

On November 9, 1989, during an otherwise unremarkable televised press conference, a journalist asked Günter Schabowski, a leading official of East Germany's Socialist Unity Party, about travel restrictions. The government of the GDR, under considerable pressure, had just drafted a new bill in an attempt to stop the uncontrollable flow of people escaping through the Hungarian/Austrian border. The plan was to allow GDR citizens to apply for visas and emigrate to West Germany, while denying them the right to return; it was essentially a one-way ticket, and the news wasn't supposed to be announced until the following day. But Schabowski grew confused. He responded to the journalist's question by reading the draft bill out loud; pressed further, he affirmed that the border between East and West Germany was indeed open. Effective immediately? Schabowski looked down at the draft. Yes, he responded, effective immediately. The blunder quickly spread through the international news agencies and was broadcast on the West German evening news shortly after. Less than an hour later, thousands of people had gathered at the city's checkpoints and demanded to be let through. In its late news edition, East German TV made a feeble attempt to correct the mistake and insist that visas were still required and could be applied for the next day, but the genie was out of the bottle.

While all of this was going on, I was lying on my back in a sauna with my eyes closed. I'd been renovating a loft in Kreuzberg, West Berlin, I was exhausted and sore, and I wanted to go to bed early. I can no longer remember what I thought when I learnt the news, but I still clearly recall the unease many of us felt crossing the border in the days that followed. Was it a trick? The situation was far from clear-cut, and it took some time for things to sink in. Despite the Monday demonstrations in Leipzig, despite the hordes that had been crossing the Hungarian border since September, we didn't see it coming; the world was divided into East and West, this was the natural state of things, and the demise of the Warsaw Pact was as unthinkable as the prospect that Mikhail Gorbachev could be held prisoner by his own party or that the Soviet Union could disintegrate soon thereafter. Thirty years later we speak of the "Fall of the Berlin Wall", but the Wall didn't simply tumble down like a row of dominoes on November 9. The GDR continued to exist for another year, during which time the East German authorities did what they could to keep up appearances. The border guards let East and West Germans cross freely, but when it came to foreign residents like myself those first few weeks, they didn't quite know what to do. My passport wasn't enough for them; I had to go to the police and apply for an interim document, a "Lichtbildbescheinigung" that was essentially a stamped sheet of paper with my address and a photograph stapled to it. It was a pretend-document for a situation in which the authorities pretended they still had authority; a document for a charade.

By the autumn of 1989, I'd been living in West Berlin for five years. I had decided a few months previously that, if I was lucky enough to get the large grant I'd applied for, I'd move myself and my paintings back to New York. But when the grant came through, I spent a chunk of the money renovating a commercial loft in Berlin instead. Rents were cheap, studio space was my paramount concern, and I signed



## Slowly falling

### Recollections of November 1989 in Berlin

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a three-year lease. But now, with the Wall being dismantled and Kreuzberg on its way towards merging with Mitte, East Berlin's historic centre, my landlady reasoned that property values were bound to skyrocket. And so as soon as the lease was due for renewal, she jacked up the rent.

The fact is, most of us artists and writers and filmmakers and dancers and musicians who'd wound up in West Berlin and stayed were fine with the Wall. We were fine with the soldiers and the barbed wire and the political theatre of it all because it gave us a place to live at a crucial remove from the rest of the Western world. We lived in a protected bubble, no one paid much attention to us, and those who were eager to build a career moved away. The rest of us survived on part-time gigs and resigned ourselves to cold-water flats and coal heating and toilets in the hall, because we'd understood that the most valuable resource of all was time, and that Berlin was giving us more of it than we knew what to do with. We painted, we wrote, we daydreamed; we drank and took drugs and danced. The city had spoiled us, and change – as exciting as it quickly became for so many of us – arrived as a rude awakening.

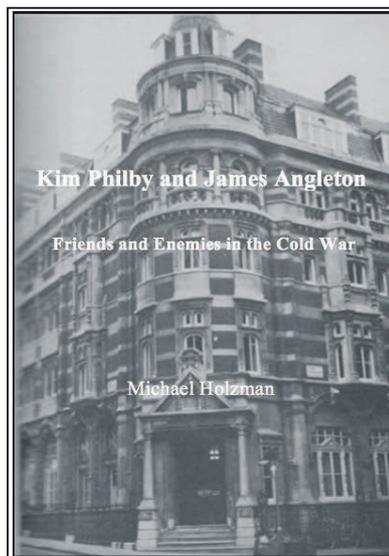
As for my wonderful loft, I soon realized I could no longer afford it. I started studying newspaper ads. I remember speaking to an older woman on the phone with a five-room apartment she'd raised her children in but could no longer maintain because the rent had gone up tenfold while her tiny GDR pension remained the same. She spoke quietly, she politely asked me if I could help her, but I hardly knew what to do myself. Capitalism had come raining down on East Berliners without warning, the majority was not equipped for it – and while the city had suddenly doubled in size and become infinitely more interesting, virtually overnight – neither were we. Supply

and demand, the deceptions of advertising, unemployment and the vagaries of the job market, Western-style competition: it was clear that the younger generation would adapt to the new system, while many older people whose academic qualifications and professional expertise were downgraded as part of the wholesale devaluation of everything from the East would be left behind.

But what did we know of any of this? On November 10, thousands of tiny Trabant cars clogged the boulevards of West Berlin and filled the air with the unfiltered fumes from the mix of petrol and oil their two-stroke engines ran on. It was a devastating day for asthmatics; all in all, it felt like an invasion. I had a job in a design agency on Kurfürstendamm, and we stood on the fourth-floor balcony and smoked

as we watched the spectacle below. People came and stared, spellbound, zombie-like, at the still largely unattainable objects of their desire: Gucci, Givenchy, Yves Saint-Laurent; hundreds stood in line outside the cheap drug-store chains to buy toilet paper and underarm deodorant. It was grotesque; surreal. We were torn between condescension and heartache, and although we didn't yet know it, didn't yet grasp the full scope of our ugly arrogance, we were already beginning to mourn a lost ideal as socialism entered its dying days and smug pundits proclaimed the historical inevitability of the capitalist system. Months later, on the weekend of the currency union, I drove to Rügen and watched as stores closed for the weekend to replace the drab-looking Eastern wares with coveted items from the West. The cashiers assigned to inventory were as giddy as children on Christmas Eve. They restocked the shelves with colourful packaging, unaware that even with the new spending power of the deutschmark, the allure of these new products would soon wear off.

But the peaceful revolution didn't originally aim for Reunification. It imagined a kinder, more human face to socialism: freedom to travel, freedom of speech, freedom of artistic expression. The crucial day that heralded the resignation of Erich Honecker (who had controlled the government of the GDR since 1971) had, in fact, occurred a month earlier, although no one fully realized it at the time. The Monday "peace prayers" in St Nicholas's Church in Leipzig had been growing increasingly politicized; people began arriving from all over East Germany, and the crowd was soon spilling out onto the streets. On October 9, an estimated 100,000 people, prepared to face state violence, gathered to demonstrate. It was the tipping point. One month later, in a hallucinatory demonstration of state force fighting for its life, the passports of the first East Berliners crossing over into the West were stamped as invalid; caught in the frenzy of those first few minutes, they had no idea that they'd just been stripped of their citizenship. Two hours later, unable to hold back the vast crowd, the guards opened the barrier. The people had won – but they'd barely had a chance to feel their power before they were absorbed by the West and the system they'd come of age in was annulled.



James Angleton and Kim Philby were friends for six years, or so Angleton thought. They were then enemies for the rest of their lives. Both agreed on that.

This is the story of their intertwined careers and the effect of those careers on the Cold War.

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