only

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protest against nuclear weapons but also needed to support independent politicians in the Soviet bloc like Václav Havel and Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, Adam Michnik and Solidarność in Poland, and Katja Havemann and *Frauen für den Frieden* (Women for peace) in East Germany: “Peace is not just an absence of . . . Pershing II and SS-20s . . . [but also] a positive external and internal condition where people are free.” Her remarks also engaged in feminist, gendered critiques of violence, asserting that to be successful, peace activists needed to “challenge conventional gender roles and . . . break the circle of violence.”

Kelly and other women activists’ work had a significant impact at the grassroots level, mobilizing hundreds of thousands for peace throughout the 1980s, long after the deployment of the Pershing II and cruise missiles. This work included local educational outreach, petition, and letter-writing campaigns, and international citizen diplomatic exchanges, among other actions. Top political leaders recognized the importance of the work of women antinuclear-weapons activists. At the 1987 World Congress of Women held in Moscow, for example, the Soviet Union Communist Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev gave an opening address where he asserted that “the international women’s movement has markedly reinforced the potential of peace and goodwill. It has forced people to listen to it. It is a real factor in politics.”



Figure 4. Petra Kelly (second from left) at a 1981 peace rally against nuclear weapons near a NATO air base in Geilenkirchen. Pictured, from left to right: Kunigunde Birle (Petra Kelly's grandmother), Petra Kelly, Die Grünen members Christa Nickels and Gerda Degen.

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Kelly serves as an important example of a broader phenomenon of women activists in the 1980s who campaigned across the Cold War Eastern and Western blocs to protest against nuclear weapons development and deployment and for peace. Like Petra Kelly, many other women and women's groups engaged one another in transnational peace activism and diplomacy throughout the decade as they fought for further women's inclusion in international politics and for a more peaceful future for themselves and their children. These included but were not limited to the US-based Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and Women for Meaningful Summits groups led by women like Margarita Papandreou and Edith Ballantyne, the Soviet-state-backed Soviet Women's Committee led by Valentina Tereshkova, and activists like French Green activist Solange Fernex or US activist Cora Weiss, who both worked with numerous groups. Their contributions to the rapidly changing international political scene during the 1980s help us better

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understand the diverse range of ideas and opinions about Cold War international politics. They advocated for a new way of doing international politics that redefined peace as an active condition, not just the absence of nuclear weapons or Cold War tensions. Their ideas demanded attention and shaped the political environment in which elite politicians like Gorbachev and US President Ronald Reagan made decisions. Peace was made a political issue in which people across the Cold War Eastern and Western blocs believed.

6. Petra Kelly's Legacy

Petra Kelly has been remembered in many different contexts and for a variety of reasons since her life was suddenly and violently ended in 1992. The spectrum ranges from the remembrance of Kelly's concrete political work to media speculation about the circumstances under which she was killed, which, particularly in Germany, arises almost every October on the anniversary of her death. Even decades after the heyday of her activism in the 1980s, Petra Kelly has not been forgotten in many parts of the world. The different ways that her legacy has been interpreted in Germany and abroad reflect her alternative, transnational approach to politics.



Figure 1. Die Grünen held a joint memorial service for Petra Kelly and Gert Bastian on 31 October 1992 at the Beethoven Halle in Bonn.

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Figure 2. A memorial service at Petra Kelly's gravesite in Würzburg, Germany, on the first anniversary of her death, 1 October 1993. Those in attendance include Petra Kelly's mother and stepfather, her grandmother, and Green party politicians from Germany and the United Kingdom.

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The unclear circumstances of Kelly's death overshadowed her legacy, especially in Germany. In October 1992, Kelly was shot in her sleep by her partner Gert Bastian, who then killed himself. The bodies lay undiscovered in the couple's Bonn home for weeks. Unsure how to react and initially unwilling to come to terms with the idea that Bastian had murdered Kelly, Die Grünen held a joint memorial service for the pair. Indeed, in early 1993, the public prosecutor's office certified the deaths as a "double suicide," a decision that tarnished Kelly's image as an icon of peace and nonviolence. Over time, however, the interpretation prevailed that Kelly had certainly not intended to end her life at the barrel of a gun. Some circumstances surrounding her death remain unclear even after three decades. However, the known facts of the case strongly support the

conclusion that Bastian's shooting of Kelly was a case of femicide. The feminist and publisher of *Emma* magazine, Alice Schwarzer, who discussed the relationship between Petra Kelly and Gert Bastian in depth in her 1993 book *Eine tödliche Liebe* (A fatal love), played a major role in this reinterpretation of the violent end to Kelly's life.

Germany's Petra Kelly

A Preacher of Pacifism Dies a Violent Death



Kelly

Petra Kelly ended her most recent book, "Nonviolence Speaks to Power," with an open letter to the German Green Party, which she founded in 1979. She exhorted her colleagues, with whom she often feuded, to revert to the "historic corner-

stones of our philosophy: uncompromising nonviolence, radical ecology, indivisible human and civil rights, civility, social emancipation, justice, and solidarity with the weak."

Her pursuit of those ideals, combined with charisma and keen public-relations instincts, gave the 44-year-old Miss Kelly world renown as a leader of Germany's peace and environmental movements.

Last week the Bonn police said she had been shot and killed under still-unexplained circumstances by her companion, Gert Bastian, who then shot himself. Their decomposed bodies were found in their rented house in a suburb near Bonn.

Although no note was found, investigators said the deaths looked like a murder-suicide. Mr. Bastian, 69, was a former major general in the West German Army and had become increasingly depressed, according to his friends. In poor health, deeply troubled by the recent upsurge of rightist violence and burdened by financial problems, they said, Mr. Bastian may have resorted to the death-before-dishonor code of German officers.

FERDINAND PROTZMAN

Figure 3. A *New York Times* article published shortly after Peter Kelly's death was reported. A version of this article appeared in print on 25 October 1992, section 4, page 2 of the national edition with the headline: 18-24 Oct: "Germany's Petra Kelly: A Preacher of Pacifism Dies a Violent Death."

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IN MEMORY OF *PETRA KELLY*

BY MICK WOMERSLEY

It is unfortunate that America will probably not mourn the deaths of Green Party founder Petra Kelly and retired general-turned activist Gert Bastian. Their violent ends merited only a small piece in the "Food and Health" section of Missoula's local rag this morning and, outraged, I feel the need to strike back. Who will know the story if it is never told loud enough?

Those of us who were young in Europe in the late seventies and early eighties well remember the hopeless feeling that we experienced with the invasion of our countries by American Pershing and Cruise missiles. We also remember the hope we experienced when the German Greens won seats in the Bundestag, and Kelly, our hero, was seen in newspaper photos talking with government penguins wearing t-shirts and sandals. One particularly dramatic moment that needs to be remembered as part of our folk culture was when the Greens took their seats in the parliament for the first time. All the rest of Bundestag, mostly men with a smattering of women, all conservatively dressed, was upstaged by the colorful procession of Green parliamentarians. When they sat down, they did so in such a way that they were a solid block of color between the two mainstream parties.

We needed to know then that we had political power. Petra and the Green movement told us we did. Bastian, the old soldier, showed us that older people could and would share the same values. Some of us were inspired and went to found other branches of the movement elsewhere, or took the energy and changed our lives in other ways.

The environmental movement already has its share of martyrs and most of us probably don't even believe in martyring ourselves to the cause.

all leaders, and will simply learn to become better leaders ourselves if they take our best from us. Others seem to think that the movement will fragment at the hands of skilled spin doctors, will topple under the weight of conservative public backlashes, or will simply peter out if ignored. Mistakes number two, three and four.

A movement that is based on grassroots support for a human way of life, a humane way of life that doesn't kill the planet or take resources from other humans who need them is based

There will be others. Nobody can stop us in the next stage, which is when we tell the world that it is possible to live as a Green on the planet, and not only is it possible, it's more human, more fun and more fulfilling.

Today I shed a tear for Kelly and Bastian. Last night I was inspired by Helen Caldicott on public radio (one leader is replaced immediately by another). She told of how she was banned from a major prime-time network show after her book, *If You Really Love the Planet* came out. The corporate sponsors, General Electric, were named as despoilers in the book, and they tweaked the tail of the network to censor Caldicott. She got her message out in other ways.

As always, I will go out into the world again today to try to continue living my life in the best way I know how. No one can take that power away from me or anyone else. In the future, the American media will be shamed by historians for their mean-spirited adherence to the dictates of their corporate slave-drivers, and their various financial rationales. Meanwhile, my friends and I are free.

Mick Womersley is a wilderness advocate and native of England.

*Some people seem to think
that our movement can be
decapitated by removing leaders.
Mistake number one.*

That would be against all the ecological imperatives that I know of.

It is clear to me that some people seem to think that our movement can be decapitated by removing leaders. Mistake number one. We are

mostly on the strength of our own emotions and human needs. We already have our new lives. They can never be taken away. Kelly and Bastian were there to help us show ourselves what to do to make our new lives.

Figure 4. An obituary for Petra Kelly was published in the journal of the US radical environmental group Earth First!. Roselle, Mike, ed., *Earth First! Journal* 13, no. 1 (2 November 1992).

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Even as Kelly's death was still being discussed, her life and her many achievements began to make their way into public memory. Indeed, outside of Germany, Kelly's life and her many contributions quickly overshadowed the debate about the circumstances of her death. Already on 25 April 1993, a memorial was dedicated to Petra Kelly in Spain. In the aftermath of Earth Day, the Catalan city of Barcelona decided to name a garden on the slope of the Montjuïc hill after Petra Kelly (Jardí Petra Kelly), in which a small sculpture was also placed in her honor. Even in Germany, Kelly's life has been celebrated with public monuments. On the first anniversary of Kelly's death, an elaborate gravestone was unveiled in Würzburg's Waldfriedhof, the same place where her half sister Grace P. Kelly was buried and where her grandmother Kunigunde Birle was later entombed. Streets and squares in many German cities have been named after Petra Kelly since the 1990s, most notably in the former capital city of Bonn, where Kelly served for seven years as a member of parliament.

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After the mourning and these initial commemoration ceremonies had been held and Petra Kelly's papers had been safely stored in the newly founded Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (Green Memory Archive), however, German discussions of her legacy quieted down. Her political positions, from her uncompromising commitment to nonviolence to her criticism of possible government participation by the Greens, were no longer majority opinions within her own party by the end of the 1990s. In 1998, Die Grünen, now united with the East German group Bündnis 90 (Alliance 90), entered into government as junior coalition partners to the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). The following year, in 1999, the majority of the delegates to a Die Grünen party convention voted in favor of NATO's engagement in the Kosovo War. It was only after the end of the Red-Green coalition in 2005, when the Greens needed to regroup in opposition, that the idealism of a thinker like Petra Kelly could once again be found more widely within Die Grünen. This was probably one of the reasons why Ralf Fücks, then president of the Heinrich Böll Foundation (affiliated with Die Grünen), wrote in 2007 in an illustrated book published by the foundation on the occasion of Petra Kelly's 60th birthday of a *Wiederannäherung* (rapprochement) between Kelly and the Greens. Nonetheless, the party's relationship to the memory of its erstwhile figurehead remained tenuous in the following years.



Figure 5. A stone honoring Petra Kelly at the Petra Kelly Memorial Garden in Barcelona.

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Figure 6. Petra Kelly's mother, her stepfather, and the Green politician Renate Künast stand by the sign for "Petra Kelly Allee" in Bonn in August 2006.

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More recently, however, Kelly's name has been invoked with greater frequency. In Germany, interest in the circumstances of her death was reinvigorated by true-crime podcasts and television series. The contrast between Kelly's relentless political engagement and her sudden death was a major subject of Torsten Körner's 2021 film *Die Unbeugsamen* (translated into English as *Femocracy*), which focused on women's struggles to enter and transform the hypermasculine world of West German parliamentary politics.



At the same time, the ongoing climate crisis made Kelly's approach to politics seem increasingly relevant. Her emphasis on the importance of Indigenous knowledge and the need to stand with "native peoples" who are "suffering from the expansion of Western society and Western ways of life" rings true in our era of global environmental destruction and growing militarism. Likewise, her call to "transform consumer mentality and our industrial economic growth system into an ecological sustainable economy with conservation replacing consumption as the driving force" is all the more urgent in the climate-change era. Works in a variety of media offered new ways of thinking about Kelly's legacy. In September 2020, the Canadian novelist Shaena Lambert published a work of historical fiction that explored Kelly's relationship with Gert Bastian, and imagined Kelly as her closest political comrades saw her. By emphasizing the importance of Kelly's relationships, Lambert offered a new means of reflecting on Kelly's understanding of Green politics and their meaning in the present. In 2022, the German author and illustrator Simon Schwartz published a visually stimulating graphic novel that linked Kelly's radical views and political visions with the bold acts of protest and civil disobedience that underpinned them.

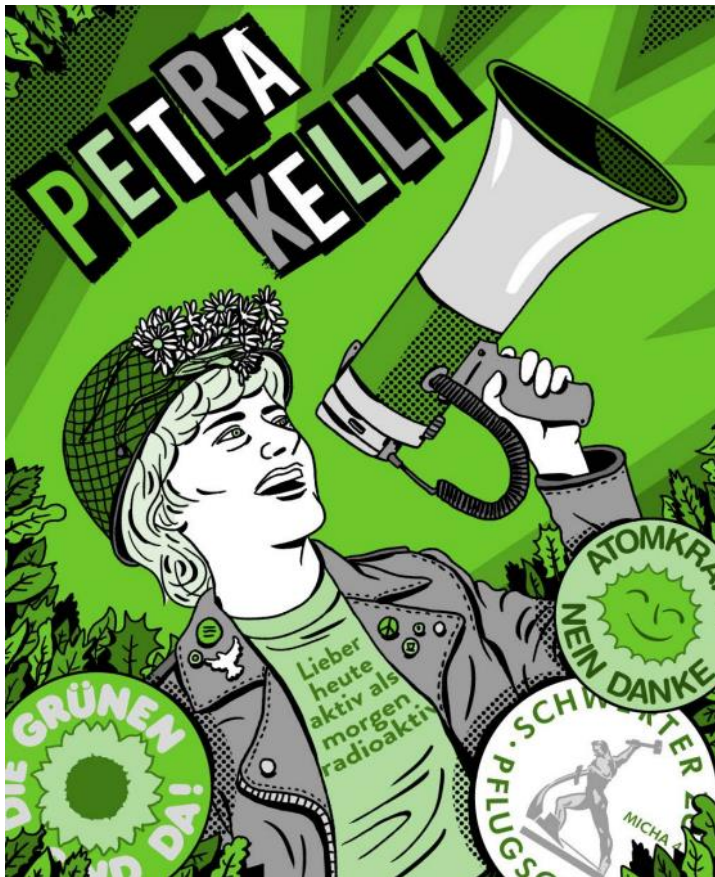


Figure 7. Simon Schwartz created a [graphic novel](#) about the life of Petra Kelly, which was published by the Heinrich Böll Foundation on the 75th anniversary of Kelly's birth in 2022.

Published by the Heinrich Böll Foundation. Used by permission. Illustration, text, and typesetting by Simon Schwartz, Hamburg.

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Following the brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Kelly's important role as a leader and spokesperson of the 1980s "new peace movement" came back into focus, as well. On account of Kelly's total rejection of violence, her name was regularly invoked as a symbol of Germany's post-1945 antimilitarism and the Green Party's pacifist roots. Her positions were contrasted frequently with contemporary Green politicians' support for shipping arms to Ukraine and increasing Germany's domestic defense budget. In contrast to the 1999 debate over the Kosovo War, almost no one in or around Die Grünen emphasized nonviolence as the guiding principle in the debate over how Germany ought to respond to the Russian invasion.

By the fall of 2022, on the 75th anniversary of her birth, the significance of Petra Kelly's life and her political work had become widely acknowledged in many parts of the world. Strikingly, however, there remained important differences in the way she was remembered in Germany and elsewhere. Within Germany, Kelly was still criticized for shortcomings in her work within Die Grünen; the extent to which her particular approach to politics shaped the party and defined its image continued to be overlooked. Perhaps more significantly still, her central role in building political networks and green parties around the world was rarely mentioned.



Figure 8. A protester holds a sign reading “What would Petra Kelly say?” at a protest for heat, bread, and peace on 5 September 2022 in Berlin.

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In other countries, however the picture was quite different. Emphasis on Kelly’s global networking and her role in aiding grassroots movements and popularizing green politics in many different counties is widely acknowledged in places like Spain, Italy, and the United States to name just a few examples. Hence, one of Kelly’s closest colleagues, the activist Eva Quistorp, recently remembered Kelly’s importance for the development of Die Grünen, but also emphasized the extent to which Kelly’s legacy was a transnational one that had to be understood beyond the boundaries and frameworks of traditional, national politics. In an October 2022 open letter addressed to her deceased friend, Quistorp wrote, “your accomplishments should remind us of the strength and the vision of all those who struggle now, everyday and without acknowledgement, for solidarity and democratic change.”

“Missing you!”—A personal letter

Dear Petra,

I am not the only one who is missing you very much, you are missed by many in this country and around the world. Especially now, when Putin’s power apparatus is waging a brutal war against Ukraine. You are also missed by Russian feminists, who dare to take non-violent actions against the war of Putin’s mafia.

Petra, your name, like Peter, reminds us of a rock: you were a rock on which the anti-nuclear weapons movement and the Greens were built throughout Europe. You were part of the awakening in the U.S. in the 1960s with the civil rights movement—which, with Martin Luther King, was also a peace movement against the power of the military-industrial complex and against the Vietnam War, which we protested in West Berlin and you protested in the U.S. with Robert Kennedy.

You held great speeches at the peace demonstrations in the 1980s in Bonn that I helped organize with the “Women for Peace.” Unfortunately, neither Georg Mascolo quotes you in his good articles in the South German Newspaper (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*) on nuclear weapons, nor Green foreign minister Annalena Baerbock in her UN speeches. You supported the women’s peace movement worldwide and, together with me, the women for peace in the GDR.

You are missed by many now, when we must insist in the UN on the implementation of Resolution 1325, which since 2000 has advocated the participation of women at all levels in peace negotiations. You did not live to see the founding of the women’s rights organization *medica mondiale* in Cologne in 1993, in which I participated as an MEP. Unfortunately. Since you also so wanted to help practically against the traumas of women and children in wars and terror.

Do you remember when we were together at the World Women’s Conference in Moscow in June 1987—and with Helen Caldicott, our third-in-command since the anti-nuclear conference in Dublin, where we had met in 1978, daring to raise the health dangers of Chernobyl? The Soviet Women’s Federation allowed us to speak openly back then under Glasnost and Perestroika! What a contrast to the ban on the human rights organisation Memorial and the newspaper *Nova Gazeta* today. They—I’m sure you were happy to hear on your cloud—won the Nobel Peace Prize, along with oppositionists from Belarus and civil society in Ukraine.

You would have come to the vigils at the Brandenburg Gate for the Green Movement in Iran in 2009, which I helped organize. Also now you would have been there when Duezen Tükkal organized a demo for the women in Iran protesting against compulsory hijab and against the reactionary Islam theocracy and the corrupt elites in Iran and their murders and lies. You always wanted both: nuclear disarmament and full women's rights. You were no stranger to criticism of religion as a liberal Catholic.

Myself, and many others, also miss you in the feminist debates of today on prostitution, hijabs for teachers, diversity, anti-discrimination and quotas. You clapped immediately when I was the first in Germany to call for a women's quota at the founding party conference of the Green Party in my speech in Karlsruhe in January 1980. After that, we pushed it through in the first committees—long before the Greens' women's statute of 1986. We both talked about forced marriage and genital mutilation and women's poverty, in conjunction with U.S. and French feminists.

We both invented the sunflower as the logo of the Greens with Roland Vogt, who was one of the trio of founders from the Federal Association of Citizens' Initiatives for Environmental Protection (BBU) and the Young European Federalists (JeF). And we then gave the sunflower to the Greens as a gift. It wasn't Josef Beuys, as a German Television (ZDF) film claimed the other day at the Green Party convention, along the lines that only famous men can invent famous logos and names. No. It was our trio, who—like tens of thousands of anti-nuclear activists—knew the logo of the designer from Denmark: "Atomkraft, nein danke!" ("Nuclear power, no thanks!").

We suggested the name "The Greens" as if from the same mouth when Milan Horacek of Charter 77 told us that the left-wing party founding scene wanted to call themselves "The Alternative". This reminded us of Rudolf Bahro's important book against environmental destruction, but was too abstract for us. We felt the name "The Greens" was more sensual and related to spiritual traditions of hope. The Greens should have been more respectful of this gift from three party founders.

Instead, for the past 30 years, you have been almost forgotten in official speeches and media appearances by top Greens. And now you are rather used as an ornament, as it happens to many dead people who experienced competition and envy and intrigue during their lifetime. No quote from you and not even your name was mentioned at the big celebration of "40 years Greens" in early January

2020. Not even from Lukas Beckmann, who was the only founding Green to speak—along with Ströbele, Steinmeier and Luisa Neubauer, Annalena Baerbock, Robert Habeck.

And eight years earlier, at the funeral service in 1992, you and your murderer were remembered at the same time. I found that just as bad then as the silence in 2020. Later in the evening of the green anniversary celebration, slightly tipsy, I met Ina Deter, who hugged me in tears and called out “Eva, where is Petra? Why is no one talking about Petra?” This was overheard by a journalist of the weekly ZEIT (Time), but she probably couldn’t relate anymore to us two feminists from the era of the great peace movement and the founding period of the Greens.

What actions do you think you would have done in the last 30 years if you hadn’t gotten sick ? Something like the one at Alexanderplatz against the repression in the GDR or the one at the embassy in South Africa against the apartheid system ? Surely you would have been there at the climate demonstrations. Although you would have spoken out clearly for non-violence—as we did together in the 1980s. You would have made radical speeches, but you would have opposed extreme actions.

You were actually a Greta of your time. You also struck apocalyptic tones from time to time and scolded on politics. Yes, even on the Greens, which you wanted to be an anti-party. You also got a lot of shitstorms back then and mean letters—there was no Twitter yet—from right-wing extremist milieu with the mail.

You didn’t want to rotate and give up your seat in parliament. But you wouldn’t have necessarily wanted more than eight years in the Bundestag either, which is normal for many Greens today. You wanted to go to a university in the U.S.A., you told me a few days before your murder, enthusiastically and full of life. You were unhappy with the Green Heinrich-Boell Foundation and the Green Party at the time, feeling abandoned and forgotten with your money troubles and with what you could contribute to the Greens.

But it was not you, but your life partner Gerd Bastian who seemed depressed at the conferences in Salzburg and Berlin in September 1992, your last month of life, and aged since his accident. I always tried to perceive you as Petra, as a unique female personality, and believed in us as a feminist tandem as in the beginning. I was never entirely comfortable with this “General for Peace.” Nor

with his organization, in which some from Italy and Holland were close to the SED, if not the USSR and the KGB.

It is strange that he shot you in your sleep after you had been briefly with the Stasi authorities in Berlin in September, as you told me. Your all-too-early death, your murder by your life partner remains a great mystery. It was a shock for me that burdened me for years. I would have gladly redeemed you from this entangled relationship.

At the World Women's Conference in Miami in 1991, we were happily together again for a short time. Bella Abzug and Mim Kelber, two great female figures in U.S. peace and women's politics invited on a ship where we could finally eat and talk together without the General for once. The results of this conference in Miami, which we summarized with Bella and Claire Greensfelder in *Women's Agenda 21*, should be taken to heart by the Greens of today.

To the new climate movement, let it be said that we were already talking about climate in 1978, and Petra was one of their predecessors. That as a former Social Democrat and former EU administrator, facts and administrative knowledge was as important to her as it is to Scientists For Future today. Would the talk shows of today have invited you? And how you would have fared? You failed on Sat 1-TV back then. Many women of the old women's, environmental and peace movement never got on TV.

That we would appear in articles in the established media was unthinkable at the time. But you desperately wanted to conquer parliaments besides the media and parties. You aspired to greatness, perhaps sometimes too strained and too pathetic. You were not grounded enough by those who surrounded you after 1983 and profited from you in the parliament, the Bundestag. And competed with you or intrigued in the party against you.

I was always more of a "down-to-earth" and undogmatic "Sponti" leftist of West Berlin than you, in whom the amazon and the courageous suffragettes of the past continued to tick. Black Lives Matter was familiar to us through the Black Power movement and Nelson Mandela. Plus your 1987 Tibet hearing and your friendship with the Dalai Lama—to whom you introduced me, and laughed when I dared to present him with a rose.

How do you think you would have fared with Angela Merkel? You would have had to change your speeches a lot if you were now facing the questions of the turn of the times like us. As a democrat who was not in favor of leaving Nato

like many Greens, but like me always in favor of Nato reforms, you would not have been against arms deliveries to Ukraine in principle.

You blocked nuclear weapons transports together with Heinrich Boell and his wife in Mutlangen in Southwest Germany—non-violently in the spirit of Gandhi and Martin Luther King. You were unique with your charisma. You drew me and many others into the stream of hope and parliamentary politics. Like us, however, you also had weaknesses and dark sides.

Petra, today you would be the age of the “climate women seniors” from Switzerland who, together with Greenpeace, are suing the inaction of governments before the European Court of Human Rights. Would you go with them? Today with the protection against right-wing and media hostility that you lacked 30 years ago. And which you then unfortunately sought from a general. I wonder if you would enjoy the book and podcasts now being produced by the Boell Foundation to mark the 30th anniversary of your death and the 75th anniversary of your birth.

At any rate, it’s good that some of your speeches are being reread, the Petra Kelly Archive is being used for the present—and you’re not being digested in movies with the mysterious “relationship thriller” ending. You have been spared the wars of the present and the right wing party Alternative for Germany (AfD) as well as the dictatorships of today that threaten freedom of the press and democratic welfare states. Also Big Tech with its global corporate power. You would certainly have sued Facebook.

Joan Baez “We Shall Overcome”—will still please you with her songs. And she won’t forget you. Hopefully, neither will the many feminist climate activists and young parliamentarians from Europe and Africa and Latin America and Asia.

Eva Quistorp, Berlin, 12 October 2022

Petra Kelly’s longtime political comrade, Eva Quistorp, wrote this letter to her on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of her birth in 2022. Original German text © 2022 Eva Quistorp. English translation © 2022 Rebecca Hillauer, <https://hillauer.substack.com/p/today-petra-kelly-would-have-turned>. Used by permission.

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Timeline

The original virtual exhibition features an interactive timeline
of Petra Kelly's life.

Read an offline version of the timeline
on the following pages or visit the online version here

(<https://www.environmentandsociety.org/exhibitions/petra-kelly/timeline/petra-kelly-timeline>).

Born in Günzburg, Bavaria

29 November 1947

Petra Kelly was born as Petra Karin Lehmann in Günzburg, Bavaria. Her parents, Marianne Margarete Birle and Richard Siegfried Lehmann, met as pen pals while he was interned at a prisoner of war camp.



Petra Kelly and her mother, Marianne, out for a walk, ca. 1949.

Unknown photographer, ca. 1949. © Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (signature: FO-03116-01). Used by permission.

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Childhood in Günzburg, Bavaria

29 November 1947–1959

Kelly's father, Richard Siegfried Lehmann, abandoned the family in the early 1950s, which was a formative loss for the young Petra Kelly. Instead, her grandmother, Kunigunde Birle, became the person to whom she related most closely. After Kelly's parents divorced in 1954, her mother, Marianne Margarete Birle, met US soldier John Edward Kelly in 1957. The two married in 1959, and, as a result, both Marianne and young Petra adopted the surname Kelly. Petra Kelly started school at the Catholic Girls' Elementary School in Günzburg in 1953 and then transferred to a girls' high school, which she later described as a Catholic convent school. On 25 May 1959, Kelly's half sister Grace Kelly was born.



Petra Kelly and her grandmother, Kunigunde Birle, on a walk in June 1953.

Unknown photographer, 1953. © Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (signature: FO-03119-02). Used by permission.

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Public-School Pupil in Columbus, Georgia, and Hampton, Virginia

1960–1966

In December 1959, the Kelly family relocated to the United States as Petra Kelly's stepfather, John Kelly, was transferred to the US Army post Fort Benning near Columbus, Georgia. After her family's move to the United States, Kelly attended public schools in the southern military towns where her stepfather was stationed. From 1960 until 1962, she was a pupil at Eddie Junior High School in Columbus, Georgia. She then attended Columbus's Baker High School from 1962 to 1964. When her stepfather was transferred to Fort Monroe in Hampton, Virginia, in 1964, Kelly began attending Hampton High School. She graduated from Hampton High in spring 1966.



Petra Kelly in January 1965, at which time she was a pupil at Hampton High School in Hampton, Virginia.

Unknown photographer, 1965. © Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis. (signature: FO-01619-01). Used by permission.

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Student at American University in Washington, DC

1966–1970

In the fall of 1966, Petra Kelly enrolled in the School of International Service at American University in Washington, DC. In May 1970, Kelly graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in international relations. She was an outstanding student who organized AU's "International Week," took part in student government, and volunteered on the electoral campaigns of several Democratic politicians. Kelly admired John F. Kennedy and endorsed Democratic candidates Robert Kennedy and, after his death, Hubert H. Humphrey, who, however, was defeated by Republican Richard Nixon in the 1968 presidential election. The civil rights movement and the Vietnam War were important political reference points for Kelly's early political involvement, although she is explicitly described by Saskia Richter as "not rebellious." Correspondence between Kelly and Humphrey indicates that she could have imagined working for the national Democratic Party organization.



Petra Kelly with US Senator and presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy, ca. March 1968.

Unknown photographer, ca. March 1968. © Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis. (signature: AGG FO-03152-01-cp). Used by permission.

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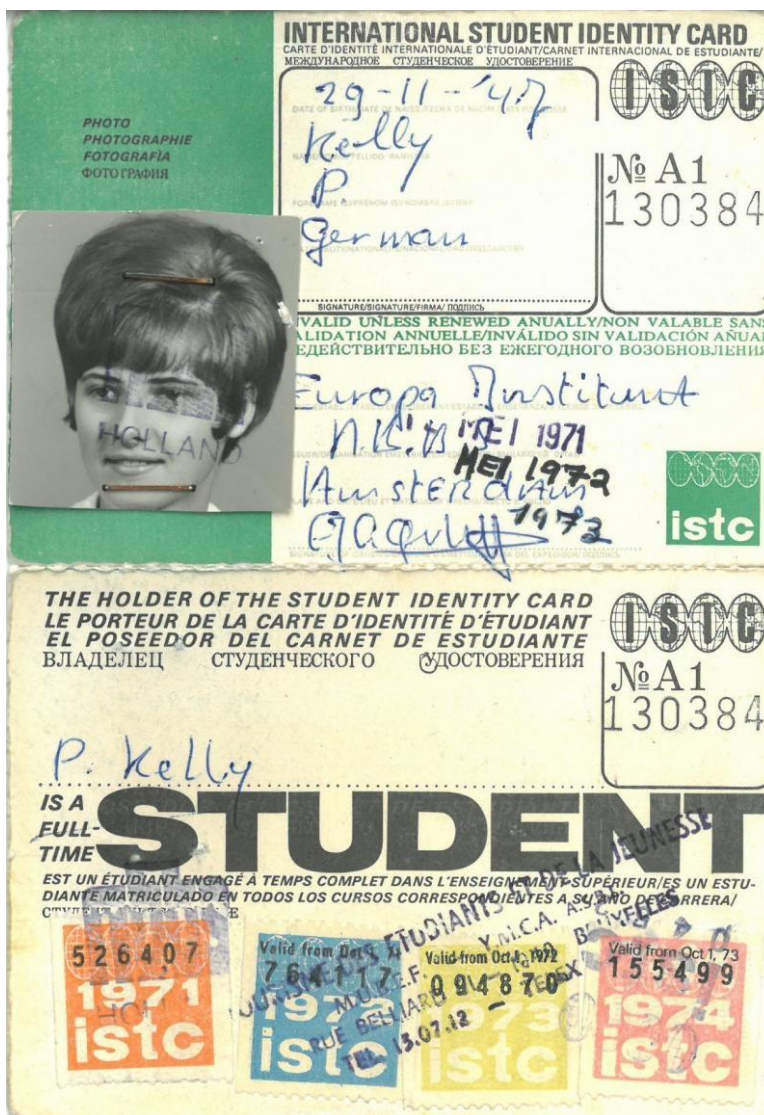
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Master's Student at the Europa Institute of the University of Amsterdam

1970–1971

In the fall of 1970, Petra Kelly moved back to Europe in order to enroll in a master's program on European integration at the University of Amsterdam's Europa Institute. Kelly's choice to return to Europe was prompted on the one hand by her disillusionment with US politics after Hubert Humphrey lost the 1968 election, and on the other by her family's return to Germany while her half sister, Grace, was undergoing cancer treatment in Würzburg. By the time Kelly arrived in Amsterdam, however, Grace had died, and her parents had returned to the United States. Still, Kelly took advantage of her relative proximity to her grandmother, who was now living in Nuremberg.



Petra Kelly's student ID from her time as a master's student at the University of Amsterdam.

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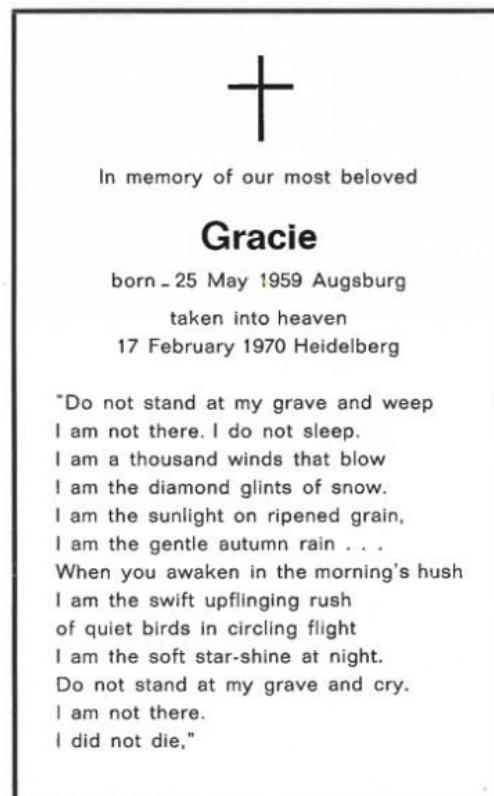
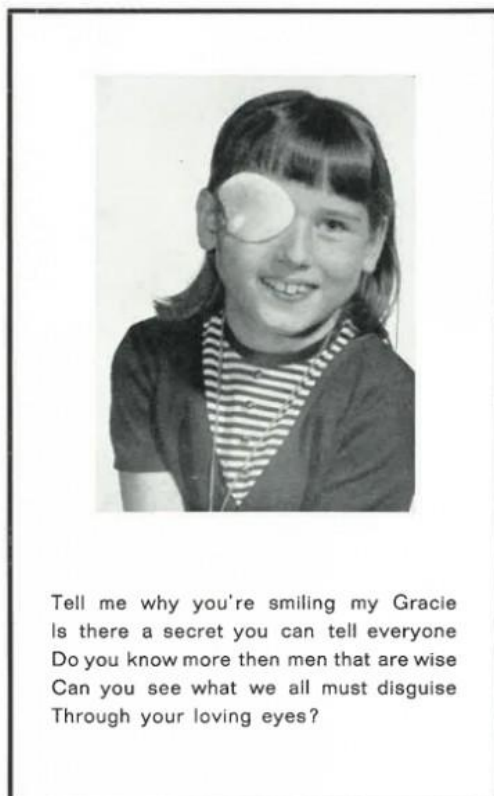
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Death of Kelly's Half Sister, Grace

17 February 1970

Petra Kelly's half sister, Grace, died of cancer at the age of 10 in February 1970. Grace's death was a painful and moving experience for Kelly and marked the beginning of her vehement rejection of nuclear technology. In a Bundestag debate at the end of 1983, Kelly looked back on this blow of fate in the following way: "I became active in the antinuclear and peace and women's movements in 1970. The occasion was the death of my cancer-stricken sister, Grace, who was almost eleven years old and had been lying under radiation apparatus in various X-ray departments of cancer hospitals for three years. My sister was irradiated at a high dose almost daily and became a victim of this atomic age herself, as the cancer spread through the eye, the face, the ear, and all indications were that the radiation therapy was making her condition even worse." In February 1973, Petra Kelly founded the Grace P. Kelly Association for the Support of Cancer Research for Children ([Grace P. Kelly Vereinigung zur Unterstützung der Krebsforschung für Kinder](#)). On the anniversary of her sister's death in 1979, Kelly resigned from the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), of which she had been a member since 1973. In a letter sent to SPD chairman Willy Brandt, Kelly named the party's nuclear policy as the reason for her resignation.



Petra Kelly saved this card announcing the death of her half sister, Grace, in a memorial album that she created for Grace.

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Employee of the European Economic Community (EEC) in Brussels

1971–1983

In the fall of 1971, Petra Kelly began a six-month internship at the General Secretariat of the EEC in Brussels. In 1972, despite a hiring freeze, she became a temporary employee of the EEC's Economic and Social Committee (EcoSoc). The following year, she secured a permanent post as an administrator at EcoSoc, where she worked until 1983, when she went on leave from the position in order to take her seat in the West German Bundestag. Kelly's time in Brussels familiarized her not only with the formal processes of European integration but also with the efforts of NGOs and political parties to shape the European project—efforts in which she became increasingly involved herself, most notably through work with the Young European Federalists (JEF). It was also from Brussels that Petra Kelly got involved in West German politics, first as a member of the Brussels chapter of SPD, then as an activist in the antinuclear, women's, and peace movements, and finally as a cofounder of Die Grünen.



Petra Kelly in her apartment in Brussels. Date unknown.

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Cofounder and Early Leader of the German Green Party (Die Grünen)

1979–1983

As a critically minded EEC employee and proponent of European integration, Petra Kelly was an early advocate of direct elections to the European Parliament. When the first such election was announced for 1979, Kelly became involved in an effort to bring together local and regional environmental candidates' lists and political parties into a single entity that could stand in the elections. The result of this effort was the formation of the Alternative Political Association: The Greens (Sonstige Politische Vereinigung: (SPV)-Die Grünen). Kelly was chosen for the first position on this group's list of candidates for the European Parliament, an effort that achieved 3.2 percent of the vote. In 1980, after the European election, SPV-Die Grünen established itself as a formal political party called the Greens (Die Grünen). Petra Kelly became the new party's first cochair and served as its lead candidate in the 1980 and 1983 Bundestag elections as well as the 1982 election to the Bavarian state parliament. At the same time, Kelly made a name for herself as a protagonist of the peace movement. Kelly's experiences living in the United States and her ongoing career at the EEC in Brussels informed her different ideas about political work that shaped her engagement in the new party and her visions for the future of Green politics.



Protest action by Petra Kelly, Roland Vogt, and Solange Fernex (Europe Ecologie) on the day of the constituent session of the European Parliament in July 1979. The Parliament had been directly elected for the first time, but the Greens were not represented in parliament due to the five-percent hurdle, which caused some of them to protest from the guest grandstand.

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Member of Parliament for Die Grünen

1983–1990

On 6 March 1983, Die Grünen scored 5.6 percent of the vote in the election to the West German parliament (Bundestag), a result which entitled the young party to 28 seats. On 29 March 1983, the Bundestag held its constitutive session. The Greens marched to parliament at the head of a procession of activists. Kelly, perhaps the best-known Green politician at the time, was immediately elected the Green delegation's cochair. Though she soon fell out with her colleagues among Die Grünen and became isolated within the delegation, she became increasingly active in shaping green politics as an international project. With the resources of an MP at her disposal, Kelly traveled the world ceaselessly in the 1980s, participating in protest campaigns, making speeches, and building connections with activists. The division between Kelly's profile in Germany and abroad became most distinct at this time.



Members of the Greens march to the constituent session of the 10th German Bundestag. From left to right: Gert Bastian, Petra Kelly, Otto Schily, Marieluise Beck.

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Beyond the Greens

1990–1992

After the West German Greens lost all of their seats in parliament in the 1990 elections, Petra Kelly no longer had the resources of the Bundestag at her disposal. In 1991, Kelly ran for a position as party cochair, but she took a distant third place in the voting. Despite her growing distance from German parliamentary politics, Kelly remained deeply engaged in international politics and activism. Together with her partner, the former Bundeswehr general and erstwhile Green MP Gert Bastian, Kelly traveled in 1991 alone to the UK, India, Switzerland, Tibet, the United States, Austria, and Mexico. Among other topics, she spoke frequently of the challenges facing the international peace movement after the end of the Cold War and of her concerns about a resurgence of nationalism in reunified Germany.



Petra Kelly visiting Hawaii in June 1991.

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Shot Dead by Gert Bastian

1 October 1992

Petra Kelly was shot dead in her sleep, presumably in the early morning hours of 1 October 1992, by her life partner Gert Bastian in their shared home in Bonn. Bastian turned the gun on himself and committed suicide shortly after killing Kelly. Because the bodies were not discovered until 19 October, many details of the shooting remain unresolved, a circumstance which has led to wide speculation about Bastian's motive and influenced the way that Kelly has been remembered today.



Petra Kelly's gravestone at the Waldfriedhof in Würzburg.

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Petra Kelly's Legacy

1 October 1992–2024

Kelly's death, and especially the manner in which she was violently torn from life, generated widespread coverage in the days and weeks following the announcement of her death. Newspapers in many countries around the world published at least a note about the tragic end of the green icon. The sometimes very different interpretations of Petra Kelly's life, of the circumstances of her death, and the significance of her person, still caused people to express themselves in one way or another years later. One of the most important contributions, published in 1994, was the biography by Petra Kelly's friend and British Green activist Sara Parkin on "the life and death of Petra Kelly." After the unconventional and even radical beginnings of the environmental movements in the 1970s, the consolidation of parts of these movements into the establishment during the 1980s, and the integration of ecological issues into the capitalist mainstream through the concept of sustainable development in the 1990s, the question of whether the far-reaching and radical approaches of Green pioneers like Petra Kelly were even still needed arose. Parkin answered this question in her 1994 book, in which she pointed out that "history will see Petra's death like a punctuation mark in the development of green politics, but it will be as a comma, not as a full stop." This prediction seems to have now been borne out with the rise of movements like Fridays for Future. In the widespread political debates that have since resumed about the policies needed to address the unfolding climate crisis, environmental and climate movements around the world have never been more present, and Petra Kelly's ideas, from nonviolent civil resistance to ecofeminist approaches to transforming the economy, sometimes seem written for our times. In addition to the appeal of Kelly's legacy to political actors, her rediscovered relevance is also evident in cultural spheres, such as podcasts and novels.



Sara Parkin speaks at a conference on Petra Kelly's life and legacy in Munich, October 2022.

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Petra Kelly, ca. 1964–1966.

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ANTI-NUCLEAR ACTIVIST AND FOUNDER OF GERMAN GREEN PARTY
IN MEMORY OF PETRA KELLY

By Mike Foreman
 It is a sad day for the world that we have lost the German Green Party's first leader, Petra Kelly. She was a woman of great courage and vision, who dedicated her life to the cause of peace, justice, and environmental protection. Her death is a loss to the world, but her legacy lives on in the hearts of those who continue to fight for a better world. She was a woman of great courage and vision, who dedicated her life to the cause of peace, justice, and environmental protection. Her death is a loss to the world, but her legacy lives on in the hearts of those who continue to fight for a better world. She was a woman of great courage and vision, who dedicated her life to the cause of peace, justice, and environmental protection. Her death is a loss to the world, but her legacy lives on in the hearts of those who continue to fight for a better world.

Some people seem to think that our movement can be decapitated by removing leaders. Mistake number one.

Obituary originally published in Mike Roselle, ed., *Earth First! Journal* 13, no. 1 (2 November 1992).

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