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Feeling a Way Forward in the Rhythms of Direct Action:
Prefigurative Convergence of Embodied Horizons Through "Soft
Assembly" in Protest Camp Wüste

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Alexander Martin Hähnlein BA

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Univ.-Prof. Manuela Ciotti PhD

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1. Introduction

In *Wüste*, one of three protest camps occupying highway construction sites in Vienna, the future is not just a distant ideal to be debated but also a tangible reality being actively felt into existence through the social fabric of the site. How, then, do deeply personal gut feelings shape both the processes of collective decision-making and the unfolding collective action within this intensely communal and contingent environment, affording visions of alternative futures while simultaneously constraining the pathways considered? This dynamic is explored through the lens of the “soft assembly”, a term I use to describe the informal decision-making process observed in *Wüste*, drawing inspiration from one participant’s observation of an opaque social structure she did not quite grasp, and another’s description of how softening the assembly developed a solution that “somehow just worked”. Highlighting how the affective dimensions of their social interactions sustain the protest camp, and in turn animate their experiences within it, this soft assembly guides participants within the rhythms of direct action through the convergence of their embodied horizons of choice and decision-making. This thesis explores the “thrown-together pile of people”, a notion many shared, where the superordinate goal of stopping construction of a new highway in times of climate crisis may be identified, but the actual experience of protesting is deeply personal, value driven and often ambiguous. Acknowledging difficulty in pinpointing a singular theme or goal, participants arrive with their own unique horizons and find resonance within the rhythms of the movement. This is a factor especially for participants living and acting together on site daily, where the affective experiences of community, solidarity, and shared purpose draws people in and then provides a space for alternative social dynamics through which they attempt to enact in the present a future world they desire.

For current social movements, ideas of horizontal decision-making and bottom-up self-organization present a political ontology that appears to guide activists’ understanding and interacting. In contrast to traditional models of political organizing, these politics provide a framework for a better future, achieved by enacting said future in the present. Termed “prefigurative”, this form of politics is one dimension of what is “new” in New Social Movements that emerged in the 1960’s. Protest camps in particular, afford the opportunity to experience such social dynamics, because in the necessity to sustain the site, questions of how people should live together come to the fore as soon as someone becomes hungry, tired, or cold. From the first day of research, these concerns are expressed and debated by participants,

showing amazement that the three protest camps are able to persist. In their experience, the *Lobau Bleibt!* (“Lobau stays!”) protest consisted of a diverse range of people, opinions, grievances, hopes, and wishes that did not always agree with each other. And yet, their “improvisational performance” as someone remarked, somehow seemed to work, and so this thesis will explore how this came to be. Taking the idea of self-organization as a starting point, a specific historical, intellectual, and cultural background of the concept is provided to contextualize this axiom of political organizing and social practice in many current social movements. By outlining the connection between the “cybernetic moment” of the postwar period, and emerging social movements in the following decade, I hope to demonstrate a slightly shifted perspective on politics and power in the second half of the 20th century, ultimately illustrating an ambiguous entanglement between the “status quo” and its’ negation in the form of prefigurative protest.

This thesis will follow daily life in *Wüste* in the period from November 2021 until February 2022. Research was initially guided by a film project for a seminar and quickly developed into the presented anthropological thesis. As field sites, protest camps provide their own challenges and constraints, and considering the lawsuits threatened by the city of Vienna in this period, concerns for anonymity remained important for participants throughout my stay. This of course constrains representation and discussion of collected data, but at the same time, affords a certain level of abstraction that will turn out to be very fitting for the occasion.

Chapter 2. (Literature review) lays the conceptual groundwork by establishing protest camps as a distinct and increasingly relevant field of social movement research. Protest camps are differentiated from other forms of protest by highlighting the sustained physical and emotional labor involved in creating a space that is both a base for political action and a site for the recreation of daily life. Emerging in the 1970’s as a distinct form of protest, they offered a way to bypass formal, large-scale organizations by providing a spatial context for and enabling the development of horizontal social practices. This horizontality is linked to the broader context of so called New Social Movements and prefigurative politics which will later be explored in more detail. Building on previous research, the chapter then discusses the three thematic clusters spatiality, affect, and autonomy. In terms of spatiality, protest camps are discussed as “convergence spaces”, emphasizing the dynamic relationship between such sites and their surroundings, as well as the interplay between space and social organization. In terms of affect, the importance of “affective community” in sustaining protest camps is emphasized. Affect is

presented as a crucial element in holding protest camps together, generated through the interplay of bodies and the material environment. The chapter introduces the idea of “affective infrastructure” as the bodily-sensed energies within the space, specifically noting its visibility when it breaks down. In terms of autonomy, protest camps are framed as tangible experiences of autonomy from the status quo. The role of architecture in enabling and manifesting this autonomy is discussed in relation to Do-It-Yourself architecture, characterized by diverse, inexpensive, and readily available materials. By fostering engagement, reuse, and open experimentation, architectural processes translate prefigurative autonomy into spatial and material terms. A short review of the organizational features in a similar protest site in German *Lützerath* will finally set the stage for *Wüste*, by concluding that while the former may represent a kind of ideal for open participation and decision-making in current social movements, this thesis will illustrate how these infrastructures can transform based on changing needs and circumstances on site while keeping with the spirit of the movement.

In chapter 3. (Theory), the theoretical landscape relevant to the analysis of social movements, particularly in the context of euro-western modernity and the specific case of the *Wüste* camp, is discussed. A crucial aspect is the impact of socio-technical formations, particularly information theory and cybernetics, on both anthropological theories of culture and the cultural underpinnings of climate change activism. The concept of feedback and circular causality is suggested to be a key idea present in both activists’ understanding of climate change and anthropological understandings of culture, where culture can take on a life of its own beyond its creators’ control. The chapter then addresses the foundational philosophical problem of structure and agency, by underscoring the importance of understanding participants’ considerations, doubts, and aspirations rather than imposing pre-defined categories like “protest”, which allows for seeing people as active agents in their own history. The concept of “horizon of choice” is introduced as a tool to understand the limiting and enabling capacity of experience, perception, and expectations in framing and making decisions. Finally, the crucial role of feeling and embodiment in decision-making, and the significance of physical presence for “feelings of effectiveness” is highlighted. This framework combines spatiality, affect, and autonomy, allowing for a synthesis of internal and external perspectives to address the divide between structure and agency, freedom and determination.

Chapter 4. (Methodology) articulates the philosophical and conceptual underpinnings of this thesis, by noting the shift in anthropology towards treating subjectivity and objectivity as

cultural products rather than starting points. A portion of this chapter addresses anthropology's colonial history and the problematic concept of "classical logic" that has been implicated in colonial power structures. In response to these critiques, the chapter proposes methodological premises that challenge the traditional separation of cognition and volition as exclusive categories, enabling inquiry into the relation between structure and agency in social practices, and how individuals construct themselves and their surroundings, both enabling and constraining social and cultural transformation. The concept of "contexture" is introduced as a framework of relations that allows the conceptualization of social configurations that include both implicit orientation frames and explicit orientation schemas. The idea of "transjunction" is finally presented as a way to interpret how these spaces are related and how new meaning and structure emerge through a form of reflective rejection in horizons of choice.

Chapter 5. (Field site *Wüste* camp and *Lobau Bleibt!* protest in Vienna), provides a description of my initial encounters with the protest movement and a detailed account of *Wüste* camp as the primary field site, alongside the historical and political context of the *Lobau Bleibt!* protest. Participants emphasize the diverse and fluid nature of participation, the unique "vibe" of each camp, and the surprising ability of the movement to function despite a multitude of sometimes competing values. Here, the insight is introduced, that while some things come together smoothly, the organizational processes can also be challenging, ambiguous and unsatisfactory, setting the stage for further analysis of decision-making processes.

Chapter 5.1. (Politics of protest and prefiguration) attempts to bridge immediate political organizing in *Wüste* to broader concerns of social movement politics, introducing the themes that will be explored in the following subchapters. In contrast to traditional agonistic politics aimed at the "powers that be", prefigurative politics aim to create a more egalitarian and inclusive society by aligning the movement's means with its ends, fostering horizontal relationships and decision-making processes as an alternative to perceived deficits in representative democracy. The section emphasizes how the practicalities of maintaining a protest camp create a space where these tensions between antagonism and prefiguration, and the resulting different horizons of choice, become manifest in decision-making during daily life on site.

Chapter 5.1.1. (The urgency in climate activism) will interpret the sense of urgency in light of an approaching climate catastrophe, as well as disappointment in the effectiveness of previous

movements like Friday for Future as a key reason for why people decide to occupy a construction site. The role of future-oriented narratives is explored through the history of futurology, tracing its development from Enlightenment-era scientific prediction to scenario methods that emerged after World War II. As a form of “corporate performance art” where corporate and counterculture merged, a new distinct commodity is introduced, namely the management of open sets of possible futures in the present that planners can choose from. Outlining an intellectual connection between one of the dominant intellectual paradigms of the postwar period and the emergence of New Social Movements in the following decade, this and the following subchapters argue that cybernetic ideas (feedback, self-organization, systems) provided scientific validation for decentralized, horizontal bottom-up activist politics.

Chapter 5.1.2. (The power of simulated futures) will explore the historical and intellectual connections between cybernetics and New Social Movements. By drawing parallels between festival culture and *Wüste*, partly based on participants’ own experience, partly based on my engagement with a surprising lack of surprise in relation to being at such a protest camp, this chapter will argue that these parallels are not coincidental. Cybernetics is introduced as an interdisciplinary approach to circular and recursive causal mechanisms and self-regulation in various systems and characterized by its influence on notions of temporality and the relation between present and future.

In Chapter 5.1.3. (The temporalities of prefiguration), the idea of bottom-up self-organization, often taken as an axiomatic principle in radical political action since the 1960’s, is traced through the translation of anarchist writings and the perceived emancipatory potential of telecommunication technology during this period, and related to a cybernetic temporality in which an unknown future cannot be predicted and must instead be controlled through the management of the present. The emergence of New Social Movements, partly originating within academia and questioning existing bureaucratic and seemingly unfeeling systems, is discussed in the wake of this “cybernetic moment” in the postwar period. The development of cybernetics is linked to the interdisciplinary collaboration fostered by wartime research and changing funding structures, leading to non-hierarchical management styles in laboratories. As one of the dominant intellectual paradigms of the period, cybernetics also promoted the development of new forms of power, with its rhetoric actively promoting networking and entrepreneurship. And despite their rejection of “the system”, countercultural movements of the time often embraced the collaborative practices and cybernetic rhetoric of mainstream research.

Finally, a parallel is drawn between prefigurative temporality and the differing views of goal-directed behavior in early cybernetics and information theory, highlighting the initial divergence between homeostasis and reflexivity that would shape the political interpretation of these ideas in the coming decades.

Beginning with chapter 5.2. (Home-making of *Wüste*), the main body of ethnographic analysis will be presented. By illustrating the practical and emotional labor involved in creating a community within the protest camp, the tensions between the immediate protest goals and the prefigurative aspirations of the activists are highlighted. Describing the initial intense organizational structure with daily assemblies in and between all three protest camps, the challenges of internal dynamics, external representation, and the diverse motivations of participants are explored. The distance of *Wüste* from Base camp creates logistical challenges and necessitates the development of new infrastructures, driven by the practical needs of daily life, such as food preparation and storage.

Chapter 5.2.1. (Role reversal in taskscapes) illustrates the unpredictable nature of daily life in *Wüste*, emphasizing how tasks and roles arise organically from the necessities of sustaining both the antagonistic occupation and the prefigurative aspirations of participants. As an open-ended process of improvisation to solve practical problems, participants' engagement is framed through the concept of "taskscapes", where individual tasks gain meaning within a network of interconnected activities performed collaboratively. The temporality of taskscapes is intrinsic and arises from this network of interrelationships between the multiple rhythms of individual and collective activities. Sociality within this framework arises from the resonance of movement and feeling in shared practical engagement.

Chapter 5.2.2. (Intensity of relatedness) follows the contingent nature of daily life in *Wüste* and explores how this environment fostered a different quality of relatedness in contrast with the "outside" of the camp. Through the role reversal in contingent taskscapes participants relate to each other in various situations and describe a more comprehensive way of knowing each other. This way of relating in *Wüste* is distinguished with relationships often found in urban life where friendships might be activity specific, and the concepts of multiplex and uniplex are introduced to describe these social fabrics.

Chapter 5.3. (Decision-making in *Wüste* camp) links the practicalities of camp maintenance to the development of deep interpersonal connections and the development of an informal organizational structure. As participants grapple with the challenges of decision-making in a horizontal social arrangement, tensions arise from the perceived inefficiency or lack of relevance of the general assembly for daily life on site. Through deliberate intervention and “partial organization” participants move beyond a network-based organization of social interaction and develop their own way to make decisions.

Chapter 5.3.1. (Affects of scale) then introduces the importance of embodiment, affect, and emotion in the process of decision-making in *Wüste*, and how this “affective infrastructure” relates participants within horizons of possibility and choice, enabling them to embody new activities. Scale is presented as both a constraint and a product of action, and the distinction between scale as magnitude (effects of actions) and scale as orders of knowledge (mobilization of different relational orders) is introduced. The general assembly is identified as a space where these different scales as orders of knowledge are often measured against each other, with participants in *Wüste* sometimes feeling that their local concerns were overshadowed by broader political agendas.

Finally, chapter 5.3.2. (Recreation through “soft assembly”) posits that the “soft assembly”, an informal decision-making process in *Wüste*, arose from necessity of daily recreational needs, contingent taskscapes and role reversal leading to trust and understanding. Here, scale as magnitude is discussed, emphasizing the perceived impact of a decision on others guides who needs or may want to be involved. Participants developed a “gut-feeling” for the appropriate scale of decision-making, navigating whether an issue requires formal discussion within *Wüste* or at the Base camp general assembly, or if it can be decided more immediate. The soft assembly unfolds during daily life rather than at fixed meetings, allowing for decisions even in the absence of interested participants based on inferred understanding of their position. The chapter concludes with the detailed analysis of the soft assembly in action, during the construction of a kitchen counter. The interactions between a regular, an occasional visitor, and a newcomer exemplifies fluid participation, the influence of embodied knowledge, the negotiation of different scales of knowledge, and the adaptive nature of decision-making in *Wüste*. As each participant brings their unique pre-understandings and values, ideas, and wishes, the interactions are interpreted as attempts to bridge individual horizons to reach a shared understanding and course of action that confirms the prefigurative aspirations of participants.

2. Literature review

In the following chapter I will review the literature on protest camps and the historical and political context in which they emerge. Protest camps are positioned as a specific and distinct form of political protest, and a discussion of their analytically relevant dimensions based on my data will be presented. Spatiality, affect, and autonomy are offered as useful frameworks, and based on closer engagement with specific elements to each, combined within the context of decision-making.

Current social science research notes the occurrence of protest camps with increasing frequency over the last 50 years and especially in the last 15 years, but “most of this existing scholarship regards camps as just one form of protest among many; they are grouped together with other strategies such as street parties, demonstrations, assemblies and direct actions” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 2). In contrast, the authors suggest to study protest camps as a distinct field of research because “what makes protest camps different from other place-based or space-based social movement gatherings and actions is the sustained physical and emotional labor that goes into building and maintaining the site as simultaneously a base for political action and a space for daily life” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 2). Etymologically the term camp originates in Roman language, denoting a temporary military camp. In the 17th century a more mobile notion of camp comes into use, grounded in European settler mobility and the administration and control of colonized populations (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, pp. 4-6). In the 19th century camps become popular for emerging youth movements in Europe and the United States of America, often in reference to “tribal” practices of Native Americans. Their purpose was predominantly educational, as the simplification of life while camping was supposed to reconnect participants to nature in contrast to modern city life and civilization (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 7). And though this “early counterculture” (Hetherington, 1998) tended to be politically on the right and was often infused with authoritarian ideology “camping proved too popular to be politically instrumentalized for one particular set of ideologies” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 7).

A century later and within the context of the global phenomenon of modern countercultural movements and lifestyles in Euro-Western countries “combining economic and cultural alternatives involving communes, spirituality, self-sufficient agriculture, and environmentally

friendly technology” (McIntyre, 2021, p. 23), protest camps become a popular and explicit emancipatory strategy for social movements in the 1960’s and 1970’s (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 10). In his historical study of the diffusion of environmentalist protest camps McIntyre notes, that while protest movements had long been engaged in physically obstructive action, campaigns “focused on the point of destruction were a key locus of tactical innovation and diffusion” (McIntyre, 2021, p. 10) from the 1970’s onwards. Among the first sustained uses of environmental blockading (though not necessarily protest camps) were the Chipko Movement in India in 1974, famously tying themselves to trees supposed to be cut down. In New Zealand in 1978 the tactic is applied to protest the cutting of trees as well, while in Finland activists try to stop the drainage of a lake in 1979 (McIntyre, 2021, p. 10). In Austria, we find similar obstructive protests (though not necessarily protest camps) in *Rettet die Lobau* (1969-1972), *Rettet den Sternwartepark* (1973), against the nuclear power plant in *Zwentendorf* (1977), the *Sauhaufen Besetzung* (1983), and *Rettet die Auen*, the famous Hainburg protest in 1984 (Wösendorfer, 1987, p. 166).

According to Fabian Frenzel, one of the key reasons for the occurrence and adaption of these forms of protest in the 1970’s is that they allow the replacement of formal and large-scale organizations, as protest camps resulting from sustained blockade “not only provide context for horizontal practices, they also enable the development of such practices in spatial form” (Frenzel, 2020, p. 40). Why this dimension of horizontality is important to social movements emerging during this timeframe will be examined more closely in the chapter on New Social Movements and prefigurative politics. For now, it will suffice to say that protest camps are a place-based strategy that brings people together and allows for new mobilization. They differ from other place-based protests like demonstration by occurring over longer timeframes, and this emphasis symbolizes a higher level of urgency (Frenzel, 2020, p. 38). Based on their review of existing research, Frenzel, Feigenbaum and McCurdy (Frenzel, Feigenbaum, & McCurdy, 2014) identify the three thematic clusters of spatiality, affect, and autonomy, with which analysis of such protests is often framed. Regarding spatiality protest camps are discussed in terms of “convergence spaces” (Routledge, 2000), as “urban social centers” (Montagna, 2007) or “convergence centers” (Juris, 2008). As a spatial strategy for social movements, protest camps express autonomy from the status quo through a shared antagonism to the outside and a different internal form of social organization (Hailey, 2009), as a “temporary autonomous zone” (Bey, 2003) and usually on a longer timescale than regular protests. For this reason, physical and emotional labor necessary for protest camps to sustain themselves plays an important role

in terms of “affective solidarity” (Juris, 2008), “emotional reflexivity and sustainability” (Brown & Pickerill, 2009), “affective strategy” (Rosa, 2016), and “affective infrastructure” (Näre & Jokela, 2022). It is the interplay of spatial practices, decision-making, and social reproduction that creates protest camps as “exceptional” in contrast to the status quo, hence constructing the autonomy of participants, though this exceptionality is ambiguous as we will see.

It becomes apparent that spatiality together with the social interaction of people involved presents a key aspect of protest camps across the globe, as camps occur in space, produce space, and are experienced in space (Frenzel, 2020, p. 29). This means that space is not a container but is produced by social interaction. Social organization and space are dialectically related because decisions about organization have spatial consequences, and certain spatialities evoke different forms of organization. It is these relationships that become especially important in ethnography, as any decision regarding spatial form will affect how organization is experienced and made sense of by participants (Frenzel, 2020, p. 29; 31). In protest camps, activists spend considerable time together in a shared space, and from these new challenges arise regarding social reproduction. And so the requirements for food, shelter, sanitary installations, entertainment and childcare are rendered political matters, because the duality of public/private comes into focus (Frenzel, 2020, p. 42). While an occupation as political process “materializes the social order which it seeks to enact” (Vasudevan, 2014, p. 318), it is largely through these infrastructures of re-creation and decision-making, that autonomy from the status quo is performed in protest camps. For the political protest to last however, an affective infrastructure must be created and maintained as well (Näre & Jokela, 2022, p. 2). As Näre & Jokela point out, in the typology by Feigenbaum et al and derived research, affect is seen as something that happens within and through a given infrastructure, not as an infrastructure in itself. They argue that creating the space of a protest camp “always occurs against the backdrop of the affective meanings attached to a place and through refiguration of place-related meanings”, which happens through the “assemblage of bodies, affects, and the material environment” (Näre & Jokela, 2022, p. 6). The affective labor going into sustaining these relationships, creates an atmosphere of the “bodily-sensed energies that derive from encounters but are dispersed throughout the space” (Näre & Jokela, 2022, p. 9). Affect may be described as the glue holding a protest camp together but affects circulating between subjects may also have the opposite effect, and so the affective infrastructure becomes especially visible when it fails (Näre & Jokela, 2022, p. 11).

The spatial antagonism created through social organization allows the tangible experience of autonomy from the status quo, an “oppositional position...you can walk into” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 180), but Heinonen notes that while the importance of spatiality for autonomy in protest camps has been recognized, the specific aspect of architecture has rarely been examined (Heinonen, 2019). He examines how autonomy is enabled by and manifested through architecture, and his results suggest that protesters engage with architecture to organize the exceptional space of the camp in a way that “allows, enforces, and reflects their alternative societal structures and practices, thus also enforcing their autonomy as prefigurative praxis” (Heinonen, 2019, p. 648). Different dimensions of architecture like design, process, appearance, and materials can be disruptive and used as a means of protest. Collapsible architecture like tents for example, as the extension of bodily presence, are integral for sustained occupations (Heinonen, 2019, p. 650). Important is also Do-It-Yourself (DIY) architecture, which is largely defined in protest camps by diverse, inexpensive and easily available materials. These materials in turn “promote engagement despite experience, reuse, and open experimentation, facilitating autonomous construction processes on both the individual and collective levels” (Heinonen, 2019, p. 658). In this sense, protest camps reflect an environment in which autonomous acts of inhabitation and construction are allowed, and architecture is “to some extent treated as an open process and constructions that had already been started or finished by someone could be modified, extended, or reconstructed by someone else” (Heinonen, 2019, p. 661). This indefinite process therefore “deconstructs fixed control over the built environment and enforces horizontality, where protesters are not bound to fixed material framings of space, but are able to modify them according to changing desires and needs” (Heinonen, 2019, p. 661). His findings suggest that “the built environment in protest camps intentionally departs from the hegemonic: the relatively static, centrally managed, and heavily regulated urban environments” (Heinonen, 2019, p. 661). In other words, “architectural processes transform prefigurative autonomy into spatial and material terms” (Heinonen, 2019, p. 662) and based on this literature review, my analysis will emphasize the affective infrastructure in combination with architectural processes in protest camp *Wüste*, and how both work together in establishing and sustaining participants’ autonomy in relation to the protested “outside”.

The planned highway activists protest has a total length of 19 km and will further connect areas in the north of Vienna to the rest of the city. Above ground, the highway leads through the residential areas of *Essling*, *Raasdorf*, and *Groß-Enzersdorf*. Below ground, the highway leads for 8,5 km under the Danube River and the national park *Donau-Auen*. The highway project is

part of the EU infrastructure initiative “TEN 25” which is enacted to advance the EU domestic market through traffic, energy, and telecommunication projects. Capitalism today operates in an infrastructural mode, in which “the violence of financial capitalism finds its corollary in the violent rematerialization of surplus capital as infrastructure” (Buier, 2022, p. 12). In other words: Building highways, railways, and other infrastructure projects can increase the value of land, leading to gentrification and displacement of low-income communities. Developers can also speculate on this by buying land and holding onto it until its value increases, often at the expense of local communities. In this way infrastructure extracts value through land development and speculation. An analysis of this “extraction through infrastructure” must therefore consider “the specificity of restructuring of space under the current deepening of the subsumption of nature” (Buier, 2022, p. 12).

Historically, the contentious area north of the new Danube River has been deeply implicated in the infrastructural development of Vienna. *Hirschstetten* for example, an agricultural settlement outside the city became industrialized after (one of) the regulations of the Danube River in the 19th century, an immense infrastructure project that changed the riverbed to prevent highwater flooding. In *Stadlau*, one can find a train station for the “Orient-Express” which connected London with Constantinople by train. Today, the area is further urbanized, with the smart city *Seestadt Aspern* being a prestige project for the city of Vienna, and an example of how the “living quality” of a city is commodified through rankings and consequent interest by investors (Penninger, 2015, p. 55). In his MA thesis about the “Lobau conflict” in Vienna, Weber suggests a “cross-class automobile consensus”, which “promotes resource-intensive automobile infrastructure and sexist urban development that puts male wage work before female care work” (Weber, 2020, p. 09). In his analysis conflict stakeholders operate on different political scales and are identified as the city of Vienna, the republic of Austria, and the European Union. And even though the city of Vienna presents the local arena of conflict, it appears irrelevant for political decision-making, because the city highway is a project regulated by federal law (Weber, 2020, p. 72).

Engaging with current writing in the “anthropology of infrastructure”, Buir argues that instead of naturalizing current forms of infrastructural development, an approach to infrastructure in anthropology should try to critique the forms of accumulation that are “going on behind the scenes” (Buier, 2022, p. 07). Through study of what participants *Wüste* camp want to change and how they try to do so my research will add more depth to Buir’s forms of accumulation

through a closer analysis of Weber's local arena of conflict. Because even though it may be politically irrelevant in the context of EU-wide infrastructure projects, an ethnographic view from peoples embodied and intimate experiences as subjective and social encounters with power can help provide a richer understanding of current politics (Wright, 2016). The particular encounter with power is derived from what participants of *Wüste* do to produce the change they want to see, based on how they experience dissatisfaction in relation to the politics of the status quo. Researching *Lützerath*, a similar occupational protest in Germany, Mehl puts emphasis on the way activists organize their relations prefiguratively, in which "activists aim to establish a community that illustrates norms they perceive as important. The occupation provides an experimental space for trying out these norms on a small scale and to play around with different ideas of living together" (Mehl, 2022, p. 33). She further points out that "structures are relatively flexible and can be changed according to the need that arise" (Mehl, 2022, p. 33), though how this plays out over time she leaves open for further study. This flexibility in the relation of needs, means, and ends is what my thesis will be concerned with. The description of a regular day for participants in both *Lützerath* provides an opportunity to produce analytically relevant observations for later analysis. Activists in *Lützerath* express the typical day structure of their activities in the following way:

After common breakfast in the morning, a plenary takes place, and most activists usually attend the plenary. This plenary is the main meeting point for everyone involved in the protest. The activists have the chance to discuss questions and problems and take decisions. Additionally, the plenary has the function to divide tasks between the activists. Different working groups present what they are currently working on, what they need help with, and everyone can share projects they would like to realise. Then the activists decide individually if they would like to spend their day on helping constructing tree houses, writing press releases, chopping vegetables, learning to climb and many other possibilities. After a common dinner, there are self-organised evening events like discussion rounds, movie screenings and open stages. The morning plenary is the main space for decision making, but additionally, everyone can call for an emergency at any time. Also, the different working groups have each their mandate and can within this mandate take decisions. This avoids that every single aspect must be discussed with everyone and thereby potentially take a lot of time as not everyone would be up to date. By outsourcing some decisions to dedicated working groups that are still open for everyone, the protest is aiming to establish a decision-making structure that allows everyone who would like to participate in decision-making, without occupying everyone. (Mehl, 2022, p. 26)

Mehl provides helpful insight into how participants in *Lützerath* try to organize their everyday activities in such a way, as to allow open participation and decision-making in all aspects of the movement. Implicated here are also top-down decision-making processes in wider society and

an attitude toward alternative organization and social relations. Based on my conversations in the camp, this corresponds to how many participants would describe an ideal way to organize the movement, the emphasis being on ideal way, because as needs of the people involved change, means and ends may also have to change accordingly, as this thesis will explore.

3. Theory

Asked how rising sea levels are related to climate change, activists might describe a situation in which human induced increase in global temperatures melts polar ice caps into water. And because less sunlight is reflected by a smaller surface of ice, and because a larger surface of water absorbs more heat, temperature rises further, which melts more ice into water and thus creates a “runaway effect”. Asking an anthropologist today “how culture works” (in an interdisciplinary setting for example) might elicit an answer like: “Culture is man-made - but culture is able to shake off its makers, and impact upon them beyond their control or consciousness” (Salman & Assies, 2017, p. 58). The idea of circular causal mechanisms, or in other words recursive feedback, is readily apparent in both these examples. And while the field of cybernetics did not really “discover” feedback, it nonetheless produced a scientifically convincing representation of processes that made visible and justified dimensions of social life, that had long been relegated to the subjective or spiritual and therefore non-objective domain of reality by the positivist tradition (Günther, 2021, p. 28). In this sense information theory and cybernetics furnished anthropologists, neoliberal politics, and emerging social movements with a scientific and political justification for their own respective cultures. Today, the genealogy of cybernetics is absent even in engineering departments, and so the philosopher Yuk Hui acknowledges that it has become omnipresent and invisible to us like air. And considering the seemingly unstoppable socio-technological transformation of the planet and its inhabitants he argues further that a “return to the history of cybernetics is indispensable for understanding our contemporary situation” (Hui, 2024, p. 15).

To untangle these implications, it is helpful to begin by asking what underlying notions are expressed in the two previous examples of culture and climate change, which are concerns about the nature of structure and agency. More specifically the question is if institutions and meanings are the products of cognition and symbolism employed by people or products of ecological, evolutionary and material forces (Erickson & Murphy, 2013, p. 232). In anthropology this problem is as old as the discipline itself and illustrated in classic debates

drawing from a Durkheimian or Weberian tradition between materialists and mentalists in the 1950s and 1960s, between political economy and interpretivism in the 1970s and 1980s, or positivism and constructivism in the 1990s (Silverman, 2005, p. 333). This is of course is the legacy of euro-western philosophy in anthropology, and one constituent of these traditions is the problem of causality and effect:

There is an elementary knowledge, quickly acquired by the human intellect, that the happenings which take place in our Universe belong to two - as it seems - exactly opposite categories. We believe that we are able to distinguish quite clearly, on the one hand, impersonal objective events which take place in the realm of inanimate things and which are triggered by physical causes and, on the other hand, subjectively motivated actions of living organisms which appear to have a peculiar spontaneity. The manifestations or results of a subjective Will we call decisions. And although we cannot clearly say what the difference is between the causal connections which link the data of objectivity together and a driving will and a decision which emanates from it, thinkers have insisted since ancient times that there must be a fundamental difference. (Günther, 1979, p. 205)

And so, the fundamental question in euro-western philosophy has been about which side is ontologically prior: the object in relation to theoretical reason in materialism or the subject in relation to pragmatical will in idealism (Günther, 1979). In Christian theology this problem is addressed by Thomas of Aquinas with the dual nature of human existence constituted by a material body governed by natural causes and a soul governed by reason. Because reason enables the choice between alternatives for actualizing a decision, it is directly related to ethical concerns and how one ought to live together. Whereas the idea of free will structured the relationship between the individual and God in medieval times, today it constitutes the relationship between citizen and state, as well as consumer and market: “We are supposed to ‘design’ our individual lifestyle, career, and future, as well as to choose close relationships, partners, or even children. What we are and become as persons is constituted by decisions, both our own and those of others” (Boholm, Henning, & Krzyworszeka, 2013, p. 99). Cause and effect of individual and collective decisions in relation to the future thus emerges as the core theoretical concern in this analysis, and so the next step will delineate how anthropology engages with such questions.

The “pendulum swing” between materialism and idealism in euro-western philosophy may suggest a situation of irreconcilable difference, and many have certainly argued that there is or should be one. Over time social science disciplines had come to the empirical realization however, that the strict separation leads to insufficient theories about people and “what the devil

they think they are up to” (Geertz, 1974, p. 29). The positivist tradition rejected considerations for the ambiguity of individual experiences, preferences and values in behavior, because their relation to subjectivity could ultimately only mean non-objective and therefore not accessible to scientific inquiry. From this followed the base assumption (in economics for example) that people act rationally in terms of achieving a maximum of personal fulfilment through self-interest. The idealist tradition rejected considerations for generality and explanation of intentionality, because people live and act in a world of human symbols that ultimately refer to each other and not some external reality. From this followed that human behavior is largely driven by non-objective and therefore often irrational or mystical ideas that cannot be accounted for by reductionistic sciences. In the social sciences this view was always necessarily ambivalent since the beginning of the disciplines according to Talcott Parsons, who argued that Weber amended Marx’ theory of material causes with “the spirit of capitalism”, and Durkheim embedded the self-driven individual in a society that imposes its own interests through symbols and ritual (Kuper, 2000, p. 50) To understand culture then, Kuper argues, we must first deconstruct it:

Religious beliefs, rituals, knowledge, moral values, the arts, rhetorical genres, and so on should be separated out from each other rather than bound together into a single bundle labelled culture, or collective consciousness, or superstructure, or discourse. Separating out these elements, one is led on to explore the changing configurations in which language, knowledge, techniques, political ideologies, rituals, commodities, and so on are related to each other. (Kuper, 2000, p. 245)

In this way cultural elements always relate to other processes beyond, which is illustrated when cultural features come under pressure and disintegrate, where it can be shown that these parts are “separately tied to specific administrative arrangements, economic pressures, biological constraints, and so forth” (Kuper, 2000, 246). Understanding “the culture” of social movements in a heterogenous and dynamic way enables to explore cultural and discursive “backing” they draw from in order to legitimize and strengthen their case (Salman & Assies, 2017, p. 64), as well as the historical knowledge and ideas their organizational practice is informed by.

In the 1980’s the ambivalent relationship between freedom of individual actors and the determination of systems was brought into focus again by practice theory. In her article on anthropological theory since the 1960’s, Sherry Ortner summarizes the resemblance of these approaches as being concerned with asymmetrical relations, practices of everyday life, interest in what motivates action, and attention to how culture shapes and constraints the experience of

reality (Ortner, 1984). Rather than categorizing social life in terms of absolute and exclusive categories of determination,

an institution - say, a marriage system - is at once a system of social relations, economic arrangements, political processes, cultural categories, norms, values, ideals, emotional patterns, and so on and on. No attempt is made to sort these components into levels and to assign primacy to one or the other level. Nor, for example, is marriage as a whole assigned to "society," while religion is assigned to "culture." A practice approach has no need to break the system into artificial chunks like base and superstructure (and to argue over which determines which), since the analytic effort is not to explain one chunk of the system by referring it to another chunk, but rather to explain the system as an integral whole (which is not to say a harmoniously integrated one) by referring it to practice. (Ortner, 1984, p. 148)

This approach describes the embodied and pre-reflective dimension of social action as praxis, which is embedded in complex social relations as fields, and “crystallized” as dispositions within the individual as habitus (Erickson & Murphy, 2013, p. 232). In this domain of socially constructed and constrained freedom, habitus functions as the “glue” between individual and social environment which makes people “come to coincide with the world” through socialization (Salman & Assies, 2017, p. 73). The previously outlined problem of cause and effect is therefore “sidestepped” according to Ortner, because through reference to practice the relationship between individual and system “may go in either direction - the impact of the system on practice, and the impact of practice on the system” (Ortner, 1984, p. 148). The relationship is neither fully determined by the system as a set of unquestioned rules to be followed like in Parsons’ account, nor fully reflective and determined by individual choice as Giddens would have it (Salman & Assies, 2017, p. 73f). Salman and Assies argue that because “habitual reality” is hard to shake off, the concept mostly describes the continuation of the past into the future. This is an important insight into social movements and their entanglements with relations of power their resistance is addressed to, as a conscious change of one’s own habitus is a key concern in prefigurative politics. The concept therefore also marks an analytical insufficiency regarding change-aimed action and movements, which is increasingly addressed in current anthropological research (Salman & Assies, 2017, p. 74f). Because habitual difference tends to be reduced to “one axis of cultured class”, but people live in different social dimensions like gender, ethnicity, and region all at once, they suggest a “multi-stratified embodiment of habitus” enabling analysis of different conscious and subconscious layers that might reinforce or contradict each other. This also points towards the possibility of change in such multi-stratified constellations, where habitual shifts might occur in short- or long-term

processes (Salman & Assies, 2017, p. 74). The ethnographic perspective therefore enables insight into the “forces” of the “smaller constellation” that shape peoples’ reality and their conduct in it:

These include ideologized convictions and political, religious or other tenets, pragmatic - but very consciously applied - rules of conduct, the more quotidian strategies of interaction with representatives of different strata of society, memories of former conflicts and their outcomes, ‘crises’ of steady daily routines, exposures to or the conquest of new spaces and social circles, as well as the less cognizant dimensions that are, up to a larger or smaller degree, relatively immune to abrupt changes in societal and political conditions and stimuli: habitus, home-making patterns of daily interchange, routines, ‘practical senses’. (Salman & Assies, 2017, p. 75)

In research on social movements there can be a tendency to focus on the “bigger constellations” illustrated by public statements, strategies, rallies and slogans, which are then taken as representative of the what the movement is about and thus conceptualizing them as the “unit of analysis” (Salman & Assies, 2017, p. 95). In the case of *Wüste* then, it could be assumed that protest against the highway represents what the movement is. This impression would be supported by media coverage about the camps, framing activists and what they actually do in these terms. And there is no doubt that this is indeed an important aspect for activists occupying a construction site. Asking what the movement is about however, tends to elicit perplexed reactions in *Wüste*, with one participant responding that he had hoped I would be able to tell him finally. Even when considering the highway itself, perspectives are diverse and not everyone opposes the construction or believes the project can be stopped. Rather than subsuming practices in the camp under the category of protest then, anthropological analysis is concerned with the perceptions and relations of individuals and groups, in an attempt to understand “the participant’s and non-participant’s considerations, doubts, meaning-giving and aspirations, and their own wording and interpretations” (Salman & Assies, 2017, p. 59). Meaning and practice of social movements therefore must be close to peoples’ lived experiences and perspectives, which enables us to see them “not simply as passive reactors to and enactors of some ‘system’, but as active agents and subjects in their own history” (Ortner, 1984, p. 143).

People make individual decisions that are habitual and simultaneously related to different socio-cultural systems reinforcing or contradicting each other. The potential for possible alternatives and consequent change is therefore located in the agency afforded and constrained by these configurations. In climate change related activism, decisions are linked to local and global

concerns in relation to sustainability and the ecosystem, as well as cultural solidarity and representation. In other words, decisions permeate everyday life and can be found in diverse forms and different institutional arrangements (Richards & Kuper, 1971). Anthropologists exploring the domain of public policy for example, illustrate how these systems “revolve around a never-ending modus operandi of governing decision-making” (Boholm, Henning, & Krzyworzeka, 2013, p. 99), in which the governmentality of decision-making “serves to bridge the private and the public domains, connecting individual sentiments and desires to structures of social ordering, power, hierarchy, and authority” (Boholm, Henning, & Krzyworzeka, 2013). Collaborating with social science disciplines besides anthropology in research about decision-making in the context of environmental policy and infrastructure development, Boholm et al note a difference in approaches:

A common experience is that we, as anthropologists, tend to approach choice and decision making rather differently from our non - anthropological colleagues [...] They tend to be more preoccupied with normative issues [...] whether the right or wrong decisions are being made, or how people may be influenced to make the “right” (rather than the “wrong”) decision. (Boholm, Henning, & Krzyworzeka, 2013, p. 98)

While economics for example, is concerned with how people can be more rational and efficient in their pursuit of maximization, anthropology describes people’s actual experience and reason in situations of decision-making. In our reflexivity about “observer-dependent valuations of other people’s reasons and actions”, we therefore explore the “socially and culturally embedded preunderstandings of choice and decision making that precondition any decision” (Boholm, Henning, & Krzyworzeka, 2013, p. 108). In this sense, analysis of decisions helps clarify the duality of structure in which present decisions are entangled with structural features that relate to earlier actions in social reproduction: “New acts are not mechanical repetitions of earlier acts, but at the same time they are dependent on earlier acts. The first act determines where the next begins, but not where it ends” (Hylland Eriksen, 2015, p. 111). Boholm et al offer the concept of “horizon of choice”, which draws attention to the “simultaneously limiting and enabling capacity that experience, perception, and expectations have for the framing of choices and decisions” (Boholm, Henning, & Krzyworzeka, 2013, p. 98). In their view, anthropology presents an approach providing “unique tools to clarify how decisions are horizon constituted and how they come into being through reflexive modes of aligning intentions and actions” (Boholm, Henning, & Krzyworzeka, 2013, p. 104). As a conceptual tool, the concept enables to ethnographically describe the “attributions applied on the actions and behaviors of others, as

well as inferences they draw concerning the effects that such actions would have on these others” (Boholm, Henning, & Krzyworzeka, 2013, p. 104).

What will become apparent in my field research and interviews is the importance of feeling in decision making and Henning concludes on this aspect, that “decision making is also very much about ‘gut-feeling’; about deciding something that simply feels right” (Henning, 2008, p. 61). And while research on the emotional dimensions of social movements has broadened the scope beyond concerns for rational decision making, an implicit assumption of an exclusive and ordered relation between reason and emotion remains, possibly because researchers sympathetic to the movements they study might assume the rationality of their analysis could be questioned (Frenzel, Feigenbaum, & McCurdy, 2014, p. 463). But as embodied beings, our feelings “help us make sense of the world around us and formulate action in response to events”, because our thinking also “operates automatically through our bodies rather than through our conscious awareness” (Jasper, 2010, p. 973). The dimension of embodiment may in fact be the most important aspect in this thesis, simply because without anyone being physically present at the camp, there would be no occupation in the first place. In *Wüste* like in *Lützerath*, being present directly at the place of destruction gives participants a “feeling of effectiveness” because their presence makes an immediate and tangible difference (Mehl, 2022, pp. 22, 25). And it this individual “power-to”, or the “horizon of what our bodies can do” that is “greatly enhanced in the collective setting of the protest camp” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 135). The concept of horizon therefore enables an ethnographic view that combines the three analytical clusters spatiality, affect and autonomy which have emerged in empirical research on protest camps (Frenzel, Feigenbaum, & McCurdy, 2014, p. 468). This lets us engage with the relation of structure and agency because “it is only through a synthesis of the internal and external perspectives that we can overcome the theoretical divide between freedom and determination in human action” (Boholm, Henning, & Krzyworzeka, 2013, p. 107). The concept of horizon therefore explores dimensions of embodiment in relation to structure and agency, the past and future, as well as affect and effect, which become present in the process of decision-making.

4. Methodology

Methodology concerns the philosophical and conceptual assumptions of research. The questions asked, categories employed, choice of methods, and modes of analysis all derive their

validity from these assumptions. As Weima and Brankamp note, research is also shaped by the conditions of each field site, and for protest camps this may mean limits on movement within, or on entry and exit of the camp, prohibitions of recording, restrictions on gatherings, surveillance both actual and perceived, and of course potential closure. All this shapes what researchers are “able to hear” at any given site (Weima & Brankamp, 2022, p. 3; 7).

Today, anthropologists increasingly treat subjectivity and objectivity as cultural products and objects of analysis rather than points of departure, which leads us to ask questions like:

Where are agency and structure located in observable social practices, and how do they operate in the creation of cultural institutions such as religion, gender, and nationalism? How do participants in social life, regardless of who or where they are, construct themselves and their surroundings, and how do these same constructions both constrain and enable the transformation of different societies and cultures? (Ericksen & Murphy, 2013, p. 234).

Concerns for subjectivity and agency in anthropology are related to the discipline’s colonial history and questions of ontology: about what exists and can be described by logical inference. Since its inception as a discipline in the 19th century, anthropology has been implicated in colonial power structures, and one fundamental constituent of said power relations may be identified in “two-valued logic”, often described as western, hierarchical, objectifying, othering, or disenchanting. De-naturalizing “western logic” anthropologists then critically examine and demonstrate its’ operationalized and institutionalized practice in colonial power relations and then demonstrate how this logic is but one possible logic among many in the world. Subsequently ethnographers “occasionally summarise what they find in the field as ‘following a different logic’, as being the product of a different worldview or ‘ontology’ or a different ‘total mode of being’” (Widlok & Stenning, 2018, p. 1). According to Widlock and Stenning however, “there is a growing awareness that it should be feasible to show in more detail what these logics are; that they are indeed logics; and that they are plural even within what are considered to be single cultures” (Widlok & Stenning, 2018, p. 2). They propose therefore, that “all people with various cultural backgrounds make use of multiple logics, and that difference should be captured as variation in the social contexts that call forth the different logics’ application” (Widlok/Stenning 2018, p. 1).

According to the anthropologist Vassos Argyrou, axioms of anthropological analysis were constituted in the 16th century, when European colonization efforts made it necessary to explain

the difference of other people. The imagination of these “natives” was structured by the differences between “Us” and “Them”, often resulting in denigration of the latter, meaning if “We” are rational “They” must be irrational, or if “We” have religion “They” have magic. This presented a deep theological problem however, because according to Christian scripture all humans share in God’s creation and are essentially the same under His eyes. Because the fundamental premise is the principle of human unity, the salvationist intends of Christian theologians and missionaries therefore sought to redeem the “Other” through the rationalization and redemption of “Otherness”, and it is here where fundamental principles of anthropological inquiry are developed: First, the “salvationist intend” to humanize “the Other” in the European imagination (e.g. the “noble savage”). Second, “strategies of redemption” with which this intend is to be achieved. And third, the “logic of sameness” according to which the results are measured. According to Argyrou, by positing Sameness as the base assumption from which the falseness of Otherness (and by implication inferiority in form of racism, sexism, etc.) is deduced, anthropologists inadvertently reproduce the epistemological asymmetry they thought to have neutralized this way, as they now emerge as creators of a world they pretend to inhabit at the same time. At the core of the methodology that unites all major ethnological paradigms of the 20th century is what he terms, by reference to Max Weber, the “logic of disenchantment”:

The most fundamental characteristic of this mode of thought is its propensity to turn beings into objects for the human subject, and to reduce their mode of existence to this one-dimensional relationship. In contrast to other ways of thinking, where beings are often said to have an independent and autonomous existence, this logic recognises them only insofar as they are objects, that is, under the subject’s cognitive and potentially practical control. (Argyrou, 2002, p. 57)

Decisions in *Wüste* camp were not always articulated through formal debate, the historical context in which logic became institutionalized as a method of argumentation in ancient Greece. Often, they were felt as a collective gut-feeling that emerged from shared experiences and a varied familiarity with another’s perspectives. In this sense, the ethno-logical problem is related to the inquiry into the self-reflective capacities of people to interact, and how they relate to both implicit and explicit structures of meaning in their everyday life. Argyrou’s argument attempts to illustrate how anthropology continues to rely on a logic that inadvertently reproduces power asymmetries, and he ultimately remains pessimistic about the prospect of adequate ethnographic analysis. He sees the only way to end the colonial power game in the demonstration of the limits of anthropology, “not by writing within the discursive domain opened up and authorized by the powers that be, but by playing it better than the players

themselves” (Argyrou, 2002, p. 6). In this spirit I will derive my methodological premises from the German philosopher Gotthard Günther, whose analysis and critique suggests that the formalization of classical (Aristotelian) two-valued logic has remained inconsequent and incomplete, and therefore still implicitly beholden to ancient Greek metaphysics (Klagenfurt, 2016, p. 42). In other words: classical logic is not formalized enough and therefore misses a richer tapestry of relations it cannot sufficiently describe.

Classical, that is two-valued logic, in euro-western philosophy is premised on Aristotelian epistemology, which posits an “object” and a “subject”, as well as a relationship between the two which is “thinking”. A true statement about the world is achieved by bringing thought into symmetry with the object in question, which has worked well for phenomena that are invariant to subjective interpretation in the natural sciences. This means that “classical logic separates the world into a positive side - what is - and a subjective (or reflective) side in which statements are made as to the extent to which one side corresponds to the other (*adaequatio res et intellectus*)” (Jansen, von Schlippe & Vogd, 2015, p. 11). For phenomena that must take any kind of reflective capacity into account however, this approach reaches a limit. Because now it would have to be assumed that it is possible to achieve symmetry between subjects in order to achieve symmetry between subject and object qua thinking. Classical logic therefore describes the process of a singular subject relating to the world, but it cannot describe different subjects relating to this relationship, i.e. reflexivity (Günther, 1979). And in this sense, it remains bound to what *is* and *has been* and cannot deal with what *could* be in the future (Klagenfurt, 2016, p. 42). As outlined in the beginning of the theoretical chapter, euro-western tradition assumes an ontological priority of either cognition in relation to the object (materialism), or of volition in relation to the subject (idealism). But because both sides of the coin can bring forward logically unassailable arguments, Günther finds his solution in what both have in common and not what mutually separates them: the ontological hierarchy that puts either reason or will prior to the other. From this perspective he derives a different view on the problem, first by pointing out the situation living beings continuously face:

A living system, on the other hand, represents - according to the tradition and functionally speaking - a profound ontological duality. It is a system of contemplative cognizance as well as a source of active volition. In its cognitive capacity it is determined by its environment insofar as it can only recognize what there is - including its own fantasies and its own errors. As volition, on the other hand, it maintains a certain independence from its environment. It can change its environmental conditions within

limits and negate the influences which the world presses upon it. (Günther, 1979, p. 205)

In contrast to the classical tradition who assumes cognition and volition as exclusive categories, he then posits the following premise based on research on the boundaries between animate and inanimate matter in cybernetics:

Will and Reason are the very same activity of the Mind, but seen from two different viewpoints. Or - to put it differently - Reason and Will or theoretical reflection on one hand and contingent decision on the other are only reciprocal manifestations of one and the same ontological configuration that is produced by the fact that a living system goes through constantly changing attitudes toward its environment. There is no thought unless it is constantly supported by a will to think. And there can be no act of volition unless there is a theoretical perception of something that will serve as motivation for the will. (Günther, 1979, p. 208)

From this he finally derives the following theory:

Will and Reason are not two independently operating capacities. They constitute a single faculty of subjectivity which, however, may assume contrary aspects under reversed ontological conditions. Since the classic approach to identify cognition and volition separately in a closed unit of individual subjectivity has failed we shall approach the problem from a different side. We shall assume that the phenomenon of subjectivity, as manifested by thought processes and decision making, cannot be looked for inside the skin of an individual living body - be that animal or man. We propose instead the following theorem: *Subjectivity is a phenomenon distributed over the dialectic antithesis of the Ego as the subjective subject and the Thou as the objective subject, both of them having a common mediating environment.* (Günther, 1979, p. 209 [emphasis in original])

Günther, who was really a Hegelian, believed cybernetics could illustrate that reflection is essentially a real and immanent process, rather than mystical and transcendent. But he also remained cautious about the approach, famously arguing that the question of cybernetics is not “what life, consciousness, or self-reflection ultimately is, but: can we repeat in machines the behavioral traits of all those self-reflective systems that our universe has produced in its natural evolution?” (Günther, 1976, p. 337), and ultimately remaining skeptical about the idea that machines could ever “think like humans”.

Whereas in the classical philosophical tradition such matters had been relegated to the subjective and spiritual realm, the circuitry of electrical logic gates in early computers suggested a metaphysics to cyberneticians in which “information” could neither be reduced to matter or

energy as Norbert Wiener famously put it (Wiener, 1950). Nor could it be reduced to subjectivity or spirituality as Günther argues, because what appeared to belong to subjectivity alone is now repeated in the objective machine. But rather than neutralizing the difference between object and subject through technological mediation (such an idea would be a “fateful error” he maintained), cybernetics complicates this relationship in human phenomenological experience by adding the third “proto-metaphysical” component of information as reflection-process (Günther, 2021, pp. 19-21). Günther realized early, that in emerging information theory (specifically Claude Shannon’s model), euro-western modernity was in the process of globalizing its own particular metaphysics as operationalized logic through computer technology. Because of its structural features, this logic is blind to its own historicity, and technology therefore appears as a natural force people can only ever react to (Klagenfurt, 2016, pp. 16-19), which naturalizes “instruments of social control and intraspecies exploitation” through the “blurring of boundaries between biological evolution and technological development” (Hornborg, 2021, p. 3). In this framework, logic can therefore be understood as formalized ontology (Günther, 1976, p. 251), and technology as instrumentalized logic (Hornborg, 2015, p. 42). To Hornborg it is therefore “imperative to maintain a distinction between the purposes of living beings and the physical or semiotic effects of abiotic objects. For an artifact to mean something, or to malfunction, is not to act. The meanings and functions of artifacts derive from human actions such as interpretation, design, and manufacture, but artifacts do not have purposive agency. For an artifact to signify something to somebody is not to communicate but to serve as a vehicle for communication between agents that are equipped to do so” (Hornborg, 2021, p. 8).

Günther’s approach is premised on the idea that every subject is both a producer of its own ontology and part of the ontology of other subjects, neither of which can be collapsed into each other. “Accordingly, we should conceptualize a subject as something that displays a positive and a reflexive side, something that is part of an ontology and at the same time, is constituted as producing ontologies that are not part of the first ontology” (Jansen, 2016, p. 262). If we define subjectivity as a system that has an environment from which it differentiates itself through self-referentiality, then physical embodiment within the world becomes paramount. Günther offers the following schema to illustrate this point: Consider the Universe (“U”) as the “natural environment” of two Subjects (“S₁” and “S₂”). Both subjects not only receive information as data from the world but through their actions, also produce data as information in the world (“U₁” and “U₂”), and “from this follows, that S₁ sees U plus U₂ in its universe, but

S₂ sees U plus U₁” (Günther, 1965, p. 1300). This means “that even though S₁ and S₂ are embedded in the same purely objective (natural) universe U, both subjects live in a different universe if we consider the universe not as pure objectivity and barren natural context, but as the indissoluble synthesis of subjectivity and objectivity” (Günther, 1965, p. 1300)¹. Rather than proposing the “god-trick” of the universal subject that must dissolve all differences between subjects to achieve symmetry between subject and object, the moral of the non-classical approach is simple according to Donna Haraway: “Only partial perspective promises objective vision. All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility” (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). She developed some of her insights by imagining how her dogs see the world, and let us imagine further, that her dogs notice the scent of a rabbit and get excited about it. Here we can see Günther’s idea illustrated, because if the dogs approach the rabbit to hunt it, they will initially do so sneaking. Her dogs are therefore aware that their actions produce differences in the world that could make a difference to the rabbit and consequently make him flee. If this were not the case, there would be no need to hide in the first place. Günther concludes therefore:

Our traditional (two-valued) logic presents human rationality in a non-distributed form. This means: the tradition recognizes only one single universal subject as the carrier of logical operations. A non-Aristotelian logic, however, takes into account the fact that subjectivity is ontologically distributed over a plurality of subject-centers. And since each of them is entitled to be the subject of logic, human rationality must also be represented in a distributed form. (Günther, 1979, p. 122)

In this view, subjectivity presents a kind of “operand-operator dualism” in which a subject is “an operator if it produces ontologies and it is operand when being drawn upon by other subjects”, and Günther develops the term “contexture” to conceptualize this configuration. “A contexture for him is a purely formal logical area whereby it is neither difference nor difference-maker, neither entity nor ontological-producer” (Jansen, 2016, p. 263). In this view, a context describes the more readily observable and descriptive frame that surrounds an interaction or “what is going on” in a particular situation. A contexture in contrast, is a system of logical relations that provides a framework for how subjects act and are acted upon, and how these

¹ Translated from German: “Daraus aber folgt, dass S₁ in seinem Universum U plus U₂ sieht, S₂ aber U plus U₁. Wir erhalten also das überraschende Resultat, dass obwohl S₁ und S₂ in dasselbe rein objektive (natürliche) Universum U eingebettet sind, beide Subjekte in einem differenten Universum leben, wenn wir das Universum nicht mehr als reine Objektivität und bloßen Naturzusammenhang, sondern als unlösliche Synthese von Subjektivität und Objektivität betrachten”

interactions are structured within particular contexts. Applying this to social science research allows to conceptualize social configurations that include “both implicit (frame of orientation) and explicit structures (in-order-to motives, orientation schemas) without locating them ontologically (e.g. as conjunctive experiential spaces or objectively valid norms)” (Jansen, von Schlippe, & Vogd, 2016, p. 7). Social practice can therefore be seen as being generated by the dynamic interrelation of such logical spaces that are both implicitly and explicitly structured and drawn from without reducing one to the other (Jansen, von Schlippe & Vogd, 2015, p. 7). To describe how such contextures are related and accessible to each other, Günther introduces the concept of “transjunctural operation” (Günther, 1976). A transjunction can be thought of as a kind of rejection that does neither confirm nor deny an either/or alternative (or mediates between them with a third value) but rejects the whole value alternative to generate new structure and meaning. In a *partial transjunction*, a value is excluded from a contexture which secures the boundary of a group without reference to someone else and the “operation remains within the current contexture and confirms it” (Jansen, von Schlippe & Vogd, 2015, p. 10). In a *total undifferentiated transjunction*, the “previously undefined other is designated but then excluded as an autonomous contexture with an inaccessible logic that cannot be accepted” and this type “thus has a transcontextural function since it regulates the transition from one contexture to another, while partial negation only functions within a contexture” (Jansen, von Schlippe & Vogd, 2015, p. 10). In a *total differentiated transjunction* finally, a contexture is rejected but the “the inherent logic of the rejected contexture is understood, i.e. the self-referentiality of the other contexture is taken into account” (Jansen, von Schlippe & Vogd, 2015, pp. 10f). As a theoretical lens the concept attempts to circumvent the fact that nobody has access to another person’s thoughts. Visible to us is only the product of a person’s thoughts and perceptions, meaning what they do or not do (Klagenfurt, 2016, p. 68). This “double contingency” can be “demonstrated in the interaction between two individuals who have no prior knowledge of one another. Since the ego has no sufficient knowledge of the other’s action, and the other may not anticipate the ego’s action, there is thus a situation of double contingency” (Hui, 2019, p. 9). With this, the whole spectrum of the possible, what is not but could be, becomes epistemologically meaningful (Klagenfurt, 2016, p. 68). Transjunctions therefore give insight into the positive dimension of what happens and the reflective dimension of what could have been different, or in other words, the horizons of embodied decision-making.

5. Field site *Wüste and Lobau Bleibt!* protest in Vienna

This research project begins in November 2021, when two colleagues from university and I meet in the outskirts of Vienna to begin work on a film for a seminar about visual methods in the ethnography of science and technology. Since August of the same year, three protest camps of climate activists occupying several construction sites had been a hot topic in Austrian media. For our initial field visit we decide on so called “Base camp” at *Anfanggasse* in *Hirschstetten*, a neighborhood in Vienna’s 22nd district. Media coverage we are familiar with shows camp impressions during the late summer months, when school children sit outside and do homework, residents converse with activists, and facilities are being maintained in the general bustle of camp life. Now, at the end of November, we are met by silence. It is a bitter cold and cloudy day when we enter Base camp, which began on August 27th and is the only legally registered location of the protest. The camp is located in a small park and separated by the alley way *Anfanggasse* from the residential area on the southern side. Directly north of Base camp lies one of the construction areas for the city highway *Aspern*, a barren and brown field scattered with heavy machinery. Directly east of the construction site one can also see the Flower Garden *Hirschstetten*. One of the participants of the protest would later draw attention to the contrast between construction site and garden by saying: “On this side we grow plants, and on this side, we destroy them. That’s a bit stupid, isn’t it?” Historically, the contrasted locations are the result of immense infrastructural projects. After the Danube regulation and embedment into the broader train network in the late 19th century, *Hirschstetten* had been increasingly populated by farmers and gardeners, and with further industrialization the neighborhood also becomes popular with workers. During this time and for self-sustainability reasons, the city of Vienna decides to grow all trees and flowers for green areas and public parks in the city itself, and by the mid 1950’s the garden is one of the most modern market gardens in the world, partly because it is also supposed to provide agricultural stock for the city in times of need (Dorffner & Marschik, 2021, pp. 44-46).

When we enter the area, the camp is silent and seems empty. A wooden yurt and big white camping tent stand prominently in the area, while smaller tents lie forgotten and almost destroyed by the weather conditions at the edge of the park. We arrive at the welcoming and press table where activists present a diverse array of information material and flyers by different local initiatives about the construction project and related concerns. Someone must have heard us and so a young woman leaves the wooden yurt and approaches us. We explain our film

project for the university seminar, and she guides us to the kitchen tent, introducing us to a handful of activists sitting within drinking tea. We again introduce our project and are welcomed with an enthusiasm that surprises us, but of course many participants of the protests are students like us, and their hope is that we will show aspects of the occupation that are rarely discussed in media. On that note, one of the activists speaks about how an article in a newspaper totally misconstrued the tiny sauna some had built at one of the other camps just a few days before. In this article the author had written about the sauna in a way to imply that the protests cannot be taken seriously. And so, the activist relaying the story is rather displeased with media coverage, especially as the author of this particular article never actually showed up at the camp. Framing protest as unserious is a common way media engages with such movements (Daniel, Deutschmann, Buzogány, & Scherhauser, 2020) and as we will see, this kind of re-creational infrastructure is a key concern for current social movements, as sauna and similar “unserious” projects like dance floors or living rooms illustrate some of the concerns of current protest movements beyond what is protested in the frontstage, which is what media tends to focus on.

Sitting together in the kitchen tent we notice a lot of food on the table, and they explain to us that most is donated by neighbors and supporters of the protests. Inquiring further into the community of the protest movement then produced insights that would guide my subsequent research over the following two months. “It’s a mess” one says, “but it works somehow” another throws in. Their eyes light up and they begin to describe their experience with the protest movement in general and the occupational camps in particular. The whole movement is like a microcosm of society they explain, but every camp has “its own vibe” and people. Furthermore, each day may bring new people with new ideas into the movement, but participation fluctuates increasingly in the winter. Because participation is so diverse and fluid, they express amazement that the movement could ever find a group consensus on which to act, because in their assessment a multitude of sometimes competing values are present each day. Not everyone participates in the protests because they are against the city highway for example. Some agree with the necessity of the highway but disagree with specific aspects like not having public transport included in the plans. Few would also tell me later that they did not really care about this particular construction but wanted to protest the broader processes enabling and requiring such projects in the first place. Reminiscing about his experience in the camps, one of the activists claps his hands together and says that it feels almost like theater sometimes, or better yet, an improvised performance. I point towards the wooden yurt behind my back and say that this is a pretty impressive result for improvisation and ask how it came together like this. It

wasn't too difficult, they explain, as someone in the movement always knows someone who has the required expertise, and like the food on the table, material for construction is also donated by supporters and neighbors. "The days when we build things are also really popular, we had like 100 people in one of the camps recently" someone says. One of the girls offers us more tea, and after two hours sitting together in the tent, I notice my colleagues and I shivering a bit, whereas the activists seem to be somewhat comfortable in the cold, being clothed in several layers of shirts, sweaters, and jackets, giving them an astronaut-like appearance. Guiding our conversation more towards the topic of our seminar course, one of my colleagues asks if they have any heating technology in the camps, which they affirm. The girl pouring tea turns around and says: "You should come to *Wüste* camp with us if you are interested in this stuff, because we are about to finish the pyramid and the oven will also be built soon, hopefully". After she hands us the steaming cups she sits down and states matter of factly that not everything comes together like the yurt or the oven. The others seem to agree for the most part and one says with both hands resting on his head, that sometimes he wonders if all these assemblies are really the best way to organize. One of the girls crosses her arms and replies: "Well, I don't know what the best way is or if there is one, but even if we disagree or can't move forward with something, I think our biggest strength are the relationships we build here with others. Like, none of us are hardcore activists or anything like that, we are here from all over the city to protest the highway, and we want to work together with anyone who agrees with us that something needs to happen."

On December 1st, 2021, the construction of the tunnel under the nature reserve *Lobau Auen* is tentatively stopped by the Minister for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology. In the afternoon I grab the camera and take the bus to Base camp, expecting a joyful atmosphere and hopefully some first footage for the film. When I arrive, the camp lies quiet with only a handful of people standing together, their condensed breath forming a small cloud over their heads. Before I can approach them, a young activist emerges from the tent and greets me. He introduces himself as Smiley and I explain why I am here and if he has seen Berry and Jonas, the two activists that had agreed to collaborate on the film with us. "Who?" he asks, and I make a mental note about fluctuating participation and reply: "No matter, but where are all the people? I thought today you would be celebrating!" He grins and explains that when the news broke some people were certainly celebrating a little, but the real celebration will happen later this day at a rally in front of the town hall. And besides, he explains, this is just a small victory because the highway is not cancelled completely and so there is a lot to be

done still. He then offers to accompany me to *Wüste*, which is not far from here and can be reached by tram, as I may be able to capture some footage there.

Figure 1. *Pyramid and hut with kitchen in Wüste.*



We arrive at dusk and *Wüste* is only dimly lit by light coming from inside the kitchen hut and from within the top of the pyramid. As we approach Smiley tells me this camp often reminds him of the movie *Blade Runner*, though in that moment, the barren and stony ground, makeshift architecture and low-tech infrastructure remind me even more of the *Mad Max* movies. Sadly, I do not follow up on his remark and so it will have to remain a fleeting impression by someone who I will only briefly meet again during the eviction of *Wüste* two months later. On this evening two activists are working on the finishing touches for the pyramid looming prominently in the barren area. I am introduced by Smiley, explain our film project, and am invited to join one of them on the upper floor, while the other is outside getting material. After climbing up the small creaky ladder in the middle of the lower floor, I climb through the middle floor and finally arrive at the upper floor, a 3m² area lit by her headlamp. She carries a cordless screwdriver in her hand and asks if I want to help with the windows. I tell her that I have no real experience with putting windows in and she laughs saying: “Do you think I do?!”. Though I would not help on this day, not quite feeling certain enough to do so, we continue our conversation and create the idea together, that even though construction of the pyramid is almost finished, filming the process could be interesting for the seminar.

Wüste camp is located directly next to the subway station *Hausfeldstraße* in the 22nd district of Vienna. Traveling there with the subway, which drives above ground on this section of the line,

one can see the contentious area from far away and how a mostly barren and plain field stretches for about 0,5 km² right next to a residential area. On most days one is met with a steady cold wind whistling through the few structures standing defiantly. On regular days a handful of people are engaged in many different tasks inside and outside. Maybe some canvas needs to be fixed after the last storm, and why not do it right this time? Others might discuss recent media coverage in a small group huddled together outside the kitchen, all with warm tea in hand of course. In the tiny hut right next to the kitchen a sofa and bench fill one corner, while the only oven in the camp is securely placed on the opposite end. Right next to the entrance door a big shelf houses all sorts of things and tools like nails, cables, brushes, drills and whatever may be needed to materialize all kinds of ideas. A portable solar power generator called “Sol-Cube” sits on the very top of the shelf, a precious artifact that provides electricity on site without having to ask neighbors for assistance. At this time of the year the hut is very popular, and many discussions take place here with anyone needing some warmth. The pyramid in comparison is often quieter. Sometimes one can see different pairs of legs dangling down the hatch to the upper floor, or someone sits on a ball of hay and writes on their laptop. The interior may change on any given day, with the most apparent transformations occurring before assemblies and when participants get ready for the night. Occasionally neighbors or supporters, usually older than participants of the camp, will stand in front of the kitchen and bring food and drinks, while having a chat with activists. On some days people curious about the camp might be shown around by one of the regular participants, and in addition to the pyramid, hut and kitchen, they will also find the “living room”, a wooden stage-like structure with two more sofas. On special Sundays this is the stage on which a band might play, or a known theater actor might give a performance for children. When the sun goes down, the bustle of the camp slowly shifts towards a more mellow mood, as the constant cold takes its toll when physical activities naturally simmer down without daylight to work in. During the night it is quiet at the camp, and one only hears cars and subway driving by. On the two days I stay overnight, I am offered a place in the hut, which I gladly accept. The bench is not comfortable in any sense of the imagination, but at least it is warm for as long as there is firewood, and someone awake to stoke it. In the morning the camp slowly becomes alive again, and I wake up with someone sitting next to me already drinking tea and offering me a cup. Until noon everyone has managed to peel themselves out of their warm sleeping bags and blankets, ready to take on a new day. The third camp *Grätzl I* remained a mystery to me throughout the whole research process. While I had initially planned to visit of course, I quickly found myself immersed in *Wüste* and the film project, that by the time I felt ready to explore the last camp, *Wüste* had already become my field site. Additionally,

it was never apparent when the occupation would be evicted, putting some pressure on the research.

Figure 2. *One of the many interior configurations of the pyramid.*



The area of conflict around which the protests revolve is the 22 km² local recreation area *Lobau Auen* at the western edge of the 96 km² national park *Donau-Auen*. As imperial hunting ground the *Donau-Auen* has been a protected area since 1905 until it passed into public ownership following the end of the first world war in 1918. In the same year, settlers begin occupying the area in hopes to survive the economically desolate times. The description of a photograph about this period in a museum reads, that in contrast to colonists in America, the *Lobau* settlers did not fight native people but the bureaucrats of public authority (Eder, 1983, p. 82). Over the following decades, more waves of mostly poor and homeless people seeking housing and subsistence would arrive in the *Lobau*. In the 1920s and 1930s, the so called “Lobau-Indians”, a loose movement of nudists, begins a pattern of unorganized actionism, autonomous organization and creative attempts of liberation from social and economic constraints (Eder, 1983, p. 06). Instead of paying expensive rent in the city, they stayed in tents during the warmer months and imitated the idealized and exoticized behavior of “tribal communities” for the purpose of living a utopia in nature (Eder, 1983, p. 52). The kind of economic self-help these

occupants practiced became an example for collective action in other marginalized groups living in the area. And though located at the margins of Viennese society, Eder argues that the historical “Lobau movement” also had a regional effect on the pace at which social norms and values regarding morality and aesthetics changed (Eder, 1983, p. 06). For similar movements in Vienna related to the issue of housing, it can further be argued that the self-governed settler movements of the *Lobau* area were the “social motor” for the internationally famous housing policy of social democratic “Red Vienna” in the 19th century (Novy, 2012, p. 158f).

Shortly after the Second World War an oil refinery is built in the *Lobau*, and in the 1960’s a hydro powerplant is added. By the early 1970’s Austria’s first climate related protest movements begin forming against the industrialization of the area. In 1984, the construction of a hydropower plant in *Hainburg* located at the eastern edge of the *Donau-Auen* area is stopped through an unprecedented public mobilization. This particular protest consequently becomes part of the collective memory of Austria’s second republic (Kuchler, 2015, p. 260), and climate activists in particular, illustrated by the slogan on the banner prominently hanging attached to the pyramid in *Wüste: Hainburg ist überall* (“Hainburg is everywhere”). In the 1990’s, an EU project seeking to connect Danube, Oder and Elbe River is halted by public protest and the *Donau-Auen* is designated as a national park in 1996. Initial plans for the often called “*Lobauautobahn*” (*Lobau* highway) date back to 1893 and the attempt to establish a new crossing across the Danube River to further connect the city area. In 1971, the national assembly establishes a similar project within the federal street law, which led to the emergence of a citizen initiative that prevented construction, and the *Lobau* is subsequently declared a nature preserve as well. The conflict about the highway surfaces again in 2000, when the city of Vienna establishes an initiative for dialogue with citizens regarding traffic development in the area. The current variant is chosen, despite the results of an ecological survey, in which expert and citizen testimony label it as the worst option. Citizen movements for the protection of the *Lobau* begin to form and in 2006 test drillings are halted by a small group of people occupying machinery (Weber, 2020, pp. 35-38). In 2021 then, the *Lobau Bleibt!* protest continues a historical pattern of challenging infrastructure and corresponding social norms through collective local action in relation to the area.

5.1. Politics of protest and prefiguration

The creation of a protest camp begins with an antagonistic break with current politics, a negation of the status quo which opens new horizons of possibilities and imaginaries (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 221). By occupying space, these camps create a material and symbolic place designating the social movements position in relation to an object of protest. A camp established by refugees in Vienna in 2012 for example, raised awareness by positioning the camp in a visible and public location in the city (Ataç, 2016, p. 629f), making their voices heard and demonstrating a deficit in democracy by positioning themselves as political subjects with agency (Waterhouse, 2022, p. 105). Here protest camps function in the traditional sense as a materialization of an antagonism and plea aimed at “the powers that be”, seeking change within a given legal or institutional framework without changing the framework itself (Graeber, 2009, p. 433). As soon as a camp is established however, another aspect comes to the foreground immediately: the necessity to keep the camp going over (possibly) extended periods of time, together with strangers and often in less-than-ideal environmental circumstances. From this, both ideological and pragmatical questions about living together emerge out of daily life on site. And here, protest attains an additional dimension for activists, in what is generally referred to in the literature as the politics of prefiguration, which describes a shift in how social movements since the 1960’s attempt to organize themselves. Forgoing traditional social movement organization like trade unions or political parties, the aim of these New social movements “has been to create new forms of organisation from the bottom up that can replace the existing structures, considered to be undemocratic or not democratic enough” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 153). This is a key aspect about what is “new” in New Social Movements, according to Carl Boggs, who introduced the term prefiguration in relation to the practices of political movements in the 1960s and 1970s (Boggs, 1977). In his view, prefigurative practices are a critical reaction to statist Marxism and bureaucratic domination, which achieved their goals through hierarchical top-down organization in which social change involves necessary stages and “the utopia is realized in the post-revolutionary future” (Duda, 2013, p. 57). New Social Movements in contrast, “aim to create a more egalitarian and inclusive society by equaling a movement’s means with a movement’s ends: reaching a horizontal society requires building horizontal relationships between activists in the present, which will, in turn, prefigure the envisaged end” (Fians, 2022, p. 2). Assemblies, horizontal and consensual decision-making are a response to this deficit in representative democracy mainly represented by the institutionalized activism of political parties and elections

(Fians, 2022, p. 7). Prefigurative politics in contrast, attempt to build alternative futures in the present that do not reproduce the social structures they oppose (Fians, 2022, p. 1), which may refer to decision-making processes, organizational structures and social interactions between activists (Serafini, 2015). By providing people an idea of a better future in which the “structure of one’s own act becomes a kind of micro-utopia, a concrete model for one’s vision of a free society” (Graeber, 2009, p. 210), these politics try to create alternative institutions in order to “change the world without taking power” (Holloway, 2002). Because there is some ambiguity between prefigurative acts and the organization behind the acts in Graeber’s formulation, Dan Swain proposes the distinction between prefiguration of specific action and prefiguration of decision-making processes (Swain, 2019, p. 49). The reason is that for many activists “direct prefiguration of actions is impractical, perhaps nonsensical. They thus focus instead on the importance of the deliberative processes involved in organising any given action” (Swain, 2017, p. 50). In *Wüste*, the prefiguration of decision-making in democracy is of great importance to participants, and points toward a deficit in democracy, because “even in reasonably democratic societies, politics is a highly professionalised field that leaves little more for the normal citizen to do than approve or dismiss political parties in electoral cycles” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 220). Graeber likewise notes a deficit in democratic decision-making that brought the idea of alternatives into current social movements:

Democracy, one constantly hears, means that people get to make choices. They choose between different parties or candidates. They might even choose to vote yes or no on a referendum. Almost always though, they themselves have played little or no part in shaping the things between which this choice is made. (Graeber, 2009, p. 319)

In *Lützerath* Mehl concludes that activists want to challenge and critique existing norms and structure in current society, which is contributing climate change, and her interviewees summarize that they are challenging democratic norms of political participation and decision-making but also economic norms as capitalism is a main driver of climate change (Mehl, 2022, p. 27). Likewise, a participant in *Wüste* reflects on her time at the camp:

I think power was a huge topic, which is different in society compared to *Wüste*, I mean distribution of power, who decides what, how are decision-making processes realized. I believe we all wish for a good living-together somehow. We do in *Wüste* as we do in society, but the way to get there is very different. (Interview-03, p. 10, lines 516-522)

In *Lützerath* and *Wüste*, the occupation is an antagonistic protest that also entails a prefigurative aspect which activists try to actualize as one possibility of outcome. One participant describes

her recollection of these two strands at *Wüste* camp and the movement at large in the following way:

And there are these two movements, with one of them more sensitive to good living-together and the utopia, and the others more focused on the idea that it is really important to work against the highway, but it's also important to have someone mediate between them or whatever. (Interview-03, p. 15, lines 768-773)

One activist with previous experience in environmental protest movements explained to me, that organization back then was conducted in a rather different way, saying decision-making was a lot more “ruthless”. During one of my interviews, another participant remembers the *Hainburg* protests in 1984:

Yes, and back then everything was very much dominated by men, there were all sorts of Machos who would debate really forcefully. Like, I saw experienced [activist] women who always said: ‘You cannot debate like that, that’s not an argument’. (Interview-04, p. 6, lines 276-289)

According to Graeber, “the feminist movement began largely from within the New Left, as a reaction to precisely this sort of macho leadership style” (Graeber, 2009, p. 233). In following years, feminist activists would experiment with horizontal organization in small and informal consciousness-raising circles. As these small cells scaled up over time, problems arose around the seemingly inevitable emergence of “inner circles” of women as a somewhat invisible leadership structure. Graeber argues that “the origins of the current direct action movement go back precisely to attempts to resolve those dilemmas”, and that the “pieces really started to come together in the antinuclear movement of the late 1970s” (Graeber, 2009, p. 234).

In protest camps, tensions between antagonistic demands for a new beginning meet with the practical requirements of making things work in the present (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 221). And from these, different horizons of choice emerge in the daily life of participants on site. The strands protest and prefiguration become relevant contexts for action and provide a spectrum of decisions to consider as one participant describes in more detail:

At *Wüste* camp the question, the eviction has been announced, so do you blockade the entry ways? Many idealist visions went into this. Some were very militant, like, of course we have to blockade so that nobody can enter, and maybe we even place caltrops. And then the other extreme of people who were like: No, we can't do this under any circumstances, to blockade something, because then we lose our openness and will be less welcoming to citizens and neighbors. And if this includes police coming in too, cool. And then there were some with a more careful attitude, like, the neighbors will be

able to enter hopefully, police might take longer, but what about rescue and firefighters, because we would block them too. So there are a lot of points on this one topic alone, and a lot of ideals went into this. (Interview-01, p. 8, lines 386-402)

Participants must mediate different perspectives on decisions that emerge out of the camp, and in the above example, also its relation to the environment. In the question of blockading police, we can see how different horizons are interrelated and negotiated through transjunctions of contextures. Making it as difficult as possible for police to enter suggests that in this case, activists designate “the police” as an entity and attribute future action and effect, meaning entering and evicting the camp. Because this turn of events is disagreeable, it follows that something must be done to prevent it. Defined through future intent, the police are “excluded as an autonomous contexture with an inaccessible logic that cannot be accepted” (Jansen, von Schlippe & Vogd, 2015, p. 10), and the “dissociated structure therefore emerges as a separate contexture or reflective position which can then also be used to create structure” (Jansen, von Schlippe & Vogd, 2015, p. 10). Created here is the intent to blockade police from entering and evicting the camp, as the operational logic of this position cannot be accepted. However, a subtle shift occurs as soon as more specific considerations for the type of blockade enter the discussion, as now the self-referentiality of the opposed position is taken into account. Thinking about placing caltrops suggests that “the police” as a generally defined position has transformed into policemen and policewomen in particular. By trying to grasp how someone else, as a person physically present at the camp, might try to enter and evict the location, the question of caltrops points toward a transjunction in which “the respective other logic is subverted by addressing and understanding it and using it to further one's own self-referentiality” (Jansen, von Schlippe & Vogd, 2015, p. 11). Here, the embodied horizon of another person, and what they possibly can and cannot do is generative for the horizon of activists proposing caltrops, and ultimately what kind of decisions must be made collectively according to these future events. In the end, a decision is made and only the entrance to the pyramid as the “last line of defense” will be blocked with a wooden fence. This kind of compromise that takes as many perspectives into account as possible is a recurrent pattern in *Wüste*, and as the later chapter will illustrate, especially pronounced in decision-making processes.

As the above example also illustrates, not everyone agrees that blockading is necessary or even a good idea in the first place. By pointing out that any blockade would not only hinder neighbors from entering, but also rescue and firefighters, different reflective horizons are brought into the mix, adding further complexity to the decision. These horizons of actions and effects entail both

positive and reflexive dimensions and are used to open and close distinct possibilities for activists to consider. In this sense, transjunctions shape the concrete actions taken by participants and the decision to only blockade entry to the pyramid as a last stand represents a negotiated outcome that attempted to bridge different contextures. In the discussed example I will define four contextures with their own individual horizons and operational logics, which I will simply term “police”, “blockade”, “open”, and “compromise”. The very act of protesting and resisting eviction signifies a fundamental rejection of the police's immediate goal to clear the construction site and so the political aspirations of participants clashes with the state's authority. The police force operates according to their own distinct logic, values, and goals, which often differ significantly from those of climate activists, especially in relation to prefigurative politics. Police work within the framework of state law and legal mandates and prioritize the maintenance of public order and the enforcement of laws through the use force. Organization furthermore exhibits a hierarchical command structure and follows specific protocols and procedures. Participants are fully aware of the police force's role, their legal mandate to enforce the eviction, and their potential tactics and understand that the police operate within their own system, with their own rules and priorities. The discussion about blockading and the potential for police intervention demonstrates this understanding of the police's likely actions, and in this sense, they are not trying to convince the police to adopt their values but rather strategize on how to resist eviction. Initially then, the focus is on preventing the anticipated event without necessarily engaging with the individual motivations or constraints of the police officers themselves, and the transjunction is therefore total but undifferentiated. By considering the physical actions and embodied experience of individual policeman and policewomen potentially stepping on caltrops, participants are directly engaging with and attempting to subvert the self-referentiality of the opposed position. They are now considering an individual's capacity for movement, using this understanding to further their own goal of preventing entry. This subsequently transforms the initial operation into a differentiated transjunction, because at first, police are “seen as the totally foreign other which logically appears to be inaccessible because it cannot be understood and therefore also not accepted” (Jansen, von Schlippe & Vogd, 2015, p. 10). By moving from the contexture of “the police” toward the horizon of policemen and policewomen “the inherent logic of the rejected contexture is understood, i.e. the self-referentiality of the other contexture is taken into account” (Jansen, von Schlippe & Vogd, 2015, p. 11).

The example further illustrates that the specific way police are constructed and engaged with by participants is already the result of a complex interplay of different horizons of choice within distinct contextures. “Blockade”, functionally the opposite of police, is ultimately rejected because of the more extreme proposals of full blockade and caltrops. However, the fact that some form of blockade is implemented suggests an understanding of the underlying logic of the militant perspective, which is the desire to physically prevent eviction and create a strong point of resistance. “Open” creates an inverse of the militant position, by using radical openness as a representational point of resistance to state force, representing the movements’ ideals and aspirations for a better world. This stance is also rejected in practice, and the decision to blockade something indicates a recognition that some level of obstruction is necessary. “Compromise” is the emerging contexture prioritizing what is achievable and what would minimize harm to activists, neighbors, police and potentially the broader image of the movement. The horizons now constituting this contexture seem to have understood the embodied logics of police, together with both the militant and open perspectives, and by delineating a set of appropriate priorities (effectiveness of resistance and minimizing negative consequences), a compromise can emerge. Blockading only the pyramid entrance as a last stand reflects the ongoing negotiation between these different perspectives and the attempt to find a solution that addresses multiple concerns. Participants of the discussion engage with the reasoning behind each stance (the desire to resist, the commitment to openness, the concern for consequences) as they ultimately choose a course of action that is good enough. This pragmatic attitude attempts to incorporate the different perspectives of each position and so this example highlights the internal complexity of *Lobau Bleibt!* and *Wüste*, and how different values and political ontologies coexist and interact. Contextures here encompass both implicit (frames of orientation like the desire to resist for a better world) and explicit structures (orientation schemas like blockading entry to the camp). This links personal aspects of decision-making with the shared and communicated aspects of social practice and shows how individual subjectivities interact within social spaces. In this sense, social practice emerges from the dynamic interplay of contextures, which are informed by individual horizons but also shape them. When individuals interact in a social setting, they are therefore attempting to bridge, negotiate, or differentiate their respective embodied horizons through the transjunction of contextures.

Placing your own body in the way of police to resist eviction can be considered a radical move, but perhaps also somewhat pointless considering the overwhelming force a nation state can enact. But through this “manufactured vulnerability”, that is by placing bodies in the way of

police, activists put “responsibility for the blockaders’ safety in the hands of the authorities” which creates “a sustained performance of their own moral commitment for a media and public captured by the epic quality of the confrontation” (Doherty, 2000, p. 70). Beyond this representation of moral commitment, responsibility for participants’ safety is more specifically put in the hands of the policemen and women being physically present and doing the actual evicting. Here, the self-referentiality of another person’s embodied horizon is taken into account and, in a sense, this relation is turned around by forcing that particular person to do the same: to recognize the explicit and implicit reason for both their presence, and possibly appeal to the “opponents” own moral commitment to a just world. As Graeber notes, by doing so: “One provokes with a defiantly political act, but, at the same time, forces the arresting officer to exercise the protective care he or she is supposed to exercise towards citizens” (Graeber, 2009, p. 397). This way activists expose “the inherent violence of the system by revealing precisely what it is prepared to do to those who challenge it” (Graeber, 2009, p. 403).

Placing your own body in such a vulnerable position also expresses a sense of urgency in relation to climate change, especially for those segments of society who rarely confront the police. The following subchapters will be a brief analysis of the sense of urgency in climate change related activism, but in a broader view beyond the often-frantic pace of daily life at a protest camp. Following Arturo Escobar’s insight that “we design our world, and our world designs us back” (Escobar, 2018, p. 4), Hornborg argues that the “political significance of design can thus not be overestimated” and “the challenge for an anticapitalist ‘ontological design’ must be to identify the root artifacts of capitalism and how they might be *redesigned*” (Hornborg, 2021, p. 8 [emphasis in original]). My argument will therefore begin by illustrating that the more general sense of urgency is one of the key reasons why people decide to occupy a construction site in the first place. By introducing “scenarios” employed by the IPCC as a form of “regulatory politics of anticipation” (Beck & Mahony, 2017) which produce increasingly dire visions of the future, I will contextualize the sense of urgency felt by people occupying a construction site. Taking a closer and more critical perspective of this kind of scientific futurology, my interpretation of New Social Movements and prefigurative politics will then illustrate a historical and intellectual connection that is rarely if ever acknowledged, namely between the “cybernetic moment” of the 1940’s and 1950’s (Kline, 2017), and social movements emerging in the 1960’s. I will show that ideas explored in cybernetics (e.g. feedback, self-organization, systems) furnished activists with scientific validation and justification for their politics (e.g. horizontal, non-institutional, decentralized networks). This

will inadvertently lead towards a problematization of the political ontology in current radical politics, because ideas of self-organization and horizontality vitalizing current radical politics as an unquestioned axiom of political ontology (Duda, 2013) have also been mobilized in support of neoliberal arguments against state regulation (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 154), or by conservative anti-abortion movements and white power activists (Fians, 2022, p. 13). Finally, I will suggest that in prefigurative politics, a particular relation between the present and the future is expressed and practiced. More specifically, I will interpret prefigurative politics in relation to cybernetic temporality, in which an open and flexible future cannot be predicted and must instead be recursively controlled through the management of the present (Hamilton, 1998).

5.1.1. The urgency of climate activism

On a warm day in December, I sit on a pile of wooden boards outside in *Wüste* and watch an info event by a citizen initiative on my cell phone. As someone explains the precise dimensions of the planned city highway and how it cuts through residential areas, I see several regulars of *Wüste* approach the camp. I wave towards them, and one comes over, sits down next to me and asks what I am doing. I tell him about the info event, and he sighs. “Something wrong?” I ask, and he answers: “Man I don’t know, it’s just so much. It’s like a full-time job at this point! Assemblies all the time, which must be prepared, then you go to some event in the city and do some small protest or whatever and you talk to people about the highway, and that’s cool. Then your working groups want to meet, so more assemblies and more talking. And also more postings and stuff on social media and so on. But shit man, the kitchen is still not done, and the oven, I don’t know, it’s just so much and I’m exhausted.” I refrain from asking if the other regulars are feeling the same way, because I already know the answer. Very early in my fieldwork, when I am still working on the short film for our seminar, we make a group on the messenger app Signal to stay in touch with our initial contacts we had met at Base camp. After the decision is made to film some construction in *Wüste*, I ask the two people I initially talked to about filming this particular topic want to join the group. The answer is a resounding: “No thanks!”. I must have shown some disappointment as they both quickly explain that they are part of so many groups now that they are unable to keep up with it all. And since I would spend time in *Wüste* for this project anyway, there would also be no real need for it. The “regulars” I am referring to are not the regulars that had been present during the first month of the occupation. The first occupation crew, I am told, dropped out because of burn-out and

exhaustion, and perhaps this is why people in *Wüste* sometimes reminded themselves that “the occupation is not a sprint but a marathon”. As Stine Krøijer notes, the “frenzied pace of activists” could be difficult to follow, and her own experience of the exhausting tempo of these movements alerted her to the sense of urgency and feelings of fatigue that activists experience (Krøijer 2015, p. 19).

To understand *Lobau Bleibt!*, and the urgent pace of their activism, we first need to understand Fridays for Future, and more specifically, the way effect and success of the latter is felt by participants of the protests that began in 2018 with the initiative of Greta Thunberg and collaborators. While not everyone involved in *Lobau Bleibt!* in general and *Wüste* in particular had also been involved in Fridays for Future previously, many had been. This was highlighted when the eviction alarm for *Wüste* is raised in late January on social media and about 100 - 150 people show up for the night, most of which were young women. The predominance of women in *Lobau Bleibt!* is also apparent on the day of eviction in early February, as the final film illustrates. This mobilization pattern of mostly young women within Fridays for Future is striking and a difference to earlier more men dominated protest movements (Daniel, Deutschmann, Buzogány, & Scherhauser, 2020, p. 372). Antje Daniel has researched the Austrian Fridays for Future movement extensively with her colleagues and they broadly summarize their findings in the following way: Millions of people have been mobilized by Fridays for Future globally, and the protest forced the topic of climate change unignorably into political and public discourse again. Fridays for Future further presents a new phase in the history of climate change related protest movements in Austria, by bringing the topic from the niche of climate science, professional environmental organizations and radical climate justice social movements into the mainstream. It showed participants that mass protests have the potential to induce societal and political change, but at the same time, many do not believe that they can rely on politics alone to solve the climate crisis (Daniel, Deutschmann, Buzogány, & Scherhauser, 2020, p. 382). The potential for change is a contentious matter among *Lobau Bleibt!* participants. More precisely, it is the impression that not enough has changed, that politicians react too slow or not at all, which leads to occupations as a way to generate pressure. Lena Schilling, one of the initiators of the legal camp Base camp, lays out her reasons to do so in her book published at the tail end of the protests, mainly in relation to political decision-making. In her view, shared by many I talk to during research, people do not really lack awareness of the problem. The problem, she writes, are actual political decisions for the expansion of streets coupled with decisions to decrease train infrastructure (Schilling, 2022, p.

15). She expresses frustration about her meetings with several politicians, who seem to be convinced that they cannot change much because they do not have enough societal power, or because they do not really want to enact wide reaching and forward-looking decisions anyway (Schilling 2022, p. 25). Because politicians chose short-term benefits, she and others decided to “take matters into their own hands”, since “doing nothing is a decision with severe consequences” (Schilling 2022, p. 20). And something must be done now, because she sees the climate crisis as the biggest challenge facing humanity as we are increasingly pressed for time. “To address the climate crisis” she writes, “we barely have 8 years left to act”, and from this she explains, “the radical fight of a whole generation emerges” (Schilling, 2022, p. 16).

The urgency expressed by Schilling is clear and echoes the emotional dispositions of millions of school children who have gone on strike in the last decade: bitterness, betrayal, fear and rage (Hamilton, 2020, p. 115). The failure of UN conventions and climate goals lead to the radicalization of climate change related social movements increasingly willing to consider different protest tactics like civil disobedience (Daniel, Deutschmann, Buzogány, & Scherhauser, 2020, p. 368). Environmental policy is shaped by scientific projections of uncertainty, mediated by knowledge brokers and facilitators to the people who experience the climate crisis daily on the ground (Srivastava, Mehta, & Adam, 2021, p. 2). In the so called Anthropocene, the temporality of the future has changed: “No longer the haven of inevitable progress, and no longer the scene of apocalyptic wipeout, the future was now fraught with complex responsibilities for which no easy or coherent utopian narrative was appropriate” (Ross, 1991, p. 141). The effect of human activity on planet earth reconfigures the future so that “instead of being guided by well-defined expectations over the next few years followed by vague and generally benign visions disappearing into the unknown, now the future extends over decades or a century defined by imaginable conditions of climate stress” (Hamilton, 2020, p. 116). But how did the future change, or rather, how could different futures come into being? There is one key publication illuminating this question, occasionally mentioned by activists I talk to or in literature on climate change: *Limits of Growth* published in 1972 (Meadows, Randers, & Meadows, 1972). One of my closer interlocutors remembers well when this report was discussed with classmates in his school in the late 1970’s. In his recollection, the report forced many people to open their eyes and consider their own impact on the future of the planet. Today, reports issued by the IPCC can be said to fulfil the same role. But whereas *Limits of Growth* warned of possible futures to avoid, reports by the IPCC today function as a regulatory science with which policy in climate governance can be anticipated and their performance

measured. In this way, they “do not just represent possible futures, but also help to bring certain futures into being” (Beck & Mahony, 2017, p. 312). Underlying both *Limits of Growth* and IPCC reports are so called “scenarios”, analytical instruments that were developed as a method of futurology after the World War II.

Modern history of the future begins with the rise of science and the onset of the so-called age of exploration and has served as a powerful political tool and cultural weapon since (Carey, 2009, p. 133f). The forecast of the future saw a break during the enlightenment, when “modernist writing about the future came to be distinguished by the significant, and often determinate role played by scientific knowledge in techniques of prediction” (Hamilton 1998, p. 182). During this time, clock mechanisms and positivism suggested the possibility of precise prediction, and a “secular priesthood seized hold of the idea of a perfect future based on modern science and new measuring techniques” (Carey, 2009, p. 133). In the 1940’s then, the idea of the future begins to change, as there had been a “dramatic shift in the nature of these futurologies due to cybernetic technologies such as systems analysis, computers and probability statistics” (Hamilton, 1998, p. 183). And by the 1960’s, futurologists had created a new commodity: “the opportunity to ‘explore’ alternative futures within the confines of the existing system”, in which “the new feedback variable in the future was supposed to be futurology itself” and could therefore have “a dynamic influence of social and economic decision-making” (Ross, 1991, p. 177). Like ancient astrologers, whose appeal to authority rested on the prediction of behavior of planets to order social life, these “scientists use their capacity to predict the behavior of narrow closed systems to claim the right to predict and order all human futures” (Carey, 2009, p. 133). The goal of this futurology, in short, “had been to manage and control the future through the use of systems analysis, computer databases, and modeling developed earlier by military-industrial forecasters” (Ross, 1991, p. 176).

As soon as the nuclear bombs of the US military had annihilated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, military strategists were confronted with a fundamental problem. Whereas decisions in the context of war had been made based on previous experience, now the future was radically unknown, as there existed no previous instance of nuclear weapons. The future therefore had to be simulated, and under “conditions of nuclear uncertainty, analysts had to imagine the data to which they might apply the mathematical formulas, game theories, and computer technologies they had developed for earlier forms of combat” (Turner, 2006, p. 186). Scenario methods developed served this purpose, as “stories about the future aimed at helping people

break past their mental blocks and consider the ‘unthinkable’ futures, which would take them by surprise if they weren’t prepared” (Kleiner, 1996, p. 149). In the futurology of elite thinktanks in the 1940’s and 1950’s, there was no role for democratic decision-making and “its methods of information analysis, [...] were increasingly adopted for social forecasting by government agencies and corporations in the business of designing the future of whole social systems” (Ross, 1991, p. 174). In reaction during the 1960’s then, a “significant number of liberal, publicly minded intellectuals entered the field of futurology on the back of a growing wave of anti-technocratic sentiment among dissenting sectors of the population” (Ross, 1991, p. 174). In retrospect however, their arguments about flexible and open futures against top-down technocratic forecasting must be seen “as an explanatory rhetoric for the new economic and cultural arrangements that have come to be known as post-Fordist”, which “transformed the future into a fluid set of options for planners to choose from” (Ross, 1991, p. 180). By the mid-1970’s finally, “scenarios had welded the quantitative modeling of wartime operations research and the fantastic futurism of cold war atomic forecasting to the experiential, insight-oriented practices of mystics and gurus favored by the hippies” (Turner, 2006, p. 187). The Shell corporation was the first to apply these methods and consequently avoided some consequences of the global oil crisis in 1973. Given this success, scenarios “became a form of corporate performance art, where corporate and counterculture merged” (Turner, 2006, p. 187), constituting its own distinct commodity and industry: present management of open sets of possible futures.

5.1.2. The power of simulated futures

After the second week of my research in I write a list with anything that felt new and surprising to me in *Wüste*, because as Micheal Agar notes, such “rich points” are “the raw material of ethnographic research. They run the gamut from incomprehensible surprise to departure from expectations to glitches in an aggregate data set” (Agar, 2006, p. 11). For him the purpose of ethnography is therefore “to go forth into the world, find and experience rich points, and then take them seriously as a signal of a difference between what you know and what you need to learn to understand and explain what just happened” (Agar, 2006, p. 11). Surprisingly, my list came up awfully short. Though I was familiar with traditional protests I had never participated in any occupation, and so I expected to find many ethnographic “rich points”. Sure, I noted a surprisingly sober atmosphere on the day the tunnel was tentatively stopped, and that for many I had talked to, protesting the highway seemed not as important as what they were trying to

create within the camps. In the context of building rapport for our film project I also realized that people did not often know each other, as all three camps were more autonomous than I had anticipated. But something did not add up for me and so I wondered why being in *Wüste* felt almost familiar. A few days later I sit on a donated couch in *Wüste* and enjoy the sunshine. Suddenly the radio playing in the background turns louder and a handful of people start cheering and dancing in front of the kitchen. In this moment it dawns on me: The wooden DIY architecture, the somewhat shabby couch I sit on, the sunshine, music and dancing. It is almost like a music festival. And the similarities extend further, because many smaller music festivals are organized and produced in a comparable way, by different networks aligning and planning from the bottom-up without any clear chains of command or centralized control over the project. When an eviction alarm brings about 150 people to *Wüste* a few weeks later, my impression is strengthened by two young activists standing in front of the kitchen drinking tea. Amazed they watch the site bustling with activity while listening to the radio playing music. As I exit the kitchen with my own tea in hand, one of them says: “It’s like the festival we went to this summer!” and I burst out to them: “Right?!” When I talk about my impression during interview an interview, one regular participant in *Wüste* explains that she has some experience with “hippie-festivals” and continues:

Now that you mention it, I can definitely find some parallels, like living into the day, and being able to choose freely depending on what I find important. And over each day you meet all sorts of people by chance with whom you might not otherwise share points of contact. And then also teaching each other new things, like I have been to festivals previously where there were workshops. For example, I went to Rainbow Gatherings, which are even more similar because they are self-organized, and so anyone may cook on a day or something. (Interview-02, p. 30f, 1607-1620)

These parallels are no coincidence and I will argue that understanding of New Social Movements and prefigurative politics can be enhanced by drawing out the “deep assumptions” (Hayles N. K., 1990, p. 3) in the correspondence between cybernetic theory and society, which “manifests itself in one place and then another, here as development psychology and there as a style of engineering, here as a description of our bodies and there as a template for corporate organization, here as a way to build a computer network and there as a manifesto of political ideas” (Turtle, 1995, p. 264).

Cybernetics can be defined as an inter-, trans-, or anti-disciplinary approach to the analysis of circular and recursive causal mechanisms and self-regulation processes found in biological,

social, cognitive, technological, and ecological systems. It was defined as a field of inquiry in Norbert Wiener's mathematical publication *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Wiener, 1948) which saw much wider reception than anticipated. In his popular follow up publication *The Human Use of Human Beings* (Wiener, 1950) he focused on the social implications of cybernetic automation, drawing comparisons to the industrial revolution for better and for worse. Cybernetics initially attempted to find the common elements in the functioning of automatic machines and of the human nervous system, and the foundations for cybernetics were developed in the United States of America by participants of conferences funded by Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation from 1946 - 1953. The central theme of this first set of conferences was the analogy between humans and machines as goal-seeking mechanisms that learn through the processing of information and corrective feedback (Hayles N. K., 1999, p. 65). Notable is the attendance of Konrad Lorenz, a famous biologist from Austria, who would become a figurehead in the grass-roots movement that prevented the building of the power plant at the Danube river near *Hainburg* in 1984. From 1954 to 1960 a second set of conferences was held to draw out more explicitly the epistemological implications of cybernetics. By including the observer into the system that is observed, reflexivity became the central theme of this second order cybernetics (Hayles, 1999, p. 133). As we will see later, the shift from first to second order cybernetics also marks the beginning of a political schism within the field and its' wider reception in society. Margaret Mead's introductory speech *The Cybernetics of cybernetics*, given at the 1962 Annual Symposium of the American Society for Cybernetics, shows that the "articulation of the ironic lack of 'circular self-corrective systems' in the science of circular self-corrective systems underscored the impending politicization of recursion in cybernetics" (Eglash, 1998, p. 388). The fundamental distinction in second order cybernetics is that of observer/system, "and the problem was how to locate the observer inside the system, and the system inside the observer" (Hayles, 1999, p. 73). As Heinz von Förster noted in 1969, with the advent of Einstein's relativity theory and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, "a most enigmatic object was discovered, which until then was carefully excluded from all scientific discourse: the 'observer'. 'Who is he?' was the question indignantly asked by those who subscribed to a sour grape strategy, and seriously asked by those who felt that any science worth its name must include the subject that makes the observations in the first place" (von Förster cit. in Hayles, 1999, 74).

Cybernetics began as a "project", a cluster of "ideas and practices that appear as particular historical undertakings; they are often dreams made concrete and are most identifiable in

relation to their practical arrangements” (Greenough & Tsing, 2003, p. 15). It brought together “an ensemble of heterogeneous discourses all dealing with the *practical problems of mastering uncertainty* (Tiqqun, 2020, p. 9 [emphasis in original]). The project of cybernetics was born in the context of war, and so it “would be in vain to look for some malicious purpose or the traces of a plot: one simply finds a handful of ordinary men mobilized by America during the Second world war” (Tiqqun, 2020, p. 9). Initially, research conducted by Norbert Wiener and colleagues concerned monitoring and predicting the movement of enemy planes to increase efficiency of anti-aircraft weapons. Because people act repetitively and therefore predictably under stress, as they saw it, “Wiener's idea was to use electrical networks to determine, several seconds in advance, where an attacking plane would be and to use that knowledge to direct artillery fire” (Galison, 1994, p. 234). In designing machines to forecast future moves,

Wiener came to see the predictor as a prototype not only of the mind of an inaccessible Axis opponent but of the Allied antiaircraft gunner as well, and then even more widely to include the vast array of human proprioceptive and electrophysiological feedback systems. The model then expanded to become a new science known after the war as “cybernetics,” a science that would embrace intentionality, learning, and much else within the human mind. (Galison, 1994, p. 229)

Proposing a mathematical model to circular causality, information, and questions of the brain and mind,

cybernetics had a crucial influence on the birth of various modern sciences: control theory, computer science, information theory, automata theory, artificial intelligence and artificial neural networks, cognitive science, computer modeling and simulation science, dynamical systems, and artificial life. Many concepts central to these fields, such as complexity, self-organization, self-reproduction, autonomy, networks, connectionism, and adaptation, were first explored by cyberneticians during the 1940’s and 1950’s (Heylighen & Joslyn, 2001, p. 3).

The cybernetic moment “reached its peak with the adoption and modification in biology, engineering, the social sciences, and popular culture in the 1950’s and 1960’s, and ended when cybernetics and information theory lost their status as universal sciences in the 1970’s” (Kleiner, 2015, p. 6). As popular social knowledge in the 1940’s and 1950’s, cybernetics “was concerned with, and helped shape, certain notions of temporality in general and the future in particular” (Hamilton, 1998, p. 187). In cybernetic futurology “social temporality becomes about controlling (rather than predicting) the future through the management of the present; it embraces change - perhaps chaos - normalizing it as something inevitable and outside of our control” (Hamilton, 1998, p. 196). While cyberneticians’ claims to universality transformed

into embarrassed hubris in the United States by the mid to late 1960's (Geoghegan, 2011), their ideas found reception and critical response in France as the “cybernetic matrix of French theory” (Lafontaine, 2007). This was a critical reaction to the cybernetics in, for example, Claude Levi-Strauss' structuralism, as a “brilliant misreading of information theories” that “suggest a new interpretation of cultures as dynamic systems of communication” (Geoghegan, 2011, p. 123). Similarly, Gregory Bateson was partly reproached by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, but they also adapted his ideas like plateaus of intensity and the ecology of mind (Young, Genosko, & Watson, 2013, p. 39). French intellectuals asked what it would mean for societies if cybernetics and information theory are in correct about their theories regarding communication in general and humans and machines in particular. In the 1970's and 1980's “America's cybernetic gift to French semiotics” came back to the United States and “American scholars learned from their French colleagues to understand texts, cultures, and entire societies as vying systems of cybernetic code” (Geoghegan, 2011, p. 125). Resonating with this development, Clifford Geertz would define culture “as a set of control mechanisms-plans, recipes, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call ‘programs’) - for the governing of behavior” (Geertz, 1973, p. 44). And to him, “man is precisely the animal most desperately dependent upon such extragenetic, outside-the-skin control mechanisms, such cultural programs, for ordering his behavior“ (Geertz, 1973, p. 44). Interpreting, decoding, or deconstructing anything other than written text “as text” requires a computational metaphor, one which according to Catherine Hayles, enabled a metaphysical shift in the emphasis from presence/absence to that of pattern/randomness². And what may seem like a concern for philosophers and computer engineers functionally transformed capitalism so that access rather than ownership became paramount (Hayles, 1999, p. 39).

Cybernetics also introduced a new kind of technocracy, “which no longer takes the top-down approach of classical mechanism, but rather offers a flexibility that welcomes contingency and irregularities. In this sense, it is also ambiguous, because cybernetics could be applied in the realization of a socialist, a communist as well as anarcho-liberal management (Hui, 2024, p. 14). As a science of society “cybernetics was intended to invent a kind of social regulation that would leave behind the macro-institutions of state and market, preferring to work through micro-mechanisms of control - preferring devices” (Tiqqun, 2020, p. 13). Salvador Allendes

² See for example: “It is the pattern maintained by this homeostasis, which is the touchstone of our personal identity. [...] We are but whirlpools in a river of ever-flowing water. We are not stuff that abides, but patterns that perpetuate themselves” (Wiener, 1950).

socialist government in Chile attempted to implement cybernetic principles of self-organization and distributed decision-making as “Project Cybersyn” in the period of 1971-1973. After the military coup in 1973, Chile became the prime example for neoliberal governance, as “neoliberals took self-organization by force and successfully adapted it to their purpose. The aegis of self-organization was among the spoils of Pinochet’s war on Chilean democratic socialism” (Hancock, 2024, p. 20). Since the 1980’s, the hierarchical structure of many corporate firms has been reorganized as project-oriented networks (Turner, 2006, p. 149), meaning that industrialization processes do not remain within the firm but are expanded to market relations between firms (Klagenfurt, 2016, pp. 127f), resulting in phenomena like just-in-time production and contingent and short-term work. The vision of a networked market, “whose laws could be made visible through a mix of systems theory, collaborative social practice, and mystical insight” (Turner, 2006, p. 184) and scenario methods developed for Shell are one such divination technique appropriate for these new market conditions, as the company’s managers lacked the necessary affective horizon and “did not clearly see its geopolitics, changing markets, and inconstant cultures. And without that gut feel, they could not act. If the planners wanted the company to succeed, then they would have to make this new world tangible somehow. That, in turn, would mean somehow reaching the part of the managers’ minds that harbored their perceptions” (Kleiner, 1996, p. 163). Through “the introduction of computers in the second half of the twentieth century, mechanical and sequential control of automation has been slowly replaced with digital feedback systems (Hui, 2019, p. 117). By supplanting the optimal allocation of wealth with that of information, the “image of the ‘invisible hand’ is no longer a justificatory fiction but is now the effective principle behind the social reproduction of society, as it materializes within computer procedures” (Tiqun, 2020, p. 16).

5.1.3. The temporalities of prefiguration

It can be said, that “the emergence of a decentralized, global Empire has been challenged by a decentralized global protest movement” (Fuchs, 2016, p. 132), as on the other side of fences at G8 summits, self-organization “functions in many cases as a self-evident and self-sufficient axiomatic unit, a basic term of the normative ontology of radical political action” (Duda, 2013, p. 55). The term entered the political lexicon of social movements in the 1960’s, when classic anarchist writing was newly translated, and so, free organization or self-governance became self-organization. Like anarchists and socialists of the early 19th century, who argued that

electricity could bring about a decentralized, democratic and ecological utopia (Carey, 2009, p. 94), progressive and liberal writing in the 1960's now saw the same potential for emancipatory politics in emerging telecommunication technology. As Duda points out however, "it seems highly unlikely that the sciences of self-organization happened conveniently upon a concept whose application to the political domain is entirely unproblematic, a perfect match that could be neatly applied backwards onto Proudhon and Bakunin and projected forward onto the dynamics and aspirations of the anti-globalization movement and other movements" (Duda, 2013, p. 56). Small action models of sustainability and antagonistic collective action, Skrimshire argues, represent a "significant shift in emphases on the Environmental Politics function of activism in civil society" (Skrimshire, 2008, p. 14). In the sciences environmentalists draw most of their discursive backing from, the consistency between cybernetics and sustainability science is so strong, "that as soon as we move from theoretical to applied sustainability analysis, most of the concepts and methods drawn from systems science and cybernetics are almost always and widely applied in sustainability science" (Biggiero, 2018, p. 1324). Specifically, the "tipping points leading to climatic "runaway effects" are fundamentally cybernetic feedback models, and more generally then, ecologist philosophy of the 20th century was nourished by the new mystique of cybernetic totality. But now "totality was no longer an origin to be rediscovered, but a future to be built. For cybernetics it is no longer a question of predicting the future, but of reproducing the present. It is no longer a question of static order, but of a dynamic self-organization" (Tiqqun, 2020, p. 15). In this sense, "organization through cybernetic thinking has realized (in certain sense) the general organism *qua* cybernetic system, which is called *ecology* (Hui, 2019, p. 147 [emphasis in original]). According to Vassos Argyrou, environmentalism is therefore not a radical break with modernist logic, but rather produces "a more objectified, totalizing and unifying vision of the world than the vision of the modernist paradigm" (Argyrou, 2005, p. ix). With the metaphysical transformation in the 1940's and 1950's, the death of nature signaled the rise to the environment (Escobar, 1995), and the death of man signaled the birth of the human being (Argyrou, 2005). The new physics and anthropology of environmentalism suggested by cybernetics constructs nature as a fragile domain of complex systems which need to be managed in a sustainable fashion (Argyrou, 2005, p. 37). These are the "facts" of environmentalism, but as Argyrou points out, factual and seemingly neutral explanations in environmentalism (or anywhere else) do not operate outside history and culture, but become visible under determinate cultural conditions (Argyrou, 2005, p. 38). At stake, from an anthropological perspective then, is the

“power, the ability of a group of societies to define the meaning of the world for everyone, yet again” (Argyrou, 2005, p. ix).

New Social Movements can be said to differ from earlier social movements, insofar as cultural concerns in relation to identity and representation have superseded social concerns in relation to class and reproduction. In this account, social movements have become cultural movements in post-industrial or post-modern society (Melucci, 1980; Touraine, 1981). As Calhoun reminds us however, concerns of so called New Social Movements, like a focus on identity politics, autonomy, self-realization, defensive of particular life worlds and politicization of everyday life, are also found in movements in the early 19th century (Calhoun, 1993). In his view, New Social Movements should be seen as an analytical construction that enabled improved understanding of social movements regarding their cultural forms and practices. The improved understanding emerging in the second half of the 20th century is related to the problem of causality in the social sciences, as the sociologist Fals Borda writes in his article *Investigating Reality in order to transform it: The Colombian Experience*:

It became evident that the principle of causality as applied in the natural sciences could not be utilized here due to the fact that the basic material at issue belongs to a distinct ontological category with its own qualities. “Facts” and processes of a circular or spiral nature were encountered, linked in open systems which reinforced their own development, often as self-fulfilling prophecies. [...] The problem of causality led us to question the orientation of the regional fieldwork and the analytical tools being utilized. (Borda, 1979, p. 35).

The concept that distinguishes cybernetics from related approaches is the inherent focus on recursive causal mechanisms, since “the most fundamental contribution of cybernetics is its explanation of purposiveness, or goal-directed behavior, an essential characteristic of mind and life, in terms of control and information (Heylighen & Joslyn, 2001, p. 3). This is not to say that cybernetics discovered or invented feedback mechanisms, as liquid level control mechanisms like water clocks had flourished in Greek and Islamic antiquity (Galison, 1994, p. 262). From the Middle Ages through the baroque period however, “the technology vanished almost completely in Europe” and linear clock mechanisms held the “pride of day” and “served as a cultural symbol of authority” (Galison, 1994, S. 262). Through this, the “authoritarian conception of order was directly and patently shaped by society’s experience with the mechanical clock” (Mayr, 1970, p. 197). The first non-fluid feedback device invented in modern Europe was the thermostat furnace of Cornelius Drebbel in the early 17th century. His

temperature regulator maintained the proper warmth for hatching chickens, by converting information about the temperature of the system into mechanical action of airflow variation (Richardson, 1991, p. 22). According to Richardson's study, the "loop concept underlying feedback and mutual causality has been present in the social sciences for at least the past 200 years" (Richardson, 1991, p. 90). While negative loops tend to be present implicitly in a great range of explanations, positive loops appear more explicitly. He concludes that "with the advent of the engineer's concept of feedback loop in the social sciences in the 1940's, these two pattern of loop thinking could come together" (Richardson, 1991, p. 90).

The development of cybernetics is not only related to the context of war, but also changing funding structures within academia in the United States of America, as many disciplines and formerly specialized scientists were connected to each other through project networks. And even though laboratories like the Rad Lab were embedded within the rigid structure of large bureaucracies, it was also "a site of flexible, collaborative work and a distinctly non-hierarchical management style" (Turner, 2006, p. 19). This means that "scientists and engineers had to become entrepreneurs, assembling networks of technologists, funders, and administrators to see their projects through" (Turner, 2006, p. 19). In this sense "cybernetics facilitated not only the interlinking of research, development, and production activities, but also the development of new interpersonal and interinstitutional networks and, with them, the exchange and generation of a networked form of power" (Turner, 2006, p. 26). For this reason, the "rhetoric of cybernetics not only embodied, but also actively facilitated, networking and entrepreneurship", because these "locally developed tactics of cybernetic rhetoric also allowed it to spread across multiple fields of research and to become a 'universal discipline'" (Turner, 2006, p. 25). And though cybernetics would "become one of the dominant intellectual paradigms of the postwar era" (Turner, 2006, p. 27), it never really institutionalized as a discipline and instead perpetually wandering as a "nomad science" (Pickering, 2010, p. 11) in North America and Europe.

Sherry Ortner recalls that social movements emerging in 1960's "not only affected the academic world, they originated in good part within it. Everything that was part of the existing order was questioned and criticized" (Ortner, 1984, p. 138). Renato Rosaldo likewise recalls that "how people make their own histories and the interplay of domination and resistance seemed more compelling than textbook discussions of system maintenance and equilibrium theory. Doing committed anthropology made more sense than trying to maintain the fiction of the analyst as a detached, impartial observer" (Rosaldo cit. in Kuper, 2000, p. 203). The world in which

students of the time found themselves in appeared to be “dominated by large, bureaucratic organizations. Like their leaders and like the information machines on which they depended, these organizations seemed to many to be closed, unfeeling systems” (Turner, 2006, p. 17). Students of the Berkeley protests famously criticized the existing order by wearing computer punch cards around their necks to express their opposition to the bureaucratic and industrial war machine, in which “the university, the military, and the punch-card universe of information seemed to be mirrors of one another” (Turner, 2006, p. 12). In response to visions of the social world as an unfeeling automated machine and the prospect of becoming a cog in the wheel through their own university education, “two overlapping but ultimately distinct social movements” (Turner, 2006, p. 31), emerge in the United States: The New Left and the New Communalists (i.e. the “Hippies”). The former grew out of the civil and Free Speech rights movement in the Deep South, and their politics were generally “agonistic” and directed “at the system” by staging organized demonstrations. The New Communalists on the other hand “bubbled up out of a wide variety of cold war - era cultural springs, including Beat poetry and fiction, Zen Buddhism, action painting, and, by the mid-1960s, encounters with psychedelic drugs” (Turner, 2006, p. 31). Turner ultimately concludes that “if the New Left turned outward, toward political action, this wing turned inward, toward questions of consciousness and interpersonal intimacy, and toward small-scale tools such as LSD or rock music as ways to enhance both” (Turner, 2006, p. 31).

New Communalists established communes as social laboratories “outside the system” to initiate social change through example, as “within such communities, citizens would serve as examples to one another; the communities in turn would serve as examples to the world” (Turner, 2006, p. 37). And in this sense, “the work of expanding consciousness and increasing interpersonal intimacy was not an end in itself; it was a means by which to build alternative, egalitarian communities” (Turner, 2006, p. 32). In contrast to the New Left, they saw political protests as playing the game of the establishment, as Ken Kesey famously declared at a political rally right before the Hippie movement takes off: “You know, you’re not gonna stop this war with this rally, by marching... That’s what they do... [...] holding rallies and having marches... and that’s the same game you’re playing... their game...” (Wolfe, 1989). Self-sustaining farming collectives and some forms of music and recreational festivals are the current echo of such ideas, but as Turner argues, that even though historians and critics “have acknowledged the power of the cultural dimensions of activism in the 1960s, [...] they have obscured the intellectual underpinnings of the hippie style of protest” (Turner, 2006, p. 32). Turner ultimately

concludes, that “as they set out for the rural frontier, the communards of the back to-the-land movement often embraced the collaborative social practices, the celebration of technology, and the cybernetic rhetoric of mainstream military-industrial-academic research” (Turner, 2006, p. 33). The anthropologist Ron Eglash further illustrates the ways American youth subculture closely paralleled changes in cybernetic modelling across a variety of scientific disciplines and he suggests “that there are causal links between cybernetics and popular culture which work in both directions” (Eglash, 1998, p. 382). He differentiates three periods in the 20th century³ based on how information structure and information representation were debated and applied in the sciences and how these phases correspond to their interpretation and application in American youth-subcultures. And according to Ross, “the prevailing ideologies of high-tech systems theory provide not only much of the language and the conceptual logic, but also a good deal of the holistic framework (as a result of the emphasis on the interconnectedness of systems) for alternative scientific cultures today” (Ross, 1991, p. 30)

Information structure can be modelled as recursive or as non-recursive, meaning “the extremes of this measure give us the distinction between a nonlinear, self-organizing system, in which information is recursively assembled in a bottom-up structure and a linear hierarchy, in which information is imposed top down” (Eglash 1998, p. 384). Information representation can be modelled digital or analogue: “Digital representation requires a code table [...] based on physically arbitrary symbols” like symbolic logic, whereas “analogue representation is based on a proportionality between physical changes in a signal and changes in the information it represents” (Eglash, 1998, p. 384f). Initially, the distinction was mostly academic, as researchers favored neither analog and digital, or recursive and non-recursive systems as epistemologically superior. Until the late 1960’s however, funding and research shifted dramatically towards digital and hierarchical systems and “the political lines in the mathematics department at UC Berkeley in the 1960s divided right versus left along linear versus nonlinear” (Eglash, 1998, p. 387). Recursion (and by extend reflexivity in second order cybernetics) became associated with liberation in the writing of cyberneticians like Norbert Wiener and Gregory Bateson, and the politization of cybernetics extended further into society and culture, as Eglash notes:

³ 1960’s modern cybernetics focused on digital hierarchical systems (counterculture: hippies); 1970’s transitional postmodern cybernetics focused on analogue decentralized systems (counterculture: Punk/Hip Hop); 1980’s stable postmodern cybernetics was based on synthesis between the analogue/digital and centralized/decentralized oppositions (counterculture: New Age). (Ibid. 402)

The contrast between the recursive analogue dynamics in the counterculture and digital hierarchy in the ‘military-industrial establishment’ was evident in the geometry of material designs chosen by each subculture. The psychedelic aesthetic of hippy adornment was essentially what we would today call fractal: paisleys with-in paisleys with-in paisleys, flowing robes with folds of folds, rippling organic hairstyles. Establishment icons were in the Euclidean shapes of rectangles, circles and triangles, as evidenced by the computer font introduced with the IBM punched card system. It is no coincidence that hippies accused ‘straights’ of being ‘square’. (Eglash, 1998, p. 389)

The *Whole Earth Catalogue*, a famous counterculture publication of the time, illustrates this by mixing a form of “back to nature” ethos with the logos of cybernetics, systems science and information theory⁴. Through the *Whole Earth Catalogue*’s follow up publication *Earth Quarterly*, the anthropologist and cybernetician Gregory Bateson became known to a large audience, and after most communes had failed within a few years, he “offered a generation the chance to make their way back with their faith in their own importance still intact”, because “although the Individual could not stand outside the ‘system’, Bateson’s epistemology implied, he or she could save the system from within” (Turner, 2006, p. 124). This will bring many members of the counterculture, often white, middle-class and well educated, into the developing Silicon Valley in California, while seeing networked and small-scale computer technology as a technical and material expression for their ideals: “If the mind was the first site of social change, then information would have to become a key part of a countercultural politics. And if those politics rejected hierarchy, then the circles-within-circles of information and systems theory might somehow make sense not only as ideas about information, but also as evidence from the natural world for the rightness of collective polity” (Turner, 2006, p. 38). From this followed that “if the self was the ultimate driver of social change, and if class was no more, then individual lifestyle choices became political acts, and both consumption and lifestyle technologies - including information technologies - would have to take on a newly political valence” (Turner, 2006, p. 38). After the New Communalist movement had ended, its framing of these technologies was imported into corporate and financial culture. Silicon Valley technology firms then used the cultural and symbolic capital of the “cool” counterculture to sell their products with the promise of a more globally connected and consequently more egalitarian world (e.g. “global village”).

⁴ This synthesis is succinctly expressed in the poem *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* by Richard Brautigan (Brautigan, 1967). Though it is not quite clear if the text is serious or sarcastic, it certainly highlights the cultural significance of cybernetics in emerging environmentalist and New Communalist discourse related to ecology.

Though we can find significant differences in how New Left and New Communalists attempt to achieve social change, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were also in tune with the politicization of recursive analogue systems. While the “SDS was on paper a quite formal, top-down organization, with a central steering committee and meetings run according to Robert’s Rules of Order. In practice, it was made up of largely autonomous cells that operated by a kind of crude, de facto consensus process” (Graeber, 2009, p. 228). The intellectual rift between New Left and New Communalism was therefore not quite as deep, since “many of the first SDS Manifestos were based on the idea of face-to-face communication as a more ethical means of representation than digital encoding” (Eglash, 1998, p. 389). This was partly inspired by the analogue anarchism found in the writing of Paul Goodman, who introduced the term self-organization to the lexicon of radical politics and drew inspiration from Gregory Bateson’s work (Duda, 2013). Even while using traditional antagonistic politics, within the SDS and New Left, “many hoped that they might begin to live out some of the new political structures they were working to create” (Turner, 2006, p. 35). However, as Turner notes further, “if elements within the New Left began to experience forms of solidarity like those they helped to build into the world outside the movement, they did so as an after-effect of their own organizing” (Turner, 2006, p. 35). This ultimately suggests that both New Left and New Communalists drew political inferences in terms of self-organized and non-hierarchical cybernetic systems, though for the former it was the outcome of political organization, and for the latter the means to achieve the desired outcome. More broadly, for much of the counterculture in this period, cybernetics seemed to offer an ideological alternative: “Like Norbert Wiener two decades earlier, many in the counterculture saw in cybernetics a vision of a world built not around vertical hierarchies and top-down flows of power, but around looping circuits of energy and information” (Turner, 2006, p. 38).

Stine Krøijer notes that today, “activists identify themselves more with the activities they are or have been engaged in than with ideological identities such as anarchist, autonomist or Left radical”, and in this sense “it is the activity of ‘doing something together’ that delimits the seemingly unbound network” (Krøijer, 2015, p. 11). I suggest that the practice of prefigurative politics and cybernetic modelling show a striking resonance in their temporal logic. Within cybernetic temporality, “knowledge is produced and truth claims made with respect to social temporality, concepts of time, and the relationship between the present and the future” (Hamilton, 1998, p. 182). The social temporality of cybernetics “functions as its own form of incomplete determinism, striving to succeed in its control of the future through managing the

present, seeking to determine while recognizing the futility of seeking completeness” (Hamilton, 1998, p. 187). The anthropologist Marianne Maeckelbergh describes prefiguration as follows:

In my experience as an activist, practising prefiguration has meant always trying to make the processes we use to achieve our immediate goals an embodiment of our ultimate goals, so there is no distinction between how we fight and what we fight for, at least not where the ultimate goal of a radically different society is concerned. In this sense, practicing prefigurative politics means removing the temporal distinction between the struggle in the present towards a goal in the future; instead, the struggle and the goal, the real and the ideal, become one in the present. (Maeckelbergh, 2009, p. 66f)

Taking issue with her formulation and the term prefiguration in general, Krøijer argues that the distinction between present and future is not collapsed here but rather reproduced because “continuous prefigurative practices become steps on a linear scale that bring the present closer to goals in the future” which means “that prefiguration is understood as a progressive realization of future possibilities” (Krøijer, 2015, p. 119). Instead, she offers the concept of “figurations of the future”, which she defines as “the act of giving determinate form to the indeterminate” (Krøijer, 2015, p. 103). Dan Swain makes a similar distinction between two kinds of prefiguration, which he terms ends-guided practices and ends-effacing practices. The former is concerned with specifying the future in order to live up to it, and it envisions specific ends to match its means to them. The latter is concerned with collapsing the future into the present, rather than holding them apart. Ends here are diverse and provisional and they emerge from practice (Swain, 2017, p. 55). These definitions show a striking similarity to how goal-directed behavior of cybernetic systems was distinguished during the initial Macy conferences. Claude Shannon’s model defined a “preexisting state toward which the mechanism would move by making a series of distinctions between correct and incorrect choices” (Hayles, 1999, p. 63). Donald MacKay on the other hand, saw the goal not as a fixed pre-established point, but as a series of values that changed with context (Hayles, 1999, p. 63). The former theory defines information according to what it is, the latter according to what it does, initializing the difference between homeostasis and reflexivity that would exert influence on the political and ideological interpretation of cybernetics and information theory in the following decades. Today, Schlembach et al note, that in environmentalist discourse and protest “there is an increasing tendency to base strategy upon science rather than political ideologies”, as “hard fact science now provides the climate action movement with the moral and ethical framework to

inform collective action, but also to prescribe individual behaviour and personal responsibility” (Schlembach, Lear, & Bowman, 2012, p. 823).

The argument presented here is related to the question whether one believes cybernetics, systems theory, and information theory have developed valid models for communication processes in ecological, biological, social and cognitive systems. If one assumes that these models have something meaningful to say, then the previous chapters are somewhat moot because the approach would simply describe what has always been naturally true. Afterall, the temporality expressed in flexible organization in relation to an unknown future can also be found in ethnographic writing about indigenous people across the globe. Inuit for example, by accepting that the future cannot be known in highly variable environmental conditions “focus on ‘keeping the show on the road,’ that is, opening up a path to the future in the present, rather than becoming overly fixated on the future before it has arrived. They respond to each situation as and when it presents itself, and reaction to an opportunity or obstacle is often spontaneous” (Bates, 2007, p. 90). Knowledge and engagement in the present rather than predicting an unknown future is more important, and the “vitality of this knowledge therefore lies in the freedom it allows for improvisation and flexibility, and it should be thought of as providing general ‘rules of thumb’ rather than a fixed plan” (Bates, 2007, p. 90). The reluctance for planning also extends to animal hunting, and “there is little evidence that Inuit or Eskimo groups managed animal populations via sustainable harvesting strategies. Instead, it was maintaining respectful relationships with animals that would facilitate future accessibility to game” (Bates, 2007, p. 93). Here it would certainly be possible to apply a cybernetic feedback model, precisely to the fact that if too many animals are hunted this season, then there may be less game available in the next season. Roy Rappaport’s monograph *Pigs for the Ancestors: Ritual in the Ecology of a New Guinea People* (Rappaport, 1968) is a well-known example for such an approach in Anthropology.

When Argyrou argues that the anthropology of “man” and the physics of “nature” transformed in the 1950’s, it would also begin to transform “superstitious natives” into sustainable shepherds of planet earth: The “cultural context that was beginning to emerge in the early 1970s rendered the current image of native populations immanent, a virtual reality waiting to be discovered, articulated, given definitive shape and form” (Argyrou, 2005, p. 67). And because “this image was not an act of will or intention it cannot be a cultural construct for environmentalists. It appears to them as an objective reality - a ‘fact’” (Argyrou, 2005, p. 67). In this sense, the

“assumptions of the counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s - rendered certain things visible for the first time or, at any rate, visible in a new light” and by doing so “generated a domain of meaning and significance that previously did not exist or was only ‘vaguely’ understood” (Argyrou, 2005, p. 67). And so, environmentalists, and “many anthropologists sympathetic to the environmentalist cause, now find much in ‘exotic’ societies that requires no cultural translation. What native populations know can now be understood directly and, as the claim has it, in the same way in which they themselves mean and understand it” (Argyrou, 2005, p. 65f). By the 1980’s “the proposition that native populations may have retained a certain ‘ecological wisdom’ that, to its detriment, the rest of the world had long forgotten had gained enough ground to circulate widely as a serious and legitimate statement reproducible even by the experts commissioned by the United Nations” (Argyrou, 2005, p. 68). And so, what “until recently was little more than ignorance and superstition now emerges as nothing less than sound empirical ‘knowledge’, ‘skill’ and ‘experience’ - so sound and reliable, in fact, as to have a ‘vital role’ to play in the ‘environmental management’ of the world” (Argyrou, 2005, p. 70). It is partly this myth of ecological wisdom as homeostatic ecology, that gives symbolic meaning to indigenous people and their way of life, by representing the idea of living in harmony with nature (Argyrou, 2005, p. 71). But as Kay Milton points out, “non-industrial peoples do not think like environmentalists. Some of them may live their lives in ways that are environmentally sound, but ecological balance, where it exists, is an incidental consequence of human activities and other factors, rather than being an ideal or goal that is actively pursued” (Milton, 1996, p. 113). And so, at the same time we are faced with “Gaia”, that is the notion of “the biosphere as an active adaptive control system able to maintain the Earth in homeostasis” (Lovelock & Margulis, 1974, p. 3), the requirement for resilience emerges as well, namely as the idea which “determines the persistence of relationships within a system and is a measure of the ability of these systems to absorb changes of state variables, driving variables, and parameters and still persist” (Holling, 1973, p. 17). Gregory Bateson therefore showed prescient insight when he remarked to a conference of urban planners, that they “are not outside the ecology for which we plan - we are always and inevitably a part of it. Herein lies the charm and the terror of ecology - that the ideas of this science are irreversibly becoming a part of our own ecosocial system” (Bateson, 1972, p. 354).

Though I am clearly not resistant to the assumption that cybernetics may have produced valid insights about systems of communication in ecology, there remains an unresolved tension in this thesis, between what my interlocutors do and the meaning attached to it, my theoretical

informed analysis of their social and cultural horizon, and the broader socio-technical context both emerge from. Ultimately, I suggest that the particular question about the validity of cybernetics appears almost irrelevant in the present moment. My argument is that we live in a world increasingly designed and constructed by these ideas and the “material metabolism” (Hornborg, 2021) of their technical application, and this world continuously designs us back. Of course, it should not be assumed that there is a direct correspondence between a dominant intellectual paradigm in the last century and what people occupying a construction site are doing and how they attach meaning to it today. When asked why she initially decided to join the protest, one participant’s answer illustrates a historical context of meaning and practices that is actively reflected upon:

I've been aware for a very, very long time that something is going wrong in our world, and that we therefore need to do something. And then for many years, I was more involved in changing my own life and moving in the direction of self-sufficiency, lived on various farms and somehow learned about agriculture and things like that. And then I actually lived quite nicely in the middle of the mountains in a farmhouse and grew my own vegetables. But I was somehow disappointed with the place because political work was supposed to happen there, but there was no time for anything because there weren't that many people on the farm either. And then at some point, I realized that wasn't enough for me, that I somehow wanted to have more influence somewhere on the whole society, because even if my vegetables grow well, if society is heading for disaster, then that will also affect me eventually, and besides, it's also about the entire planet and all of humanity for me. (Interview-02, p. 1, lines 9-34)

Her description reinforces the idea that her political inclination is part of a larger cultural repertoire but also underscores that this diffusion always happens with reflection on and modification of these shared wells of practice and meaning. Her long-standing awareness that something is going wrong in our world and the resulting feeling that we need to do something aligns with the sense of urgency discussed earlier in relation to climate activism. This highlights a shared perception of systemic crisis as a primary driver for engagement, often expressed by environmentalists in the slogan “System Change, not Climate Change”. Her initial focus on personal lifestyle changes and self-sufficiency also reveals a common starting point for many contemporary environmental activists. This ethical consumerism is “at the heart of today’s climate action movements, and various high-profile campaigns consciously seek change in personal consumption patterns rather than radical social change” (Schlembach, Lear, & Bowman, 2012, p. 820). This echoes clearly New Communalist politics of the self of a driver of social change where individual lifestyle and consumption choices become political acts. And within the context of cybernetic ecology, in which such behavior may be seen as a feedback

variable potentially compounding into systemic change if enough people participate, this is “a compelling argument. Our consumer choices would directly impact on the lives of the Sipson villagers” (Schlembach, Lear, & Bowman, 2012, p. 821). However, her eventual dissatisfaction demonstrates a crucial realization: individual actions alone are insufficient to address systemic issues, and so this transition illustrates a move from a more individualistic horizon of choice towards a collective one. Lastly, her decision to join the protest was partly based on a feeling that it could be “pretty big”, demonstrating that decision making is also very much about gut-feeling, which highlights the role of affect in mobilizing action. And so, one day she takes her bike and drives to Base camp wanting to engage with a collective project based on a shared sense of purpose and goal. As we will see, however, it will become apparent to her and others, that while an overarching goal of stopping the highway exists, daily life on an occupied construction site also comes with its own challenges and solutions.

5.2. Home-making of *Wüste*

In the night of December 30th, an arson attack is committed in *Grätzl I*. Activists were able to save themselves from the fire, but the picture of a blazing wooden hut travels through the movement like a shock wave. On the next day I am filming the construction of a kitchen counter in *Wüste*, the planned day to get the film done. I am greeted with freshly brewed tea by my collaborator. Peter is an experienced carpenter with some grey strains in his long hair and thick beard, and like always, he is wearing black working trousers with some basic tools attached to them. The day before we had met to make plans, measuring and selecting wooden boards, together with someone who just happened to be there. I immediately ask about the attack and am met with a shrug, something he would often do. Compared to the general reaction I saw on social media this morning, reaction in *Wüste* is surprisingly muted again. A handful of people stand together next to the kitchen and discuss last night. In their view, the movement must formulate a position, and one that is *for* something like “sustainable mobility transition”, rather than just *against* the city highway. Someone nods and argues that the radical messaging of *Grätzl I* may have been partly responsible for the arson attack. She refers to a banner hanging prominently at the entrance to *Grätzl I*. Right next to a busy road and easy to see for cars driving by the banner reads: *Gegen Autos und Sexisten – Fight the Power fight the System* (“Against cars and sexists – fight the power fight the system”). She continues that she fears *Wüste* might be attacked as well, considering that the camps are usually put together in the same box. While not everyone agrees, someone affirms that the messaging can sometimes be “anti-everything”,

hence why a more positive outlook would be helpful to position the movement. *Lobau Bleibt!* will continuously struggle for an outward-facing position that represents their ideas and desires. At this time, a wooden tower figures prominently in *Wüste* on which someone had drawn a circled A, the symbol for anarchists. A few days later the tower would stand at the very edge of the camp area almost hidden out of sight, and some participants were looking for ideas to paint over the graffiti.

About an hour after we start working, someone enters the camp area on bicycle and screams from afar: “What?! Really?!”. We turn around and greet the man who stops next to us, clearly out of breath. “They said the pyramid burnt down! I saw the article in the news!” he tells us agitated. We turn around to the pyramid and back again, and now he grins with a big smile on his face. “Guess the media was wrong, again” someone replies from within the kitchen, and we have a laugh. “I am so glad” the newcomer continues: “all the people that were here to help us, and then it’s all gone? No way man, what a waste.” By now he has noticed that we are surrounded by wooden uncut boards and asks, while pulling up his sleeves: “So what are we building today?” Iggy, as he would introduce himself, would become a close interlocutor for me over the next months, sharing many stories about his experiences during the *Hainburg* protests, which he participated in together with friends from school. He had spent his childhood in the area, and just a few years ago decided to move back to the area. To him, the occupation symbolizes protest against the city street and related infrastructure projects, but also more importantly, the process of building a better future together, a notion many participants shared. It is therefore not surprising that he and Peter would enter *Grätzl 1* for the first time on the rebuilding day sometime later, which made them really excited: “Dude, I was always a bit down on *Grätzl 1*, but after being there for the first time I am seriously considering moving over. They don’t know how to hold a hammer but have much better material than we do. Rebuilding there will be so much fun”, Peter explains with a grin. When talking about the rebuilding day with Iggy in our interview, he recalls a similar atmosphere during the construction days in *Wüste* but also notes a difference as it relates to the broader recreational infrastructure of *Grätzl 1*. In comparison with Base camp and *Wüste*, the demographics of *Grätzl 1* appeared to skew much younger on average, which was sometimes expressed by activists through the term “kindergarten”, both in jest but sometimes certainly in anger. This should not give the impression of a general perspective on *Grätzl 1* by *Wüste* or the movement at large, as there had been some previous rifts and subsequent diffusion of a handful of activists in the weeks before. In this case, the point of contention appears to be related to recreational infrastructures:

And the critique I heard on this day was that they talk too much there but can't manage to carry their cup away. And then the older people clean up after them and scold them, because it's like Hotel Mama at home. (Interview-04, p. 8, lines 408-411)

And though I cannot offer more insights into this topic for *Grätzl I*, the following chapters will examine such infrastructures in *Wüste* more closely by inquiring into daily recreational life at the protest camp. Some insights in the previous chapter on the strands protest and prefiguration regarding the political ontology of horizontal self-organization may be applicable to the other two *Lobau Bleibt!* camps. The following description and analysis will be particular to *Wüste* camp, however, as “each location offers specific resources and materialities for the development of collective action. Different places have specific symbolic meanings as well as distinct materialities. These materialities enable the development of the protest movement and regulate and mediate social relations as well as daily routines” (Ataç, 2016, p. 632f).

Wüste is located directly next to the subway station *Hausfeldstraße*, making it the most accessible protest camp of the three. The strategic location is the reason the camp exists, as initially, a general assembly decided to give the location up and concentrate mobilization on the other camps. Despite this decision, some felt the low barrier of entry in relation to public transportation was too good of an advantage, and simply kept the area occupied on their own accord. Early in my fieldwork I realized how autonomous each of the three camps operated, as I noticed that many participants in *Wüste* had never set foot into Base camp or *Grätzl I*. People generally seemed to have had “their camp” they frequented and were involved with. What may seem like a detriment for cohesion at first glance, turns out to strengthen the relationships between activists within the movement at large, as one participant describes:

It was great to have several locations where different groups could come together based on how comfortable they were with each other, because this way we could all still work together despite some differences we had. (Interview-02, p. 13, lines 667-668)

Similar to how women would choose a particular gate and protest camp to the military installation during the Greenham Commons protests in the UK in the early 1980's (Frenzel, 2020, p. 40f), participants of *Lobau Bleibt!* were able to select a site they felt most comfortable in. According to Frenzel, “[t]his spatial fix to organizational desires has helped to decentralize democratic self-organization and to manage diversity in protest camps ever since” (Frenzel, 2020, p. 41). In this way, “multiple campsites allowed for small groups with highly specific

preferences to coexist within a broader coalition structure” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 172). Interestingly, the same phenomenon can be observed within *Wüste* itself, even though the area of the occupation is small, as the same activist cited above recalls:

Even though we all somehow lived together in *Wüste*, we were never forced to spend time together the whole day. And this way some conflicts could be avoided easily. (Interview-02, p. 15, lines 777-780)

If such a conflict occurred, someone might spend most of their time in the kitchen hut, drinking tea with others, or help fix something outside. And though the core area of *Wüste* was no more than 30m², due to the myriad of tasks, avoiding someone temporarily becomes a distinct possibility for conflict control on location as people tend to busy themselves throughout the day with whatever needs to be done. The fact that this pattern of separation also occurred within the smaller confines of *Wüste*, facilitated by the few built structures available, illustrates a strategy for managing potential conflict. The limited buildings in *Wüste*, while not intentionally designed for conflict resolution, offered affordances that the activists creatively utilized to manage their social interactions. The architecture and spatial arrangement of *Wüste* therefore offered different zones where individuals and potentially smaller groups could gravitate based on their needs and preferences at a given time. Her statement that people were never forced to spend time together the whole day also points to the importance of voluntary association and the freedom to choose a degree of interaction, which appears to reduce the intensity and frequency of potential conflicts. This way patterns of spatial distribution emerged based on individual and group preferences and needs, which illustrates how participants actively shape and are shaped by their environment. During the initial month of the occupation the organizational structure of the camp differed in their intensity as one participant remembers:

In the beginning they [the camps] were very entangled with one another, and it was really like, there was a daily plenary at 9 in the morning in each camp, and then a delegate went to Base camp where the main plenary took place at 10, and then they came back, and in the evening the same thing happened I believe. (Interview-01, p. 4, lines 209-214)

Daily assemblies in and between camps are common in the beginning of the occupation, but as the weather gets colder and holiday season ends, the camps are faced with increasing shortage of participants, reducing sustained presence of participants. Whereas in *Lützerath* an average of 70 - 150 people are on site continuously (Mehl, 2022, p. 24), the scale of participation in *Wüste* is much smaller in comparison, with 5 - 10 people present on most days. This affects

how needs relate to the means and ends of the movement at large, which leads to some frustration with the frequency of assemblies and how this relates to the materiality of the specific site:

Especially at *Wüste* there was frustration which I relate to - when I lived at *Grätzl I*, the distance to Base camp was small and it was like, if you needed something because there was the kitchen or the assembly happened, then you just walked over there real quick. But when I was at *Wüste*, the thought was more like: Do I really want to go over there, it's such a hassle - the barrier was just taller. At *Grätzl I* it was like: I'll go there really quick, and at *Wüste* it was like: OK, I will go to Base camp, does anyone need anything? It was more like an errand or something, I mean the route of transport was just much longer and that made it different somehow. (Interview-01, p. 5, lines 239-250)

The location of *Wüste* camp in relation to the other camps made it necessary for participants to develop their own infrastructures to keep the camp going, as he recalls further:

Like someone says a kitchen would be a good idea because we have to carry around food all the time, and it would be good if we could utilize it here since Base camp is pretty overloaded with tasks or rather underprovided with people. And it happened often that there was no food for lunch or even dinner, because nobody had time to get some from Base camp. And so, we were like, alright if we had a cabinet for food here and a small alcove for a camping cooker there, then we could cook ourselves and would be more independent. Base camp is a little relieved, and we can align our daily rhythms better. (Interview-01, p. 11, lines 570-589)

He links the desire for a kitchen to the need for a more sustainable and predictable daily routine within their specific camp. This shows that the motivation for the kitchen is rooted in the inefficient “rhythm” of relying on Base camp. By becoming more self-sufficient with food, participants in *Wüste* are taking initiative to solve their problems rather than passively accepting the limitations of the larger structure. Such practical goals emerge from the needs of participants as they interact with their environment and each other on site. But it is the desire for a smoother daily rhythm that acts as a guiding principle. The kitchen is not built because it is a pre-stated goal or plan, rather it becomes a goal because it addresses a disruption in the desired rhythm of both camps. A new need is identified, a solution is proposed, and a collective agreement seems to emerge from the conversation among those present and being aware of the problem. One participant recalls the initial phase and consequent development of needs that had to be provided for in the following way:

It was very exciting for me because I studied geography, and with that background, *Wüste* was like a village for me, and I experienced how this village came to be. And how we just thought: Ok, people have needs and how can we fulfill those? For example,

the people need warmth in the evening, and so we build fireplaces. [...] And that's nice, but on the second day people are hungry. Food, OK. We get it from Base camp but at some point, we need our own kitchen. Then we need a living room so that people feel comfortable. And then winter comes, and we need heated rooms. Then some people say we need a dance floor, the next people say we need an information desk so that people from the outside can be taken care of. (Interview-03, p. 2, lines 93-108)

It is this sustained physical and emotional labor of participants that creates the camp as a site of both protest and home-making, where “people’s perspectives toward others, as well as towards objects and ideas, are largely shaped through communal efforts to create sustainable (if ephemeral) infrastructures for daily life” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013b, p. 21). According to Mary Douglas, “home starts by bringing some space under control” (Douglas, 1991, p. 289), but rather than a spatial container in which the home is located, it can be seen as a “special kind of relationship with place” which “attaches the ‘specialty’ less to a place in itself, than to the relationships with it, and the emphasis on relationships, rather than on terms such as bond, tie or attachment” (Boccagni, 2017, p. 4). Though participants clearly form attachments to the material structures they build together, the day of the arson attack at *Grätzl I* also shows that people emphasize the social dimension of building together, as “we will simply rebuild even better than before” is a common refrain expressed in relation to their build environment during this time. The concept of home furthermore “embraces a much more diverse environment, on a variety of (sometimes simultaneous) scales, all of them defined as ‘home’ in opposition to other external entities” (Boccagni, 2017, p. 4). Here again, the day after the arson attack is instructive, as someone can feel “at home” within the general movement in opposition to what is protested on the one hand, and a particular camp in contrast to the other two locations on the other hand. Though both relationships may be described as home, they clearly do not necessarily share the same intensity, as shown by the surprisingly muted and down-to-earth attitude at *Wüste* regarding the arson attack.

Examining the diffusion of activists into “their camps” more closely reveals three important attributes of what makes home an open-ended social relationship that is negotiated. First, security or a “sense of personal protection and integrity which is attached to a place, where outsiders should not have free access and one’s identity is not in question” (Boccagni, 2017, p. 7). Second, familiarity “both in an emotional sense, pointing to intimacy and comfort, and in a cognitive one, standing for orientation in space, stability, routine, continuity or even permanence” (Boccagni, 2017, p. 7). And lastly, control “as autonomy in using a certain place according to one’s needs and tastes, in predicting the development of events in it, and in

expressing oneself, inside it, out of the public gaze and judgement” (Boccagni, 2017, p. 7). As illustrated earlier, participants of the three protest camps diffused into their particular location over time, based on their shared values, ideas, and how comfortable they were with each other. But with Boccagni’s formulation it also becomes apparent how the home of a protest camp can differ considerably from a private home, precisely in relation to the public environment because “creating and sustaining an outdoor community means braving the elements, and figuring out how to undertake daily tasks such as eating, cleaning and caretaking on cobblestone streets, in muddy grasslands or, at times, up in spiky trees” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 56). Protest camps therefore “also become the site of interactions and exchanges that usually happen in the privacy of the home – whether these are bathing, going to the bathroom, washing laundry, or making a cup of tea” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 56). When activists laugh at *Wüste*, about how media “got it all wrong again”, this is what they feel is often missed or misinterpreted by coverage. Yes, the protest against the city highway is the reason why the occupations exist, but equally important, if not more important for some, is how participants live together at the camps and what this social dimension stands for. Being for and/or against is a prominent debate within the camps and the movement at large, and until the very end *Lobau Bleibt!* struggles to formulate an outward facing affirmative position of alternatives, rather than simply negating the city highway. This is a recurring problem for contemporary social movements, as the practical question of how to “represent a diverse collective with varying opinions to media, that expects leaders and unified positions” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 224) is not easily solved.

Shortly after the eviction of *Wüste* in early February 2022, the movement comes together to finally formulate a positive position regarding the city highway, and one participant of this assembly remembers with exasperation:

That’s what we found out during the big “goal-finding” assembly, that everyone is totally for a ‘radical mobility transition’. Yay! And with this you can do so much... (Interview-02, p. 18, lines 922f)

The necessity to formulate and represent such a position is also the result of increasing public pressure to present alternatives to the city highway. A common sentiment during this time is that, if activists are so unhappy with what is planned, they should provide better ideas. In any case, “radical mobility transition” is what the general assembly arrives at after long and exhausting deliberations. This message entails a decrease in the reliance on cars by expanding

public transport and bike lanes, and coupled with neighbors who may not even oppose the highway, it becomes apparent that a unified outward-facing position may be difficult to attain. This problem also extends beyond representation of alternatives in relation to the city highway, as the protest also expresses a critique of democracy within the camps' social organization. And so, Graeber notes in his ethnography of 1999 Seattle protests, that "for all the movements effectiveness in conveying its negative message [...] it proved almost completely incapable of conveying its positive message - particularly its call for new forms of direct democracy" (Graeber, 2009, p. 488). Representing such positive positions as alternatives to the status quo is a key concern for current social movements.

One of the most powerful arguments in favor of the 'normal' way of doing things is that it is the only way, with reference to Thatcher's 'there is no alternative' or Churchill's 'democracy is the worst form of government apart from all the others [...]. Both of these express (and ideologically reinforce) a belief that alternative ways of living may sound lovely, but they do not work in practice. Showing that they can work in practice, on some appropriate scale, helps to undermine this belief. (Swain, 2019, p. 50)

When asked how one might describe *Lobau Bleibt!* to the uninitiated and what the movement is about, responses range from confusion to:

Lobau Bleibt! is a thrown-together pile of people and organizations, who all found values for themselves. This makes it difficult sometimes to find a central theme in the movement. I believe there is a superordinate goal, but I say explicitly 'believe', because I don't know. Everybody is there for reasons related to the environment and the climate crisis. But then again, I think there are people who participate mainly for the societal dynamics at the camps. (Interview-01, p. 1, lines 16-25)

Experience of the movement as a thrown-together pile of people is a common refrain in *Wüste* and his description illustrates many key concerns for activists participating that will be relevant throughout the next chapters. His experience highlights the decentralized and potentially chaotic nature of the movement and speaks to the self-organizing aspect through the lack of a rigid, top-down structure, aligning with the idea of a network rather than a tightly controlled organization. That individuals all found values for themselves underscores the importance of personal motivations and the diverse horizons that bring people together. While a superordinate goal of stopping the highway goal may exist, his acknowledged difficulty in pinpointing a singular central theme further reinforces the idea of a fluid network with overlapping and sometimes divergent motivations. This suggests that *Lobau Bleibt!* as a protest movement is built around a broad set of shared concerns rather than a tightly defined ideology or agenda,

which challenges any attempt to impose a singular understanding of participants and their goals and desires. His explicit “I believe” coupled with the admission of not knowing for sure, highlights this loosely defined nature of the collective objective. At the same time, his recognition that everyone is there for reasons related to the environment and the climate crisis provides the overarching context and the shared concern that acts as the initial reason for participation. His observation that some participate mainly for the societal dynamics in the camps points to the importance of the prefigurative aspects of the movement’s politics. The camps themselves becomes a space for enacting alternative social relations and foster a sense of community, illustrating the dimension of home-making in *Wüste*.

5.2.1. Role reversal in taskscape

In this chapter I will describe how the daily reproduction of *Wüste* camp is facilitated in the context of prefigurative politics. Recreational infrastructures are often gendered and invisible in social movement politics, whereas in protest camps, these concerns are brought to the fore in daily interactions between participants which then constitutes the political economy of protest camps (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 206). How visible this dimension is during the first days of an occupational protest camp will be contingent on many factors, but at some point, these concerns will become apparent in the necessity to extend the occupation in time and possibly space. Some planning and preparation will always be part of the initial decision to participate in a protest camp, even if it is just for the basics like clothes, tents, and sleeping bags. Bringing people together also begs the question about how they should be organized, or to be more precise, how they should organize themselves. Here too, people will enter with ideas, wishes, doubts and experiences, but in the conclusion to his analysis of Occupy Montreal, Marcos Ancelovici contends that while practices and organizational form were partly based on previously existing ideas, they “stemmed primarily from an open-ended political process in which activists involved in specific tasks were improvising as they attempted to solve practical problems” (Ancelovici, 2016, p. 199). *Wüste* also developed mainly based on practical problems participants had to solve over time as one participant remembers:

That means many roles and tasks, and buildings, and all sorts of stuff developed out of life itself, out of doing stuff. And nobody could have planned this before. It just came out of the process itself, and that was new and exciting for me to experience. (Interview-03, p. 3, lines 111-115)

In this context another participant describes the needs of daily life and also how someone may “slide into” the movement, an experience many had in the camps.

And so I just slept there for one night at first, and the next day I got up and there is this and that, almost archaic which I like, almost like holiday you know. But then after a couple days visiting, I realize there is a lot to be done, and I there I can help, and there I have some experience and so on. At this time, I didn't really feel involved, it was just like: the people who are here need some support and so I will do it. And so, I came back again and again, helped with all sorts of stuff, and then I decided to sleep there more often and then my sleeping bag gets all wet, the first rain and it's like: oh shit! I mean, I can go home and dry the bag but what about everyone else? And so, I thought we need some kind of hut against the rain, that's what I wanted to do and so it continued, I became co-initiator of the construction group, and everyone went from there. (Interview-01, p. 3, lines 118-132)

The “construction group” is a community of practice, meaning a “group of individuals who perform a specific task, sharing knowledge and techniques through a set of particular practices, even if dispersed between different sites” (Damm, 2022, p. 85). And not only members of such groups, but everyone participating in the protest camps is engaged in what Tim Ingold terms “taskscape”. He defines tasks as “any practical operation, carried out by a skilled agent in an environment, as part of his or her normal business of life” (Ingold, 2000, p. 195), where all tasks take their meaning from their “position within an ensemble of tasks, performed in series or in parallel, and usually by many people working together” (Ingold, 2000, p. 195). This interrelated array of activities is what constitutes taskscapes, and it is a social matter because people also attend one another while being engaged with their practical environment: “By watching, listening, perhaps even touching, we continually feel each other's presence in the social environment, at every moment adjusting our movements in response to this ongoing perceptual monitoring” (Ingold, 2000, p. 196). This means that the “temporality of the taskscape, while it is intrinsic rather than externally imposed (metronomic), lies not in any particular rhythm, but in the network of interrelationships between the multiple rhythms of which the taskscape is itself constituted” (Ingold, 2000, 197). He therefore concludes that “in the resonance of movement and feeling stemming from people's mutually attentive engagement, in shared contexts of practical activity, lies the very foundation of sociality” (Ingold, 2000, p. 196). In such a co-present and embodied framework of different rhythms, “time becomes a question of simultaneous angle or perspective rather than continuum or sequence” (Krøijer, 2015, p. 3).

Everyone I talked to at the camp fondly remembered the days when the movement had called for help on social media to prepare the camps for the winter months. In my Interviews, too, participants relayed their experience of these construction days with great pleasure to me:

Construction days were always a really beautiful time. During construction it tended to be a nice atmosphere anyway, I don't know why that is, if just the right people were present by chance, or if it was the fact that you could do something with your hands, which felt balancing to all the heady stuff being discussed. So yeah, there was always this really collaborative mood during construction. (Interview-02, p. 7, lines 329-334)

And another recalls:

And it was for me like, yes, then I will build a wooden pyramid! And that was a nice feeling, this energy through building together, and you won the battle again and we continue, and this was just beautiful and inspiring. You have this plan and follow up on it, and then people come along and check it out, and in the beginning you're still joking but then it gets more and more concrete, and that was awesome. When I get really old, this will definitely be one of my highlights. (Interview-04, p. 8, lines 486-495)

Later during the interview, he would reflect further on this by saying:

So, through these collective actions, or helping each other, or getting over some problem together, that connects you somehow. And I'm sure I took some people more to heart than others based on this. (Interview-04, p. 12, lines 645-649)

According to Feigenbaum et al, it is this “ethos of building together” that “underlies the micropolitics of protest camps in which people must not only work, but also live together as they struggle toward a common goal” (Feigenbaum et al, 2013b, p. 21). And from this it is apparent that building shelter is not the only need people have, as one participant relays to me more critically:

And there were times, when I had the feeling that the people building the pyramid were valued a lot, and the people who did other work [...] were not valued quite as much. [...] The winter comes and if the pyramid is not finished by then, occupation is over. That's how many thought about it. But if we don't have food and stuff, occupation would be over in two days as well, you know? (Interview-03, p. 9, lines 452-464)

I am present at the plenary when this is brought up by her. Similarly to the plenary attended by David Graeber (Graeber, 2009, p. 349), the meeting in *Wüste* as described here illustrates one of the “fault lines” of group, namely responsibility for the recreational infrastructure. About 18 people sit together in the wooden pyramid on this evening. By now it is dark outside and through

the big glass windows one can get a glimpse of the city lights in the background. Before the meeting started someone had organized hay and blankets in a circle for us to sit on. The air is thick with the smell of hay together with a note of freshly brewed tea. Two people are linked in through Zoom and the laptop is standing right in the middle of us. One of my closer informants moderates today's assembly. We all begin by introducing ourselves and our pronouns. Some choose to use their "action names", some use their "real names". Going around we also share our general mental state, what we have been doing the last days, and our life in general. The first point on the agenda today is the missing camp cell phone. Nobody seems worried and the moderator suggests cleaning up the upper level of the pyramid. The next topic on the agenda concerns hygiene in the kitchen, and the moderator explains how she had discovered mice nibbling on food packaging some days before. She and I searched the kitchen with our cell phone lights that night and found four mice, but only had two traps on hand (which we decided not to use). Someone raises a hand and says that this is not a surprise because too much food is laying around opened. The idea of cats is raised but disregarded, because they might actually become overburdened with all the animals crawling around here. We all laugh, and shortly after someone raises her hand. She sits up straight and begins voicing her concern regarding the dishes and who washes them, because in her experience at the camp, it seems this task is usually done by the same few people. But it is not only about the dishes, since she points out that the problem extends to cleaning in general, getting wood for the oven, or water for tea. What follows is a short discussion about such tasks at the camp. The problem is acknowledged, and the idea of a cleaning group is raised. But there is some resistance to this much structure, and no real solution is found on this day as someone becomes slightly agitated about such a long debate about something like this. To him there are more important topics to discuss, because at this point in time, the eviction threat is very serious and people at the camp are somewhat on edge. The discussion is dropped, and we continue with the next topic on the agenda. My field notes will say that some tension remains in the room.

In *Lützerath*, Mehl describes how by sharing tasks, "each individual can focus better on what they are doing, and ideally spend time with things they enjoy instead of practical necessities" (Mehl, 2022, p. 28). Tasks were shared in *Wüste* camp as well, but apparently not to the extent all participants felt comfortable with. And while I do not want to suggest that everyone in *Lützerath* felt pleased about this particular topic, a difference should be expected simply because of the lower number of participants in *Wüste* compared to *Lützerath*. Another important aspect to draw out here is the contingency of camp life. Each day may not only bring new tasks

into focus, but participation at the camp is contingent as well. During an interview one participant who spends almost every day in *Wüste*, describes this aspect in the following way:

That's something about this that I actually enjoyed, I never knew in the morning what would happen during the day, what had to be done, with whom I would work with and so on. (Interview-02, p. 15, lines 793-796)

Within such a contingent environment, tasks are taken as they come by whoever is present and available at any given moment:

It was not a big challenge for me to clean the dishes because often it was done by this or that person. And if nobody had done it that day, then I just did it without questioning why nobody had done it and so on, because frankly, it's not their duty. It was much more about, this automatism, complementing each other by just doing what needs to be done so we can advance together as a unit. (Interview-01, p. 18, lines 963-971)

Another participant describes engagement with tasks in *Wüste* the following way:

And I also occupied different roles at *Wüste* and decided every day anew if I wanted to do something new or if I wanted to stay with what I have been doing, depending on the amount of energy I had. I mean, if I wanted to take care of the children on this day, or if I wanted to be the "village guide" for newcomers, or if I wanted to build something and carry heavy stuff around. And the next day I may decide differently. That was fascinating – this "living in the moment". (Interview-03, p. 3, lines 117-126)

Another participant recalls:

In the beginning I was not very involved with construction stuff, because I noticed that many other tasks were understaffed. Then I started doing a lot of administrative stuff, [...] and I believe I took on a networking role. (Interview-02, p. 3, lines 138-145)

Early during fieldwork, I had made note of her as a "networker", someone I should approach to find participants interested in our film project. When present in *Wüste*, she would often be involved with many different groups of people like neighbors, supporters, local citizen initiatives, or activists from the other two camps. If protest camps are conceptualized as a space of convergence in which networks align and organize (Feigenbaum et al, 2014, p. 462), then her role was essential making this happen. Reflecting on her role, she then goes on to explain how stressful daily life became for her and other participants in *Wüste*:

The stress factor here was that there were not enough people. I mean, there were not enough people for any task really, and this was totally overburdening. And yea, those were the things where I realized, if I don't do it nobody will. Or things where I thought, before I explain this to someone for hours, or try to delegate, it seemed just easier to do it myself. And then I could not really find a way out of this spiral, like: "Well, I will just do it myself und then I will be overburdened again." That's how it went for many at the camp. (Interview-02, p. 5, lines 239-251)

Spending time at the camp it becomes quickly apparent that nobody really wants to tell anyone what to do. Participation and tasks on any given day are contingent and so a high degree of flexibility is required of people living at the camp. Little is planned in *Wüste*, and goals are therefore formulated as they emerge out of the necessities of recreation at an occupied construction site. Over time certain "roles" begin to emerge for some participants – like the networker and the builder – based both on interest and tasks that need to be taken care of. And although some tension exists regarding the handling of specific tasks, people remember fondly how the contingency of the camp also helped them become a more cohesive group. One participant cited in the previous chapter aptly referred to this process as "aligning our daily rhythms", because the temporality of the taskscape "while it is intrinsic rather than externally imposed (metronomic), lies not in any particular rhythm, but in the network of interrelationships between the multiple rhythms of which the taskscape is itself constituted" (Ingold, 2000, p. 197). Accordingly, social life "consists in the unfolding of a field of relationships among persons who attend to one another in what they do, its temporality consists in the unfolding of the resultant pattern of resonances" (Ingold, 2000, p. 197). In the next chapter I will examine this field of resonant relationships more closely and show how the contingency of daily life in *Wüste* leads to the development of a social system build through relationships that are experienced as different and more holistic in comparison with the outside of the protest camp.

5.2.2. Intensity of relatedness

Examining a refugee protest camp in Vienna, Ataç concludes that "the emancipatory effects of their struggle mainly materialized through the emergence of new solidarity networks and strong social ties" (Ataç, 2016, p. 630). Daily life in *Wüste* camp is contingent and participants therefore develop flexible ways to deal with tasks. From this some tension may emerge, but it may also create closer social bonds. This is especially so in *Wüste* camp, where a comparably low number of participants try to recreate the camp daily. Neighbors are one network of solidarity, as occasionally they would bring food (often cake), firewood for the oven, or news

from civil groups with similar climate change related protests and initiatives in the area. Some neighbors provided electricity for charging construction tools, others let activists use their showers, and an older couple would sometimes look after the child of one regular participant of *Wüste* camp. “Affinity groups” are a common way to designate social relations of care in the context of direct action. The term appears to originate in the “grupos de afinidad” of the Spanish Civil War, describing the organizational units of the anarchist movement (Graeber, 2009: 288). Additionally, the term refers to “ad hoc groups (alliances) organized for shorter periods around a common task, for example during an action” (Krøijer, 2015, p. 11), and in both cases “the groups are expected to be based on mutual trust and to look out for each other during actions. Affinity groups are brought together during the planning of a large action, or across several actions, in temporary organizational structures” (Krøijer, 2015, p. 11). Over time such an affinity groups emerge in *Wüste*, with one of them showing their solidarity and care through the so called *Bezugi-Schüssel* (“affinity-bowl”). Some participants use this bowl together to save time, energy and warmth, for the water outside for cleaning dishes does get quite cold in the winter. When I ask about this during interviews after the eviction had taken place, participants would not only fondly remember this, but the affinity group persists beyond the existence of the camp. Interestingly, no participants from *Wüste* seem to have diffused into the other two camps after eviction, and only this network remains.

Strong social ties emerge in *Wüste* through a kind of role reversal in taskscape during daily recreation of the camp. Taskscape in *Wüste* show a high degree of contingency, as each day may bring new people and ideas and challenges. Participants are embedded in a matrix of interaction that fosters a difference in relatedness, as everyone would articulate in our interviews.

But it was not like meeting someone on the street, because there you may not have something in common immediately. But in *Wüste* on the other hand, there was this community of shared interest, and getting to know each other to build trust, and living together day and night in a very physical and emotional way. And so, you could not keep your regular life roles, because you come into the camp and have basic needs like food, toilet, and relationships, a nice conversation maybe or even erotic. (Interview-03, p. 13, lines 94-705)

Another participant describes her experience of relatedness in the following way:

It was super interesting to get to know people in these varied situations, because usually if you get to know someone [...] you tend to get insight into one specific area of their

life. But in *Wüste* you get the insight: Ok this is how the person is in a really good situation. And this is how they are if it's overwhelming for them and they are at the end of their rope. Or regarding organization stuff, you just get to know people in many different ways. (Interview-02, p. 30, lines 1571-1582)

Another describes the difference between living at the camp and living in the city in more detail:

And you just got to know people in all these different roles that relate to all kind of aspects of life. And that makes it so comprehensive. And when I thought about friends of mine, it was like, OK I meet this friend all the time and we go get drinks and we talk and it's cool. But maybe I would actually like to, I don't know, have a game night or something, but I can't imagine doing this with him. I would rather do this with my "game-friends" so to speak, but with them I can't imagine building a garden hut or something. And so you have friends for doing this and other friends for doing that. But at *Wüste* the people were connected in much more complex and diverse relationships. (Interview-01, p. 16f, lines 867-884)

The quality of relatedness differs between the camp and the "outside". This could be related to being part of a protest, but the continuous role reversal also differs from regular protest action, as another participant describes:

One difference was that, before I had often worked in an organizing or leading capacity, but at *Wüste* I was a participant like anyone else. I mean there really was no leading role so to speak, so I simply attended, watched what the others were doing and then integrated myself into an existing system that also developed further. (Interview-03, p. 2, lines 86-94)

She compares further by saying:

During other protests [...] there was a lot of work in the background towards the big day. Then you do the event, and everyone leaves when it is done. Then you meet again [...] and it begins anew. [...] But this interpersonal living together at the camp, it was not an event to which you go with your preassigned role and then you go home. We really lived there together as the people that we are, and doing so, the personalities of the people really shine through compared to a 3-hour demonstration where you plan together or simply attend it. (Interview-03, p. 2, lines 57-68)

The draw of these relationships in *Wüste* can be so immense, that some completely reconfigure their life:

At some point life at the camp really sucked me in for two months from one day to the next basically. I quit all my hobbies, restructured my previous life really, and went all in, which was a really fulfilling experience. (Interview-01, p. 15, lines 800-804)

Asking why he had such strong feelings of fulfilment he explains:

I wondered myself why this fulfills me so much. It was related to several aspects. First, it just feels meaningful because of what we do, the goal we have, which is saving the planet, something that is important to me. And emotionally it's the fear of catastrophe and all that. But on the other hand the dynamics of life there, it was very appealing to me, because there was this space where people come together, where we had shared tasks and so the barrier of contact was much lower, and so this community developed together. (Interview-01, p. 15, lines 808-820)

To some, the relationships that develop evoke familial feelings:

And yes, this feeling of family because some relationships developed really close, because we spent so much time together and had very intensive experiences with the lawsuits and all. Organizing some things or having these varied relationships, that welded us together, even though we didn't know each other for long. (Interview-02, p. 30, lines 1558-1565)

After another activist describes to me how the camp emerged like a village, the topic develops into considerations of family-like experiences. Here, she expresses that no sense of family developed for her, and she points out that her familial ties outside of the camp differ a lot from someone else's outside, hence why some participants could have felt that way:

For me it did not feel like family. Being reflexive about it I would say that I am well rooted in my family, I can go home whenever I want, I am welcome and so on. But there are other people who don't share this privilege, like some participants family situation is very different than mine. And for them it is a beautiful gift to live together peacefully, to care for each other and be welcomed. You are greeted, you can eat food and so on. I mean we also had a couple people in *Wüste* who had no home and no social lifeline. For them the relationships in the camp and these familial feelings were certainly stronger than for me. (Interview-03, p. 15, 779-792)

This difference in relatedness participants experience can be described in terms of intensity of interaction (Bird-David, 2022, p. 30), or as uniplex and multiplex, terms which denote the number of social relationships between two people in a network (Kapferer, 1969). A network can be defined as a "set of relationships activated for a particular end without being organized around a single person" that depend "on continuous activity to be reproduced" (Hylland-Eriksen, 2015, p. 100). The idea of uniplexity and multiplexity can be traced back to Georg Simmel's concept of "social circles" and the sociological theory of roles: "Comparing rural and urban livelihoods, these scholars argued that these lifeways differ significantly by the extent to which social roles and relationships overlap. While they overlap significantly in some societies,

with urbanization and economic differentiation overlaps tend to decline” (Schnegg, 2018, p. 1020). Studying conflict resolution in Rhodesia, the anthropologist Max Gluckman similarly noted “that traditional judges and the people they interact with are not only related through their immediate roles. They are, at the same time, neighbors, kin, and co-workers. This normative multiplicity restricts the agency of the judge in someways. At the same time, it offers alternative opportunities to investigate delinquencies and to settle conflicts” (Schnegg, 2018, p. 1020). A uniplex social network is constituted precisely like a participant describes his different friend groups outside the protest camp, as there is little to no overlap between people. In *Wüste* relationships are multiplex for many participants, as people overlap in different contexts through role reversal in shared taskscapes. The daily contingency of life in *Wüste* creates a need to effectively respond to unpredictable events and tasks. These tasks are not managed by a central authority but are addressed by whoever is present and willing/able, showing a decentralized mode of organization in which agency is distributed through continuous role reversal in taskscapes. The multiplexity of relationships that emerge from this can be seen as creating richer channels of communication which can enhance the system's resilience and adaptability, as information can travel through multiple interconnected pathways. In such configurations, a person “may have multiple identities and be multirelational, but also participate in multiple, partly overlapping practice networks” each of which “consists of a slightly different group of individuals for each task” (Damm, 2022, p. 86). As networks, construction or affinity group are ephemeral in so far as they primarily exist “by virtue of ties between concrete persons, and which therefore are transformed, or disappear, when those persons for some reason cease to maintain the ties” (Hylland-Eriksen, 2015, p. 101). Furthermore, networks have no “no clear boundaries or internal organisation, since any person may consider themselves the centre of the network” (Hylland-Eriksen, 2015, p. 100). The construction group is a good example for this. While there is a core of a handful of people who regularly participate in construction work in *Wüste*, the network extends to people who provide material or transportation, either themselves or by “knowing someone who knows someone” that could help with whatever is needed. Extending the network idea further toward artifacts like hammer, boards, nails and so on, it becomes apparent that ultimately everything might be subsumed within it because it exists in relation to the network, thus also participating in it. Because participation and tasks in *Wüste* are contingent and often unpredictable however, the fleeting character of such networks suggests that organization requires more permanent and person-independent systemic features. The next chapters will therefore examine how multiplex

network relationships affect decision-making processes in *Wüste*, consequently resulting in an informal organizational system one participants referred to as “softening the assembly”.

5.3. Decision-making in *Wüste*

After attending a public network meeting about the city’s plans for the highway with about 20 people at the subway station next to the *Wüste* in the evening, Peter and I walk over to the hut to get some tea and as we enter, a discussion among a group of activists huddled together filling the small room. Earlier this day the movement had facilitated a “reflection meeting” where participants were given room to talk about their experience with the occupation, and related concerns like the reaction by media and politicians, and especially the loss of protected legal status and subsequent threats of lawsuits by the city of Vienna two weeks before. While we pour our tea inconspicuously in one corner in the room, someone expresses discontent about how decisions are made, and that there is too much talking in the general assembly and not enough being done. Someone sitting next to the oven chimes in by saying that there is rarely a real consensus anyway, no matter how long you discuss topics. Someone nods but replies that because the movement includes so many different people the need to be democratic through the assemblies justifies some inefficiency. Everyone agrees, but someone questions how democratic the assembly really is if the seeming consensus is decided only by a few people present, because some people avoid or miss the assembly all together. This moves the discussion to the question about how people are being informed about the assembly in the first place, and the answer is mainly through social media. A myriad of chat groups on the messenger app Signal connect many participants directly in ever more specialized communities of practice, from groups concerned with construction, food and cooking, social media work, planning for specific rallies, networking with neighbors, or a group with anthropology students wanting to film. In addition, the Telegram group posts announcements about events on the movement’s website, informing the public about the state of the occupation and upcoming events.

Digital telecommunication technology is a significant factor for organizing current social movements. As the anthropologist Arturo Escobar suggests, the networking capabilities of these technologies are a fitting tool for social movements in our globalized historical moment (Escobar, 1992). Because these technologies are “particularly successful at enabling horizontal, non-hierarchical structures beyond local community and real-time proximity” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 154), they popularized the network metaphor both in the

vocabulary of activists as well as research about these movements. An older participant in *Wüste* would also explicitly name social media as an important difference to his experience in the early 1990's, while we are digging a trench around the pyramid for electrical grounding (a project that was never finished, as a day later it was decided that it is probably not needed). Additionally considering the previous chapter on cybernetics, this technology should figure prominently in my research. But in relation to actual decision-making with material consequences on site, social media like Signal groups played little if any role as my interlocutors realized during our interviews. In their recollection of the Signal groups they participated in, together with the few I had access to, ideas, questions, contacts and occasional discussions about decisions to be made predominate. This does not exclude the possibility of decisions being made in such a group of course, but among participants of *Wüste*, this seems to be an identifiable pattern in the relationship between decision-making and digital telecommunication technology. Going back to the discussion in the hut on this evening, Peter clears his throat and with a sly smile reminds the people present, that his old Nokia smartphone has no access to the internet, and so it should not be forgotten that social media is not all-inclusive and democratic. Clearly not the first time he brings this up, someone sitting across the room on the small sofa leans back and says: "Exactly! I don't think we can ever really solve this problem because people come and go. Some have work or school or whatever and we can't really accommodate everyone, even though we try. That's why I think the more important question is who is allowed to make decisions at the assembly". This sparks a discussion concerning participation in the occupation and the influence on decisions relating to daily life on site. Should someone have to spend a certain number of nights, or a certain number of hours doing work at the camps? Is social media curation like bringing food or building a pyramid? In the end, all agree that everyone is welcome to participate and decide, and so the question is ultimately pointless. Still early in my research, I listen intently and mentally prepare to spend some nights at the camp. When the group in the hut begins to disperse, Peter and I go outside, and he explains to me that there is some worry in the movement about the power of the assembly. Some feel that certain groups like political parties may try to overtake the movement, simply by being able to attend the assemblies in higher numbers more consistently. While he personally finds this worry unwarranted, it is true that a lot hinges on who is present at any given assembly as we will see in a later chapter.

Participants in *Wüste* express a deficit of democracy by actively engaging with questions of decision-making processes, as such protest camps "often intentionally employ modes of

horizontal decision-making in contrast to forms of representative democracy” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 55). Assemblies are a common way for such movements to organize, and based on the vignette introducing this chapter, it appears that similar protest camps share the same dilemma in their day-to-day operations, namely, how to organize without undermining the ideals of diversity of opinion and non-hierarchy. As Mehl notes in *Lützerath*, “activists being there for such different time frames affects the dynamics and creates knowledge hierarchies” (Mehl, 2022, p. 29). This problem is addressed by introductory meetings, daily assemblies and evening events, which constitute the governance infrastructure of protest camps. Participants in *Wüste* camp are very aware of such hierarchies as the following description shows:

I thought about this with another participant, and it was like this: We had a situation in which we built something together and I was standing on the ladder with the electric screwdriver, and I basically conducted her what she should bring me. That means I was the one giving hierarchical orders to her. Then there was a situation where I was building with some people and basically went back and forth between group A and group B, and I was the errand boy, and the hierarchy was reversed. [...] Then we had the situation, we all sit together in the assembly and she moderates it, which means I am quiet and she talks most of the time, and when I want to say something I indicate and wait until it's my turn. The hierarchy is reversed again. Or another dimension when she warms food. That means she is also caretaker for me at that moment, and that's another role. Or washing the dishes together and setting the table for everyone, that means we are both caretakers for someone else in that moment, which is another constellation of roles. (Interview-01, p. 16, lines 848-867)

This interplay between shifting roles and relations within different contexts can be described in terms of hierarchy and heterarchy. According to the anthropologist Carole Crumley, hierarchy describes a top-down structure which is “composed of elements that on the basis of certain factors are subordinate to others and may be ranked” (Crumley, 2007, p. 4). A heterarchy on the other hand is defined as “the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked or when they possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways, depending on conditions” (Crumley, 2007, p. 04). In anthropology this distinction traditionally played a role in the framework of band, tribe, chiefdom and state, wherein “anthropologists were willing to attribute considerable flexibility to bands and tribes, but much less to stratified society (chiefdoms and states). The difference was seen primarily in terms of increasing order, manifest in hierarchies of power and their concomitant systems of communication” (Crumley, 2007, p. 3). And although hierarchical organization can be found in many characteristics of state power, “there are myriad coalitions, federations, democracies, and other examples of shared,

counterpoised, heterarchical state power” (Crumley, 2007, p. 16), and state power can therefore “be seen as a dynamic tension between hierarchical and heterarchical features which are present at every spatial and temporal scale” (Crumley, 2007, p. 16). Crumley’s formulation suggests that hierarchy and heterarchy are not mutually exclusive because hierarchy may contain horizontal groups within each level of verticality. Following Crumley’s definition, the anthropologist Dmitri Bondarenko therefore offers the concept of homoarchy, which he defines as “the relation of elements to one another when they are rigidly ranked one way only, and thus possess no (or at least very limited) potential for being unranked or ranked in another or a number of different ways at least without cardinal reshaping of the whole sociopolitical order” (Bondarenko, 2007, p. 126).

To examine these relations more closely, Crumley suggests the analysis of conditions for decision-making through clarification of “the relation between administrative structure and environmental stability and change” (Crumley, 2007, p. 6). Her premise is “that in uncertain times the sharing of information and flexible authority structures reduce risk by increasing available information to decision makers and multiplying solutions” (Crumley, 2007, p. 15). Fixed hierarchies with clear decision-making chains “respond well to fast-developing crises (e.g., military attack, insurrection). Because the rules and responsibilities are known to all, political interactions among decision makers are few and formalized, and political maintenance of the system is low” (Crumley, 2007, 6f). At the same time, these systems are at a disadvantage “because data-gathering techniques, tied to the pyramidal decision-making framework, slow the arrival of some kinds of information (especially subversive activity) at the apex of the pyramid and necessitate the formalization and elaboration of internal security forces. Decisions are rapid and expedient but they are not necessarily popular” (Crumley, 2007, p. 7). In more heterarchical organization on the other hand, decision-makers “are treated to good quality information from many sources within and outside of the decision-making lattice. For the most part, decisions are fair and reflect popular consensus” (Crumley, 2007, p. 7). And because “heterarchies are more likely to value the contributions of disparate segments of the community (women, ethnic groups, etc.)” (Crumley, 2007, p. 7), a variety of potential solutions to problems are part of the process. At the same time, these systems are at a disadvantage “because consensus is slow to achieve, increasing the time it takes to make a decision. Decision makers must engage in interpersonal dialogue with constituents, which requires considerable time and energy investment and constant maintenance. The cacophonous voices and choices a decision maker hears complicate the search for workable solutions” (Crumley, 2007, p. 7). For analysis

then, the “crux of the problem therefore becomes the exploration of how the processes of decentralization and centralization fluctuated over time and space and [...] why these temporal-spatial oscillations occurred” (Iannone, 2002, p. 71). Because taskscape in *Wüste* are contingent, participants find flexible ways to organize their life on site. Within a given taskscape social relations may be seen as hierarchical, like when someone is “giving orders” to someone else, a mode of relation that is of course contrary to the political goals of such movements. At the same time, these hierarchies are not fixed but remain open to be reshuffled depending on any given situation because they are embedded in a heterarchical matrix of social relations. Feigenbaum et al refer to this as an “organic horizontalism” which emerges “as campers come together to tend to the needs and nurturing of their communities” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 55). As we can see, participants in *Wüste* are keenly aware of their own relationships to one another, and in general I can say most shared a pragmatic attitude towards such questions. If someone has experience with a specific task, then it is reasonable to let this person lead the group effort and share their know-how. This pragmatic attitude and the recognition of hierarchies also extends further to the self-organized structure of the movement:

There are many hierarchies, on the one hand the cognitively imagined hierarchy that someone says we do everything in a basic democratic way and therefore you are not allowed to do something on your own terms. On the other hand, I may take the egoistic right and just do it, and then nobody can do anything about it, and if it's irreversible, then you also have a kind of hierarchy. (Interview-01, p. 9, lines 443-451)

To him, the general assembly often felt inefficient and rarely relevant to daily life in *Wüste*. He would later also comment on trying to get into the social media group of the movement, but despite the movement's attempt to be inclusive, never heard back and was thus not able to participate. What the vignette about the discussion in the hut about participation also illustrates clearly, is that as networks align in the “convergence space” of *Wüste*, boundaries are negotiated in relation to the governance infrastructure of the camp. This suggests that the network metaphor is not sufficient anymore, because as “protest camps have spatial and temporal limits, they are not entirely fluid spaces. They require systems for attending to people's everyday needs, as well as for planning campaigns, actions and various policies and practices to guide camp life” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 155). This means that if “a network is seen as something open, fluid and without any organisation, then there would be no need to make decisions, or for those comprising the network to govern and be governed” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 154). While network characteristics can be identified in protest camps like *Wüste*, participants also “pursue certain aims, and sometimes make decisions on

behalf of their participants. They consciously decide on the way in which they do politics, and as a result they develop a structure. At the same time, the horizontal and fluid elements of the network structure are not eliminated, nor would this be desirable” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 155). From this a tension arises because protesters have “to find a reasonable level of organisation while maintaining network characteristics” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 155), a balancing act that can be referred to as “partial organization” (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011). It is partial, because only some elements of organization (membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring and sanction) are formally present and decided in advance and “the elements to be adopted have to be chosen by organisers” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 155). And in this sense, organization differs from networks because it is “the result of the intervention of individuals or formal organisations which can and do make decisions not only about their own, but also about the behaviour and distinctions of others” (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011, p. 90). In the following chapters I will describe how an organic horizontalism materialized in *Wüste* through partial organization in relation to an environment participants experience as highly contingent.

5.3.1. Affects of scale

The concept “horizons of choice” includes “attributions applied to the actions and behaviors of others, as well as inferences they draw concerning the effects that such actions would have on these others” (Boholm, Henning, & Krzyworzeka, 2013, p. 104). The effects specific actions may have, is a key aspect of decision-making at *Wüste* camp. What also became apparent during my research and interviews is the importance of the body, or rather embodiment in relation to affect and emotion, or in short “gut-feeling, an experience one participant remembers with some frustration in relation to consensus decision-making at the general assembly:

Often we only obtained moods, and those were then used to make a decision, because at some point you simply have to make a decision. But there never really were any determined decision-making structures. (Interview-02, p. 17, lines 908-912)

Asking another participant about the way decisions were made at *Wüste* camp, she describes a similar experience:

Yes, because we were on site a lot more than the people who met at the general assembly, and we were fewer people at *Wüste*, and so we tried, like if you had something, some new idea you wanted to implement, you tried to talk with everyone

about it. But this was an opaque structure, because sometimes I thought: Ok, I think I talked to everyone about it and I will do it now. And then someone did feel excluded, because they said “Yea, but I didn’t know about this!”. I mean there was no fixed structure, and that kind of bothered me a little as well, and therefore you cannot only bash the general assemblies, I think. (Interview-02, p. 16, lines 807-818)

What she describes here as an opaque structure, another participant referred to as the “soft assembly”, an informal decision-making process that emerged at the camp to meet the needs of daily recreation. The example also illustrates the boundlessness of networks, as she was never sure if enough people felt included in any given decision. Depending on who is physically present at any given time, a network trying to make a decision may be constituted by very different people, with anyone missing being excluded. In this sense, affect “points toward the terrain that is presubjective without being presocial” (Mazzarella, 2009, p. 291), and as the examples show, this “illusion of pre-mediated existence - of immediation - is, then, at once the outcome of mediation and the means of its occlusion” (Mazzarella, 2009, p. 303).

On my first evening at *Wüste* camp I meet a participant who is in the process of adding glass windows to the upper floor of the wooden pyramid. After climbing up the small ladder in the middle of the lower floor, I climb through the middle floor and finally arrive at the upper floor. I am very impressed with how the building turned out and wonder if she had done something similar before, which she had not. Later during our interview, she will talk about her experience and how much fun she and others had trying new things at the camp:

And I believe many really enjoyed being able to learn something new. I had no experience in construction previously, but it was so much fun to dip your toes into many different areas of activity, like building a house. And then a little about electricity, and then about radiator technology. I understand how a radiator works now, and I could build one...it’s too bad we will never finish it now. (Interview-02, p. 7, line 340-348)

But for her and others it does not end with tasks related to the recreation of the camp as she explains further:

I gained so much self-confidence, because I was often thrown into cold water. Like, here you go, take the microphone and talk to 100 people [...], or some other responsibilities I could have never imagined to do 6 months ago. [...] And also getting insights into politics, before I had very little connection to this, and then I am right in the middle of it, sitting across a politician and talking and so on. (Interview-02, p. 22, lines 1147-1164)

If affect is seen as “the sensations that affect what the body can do” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 23), then this is the affective infrastructure of *Wüste* camp, which relates participants within horizons of possibility and choice, enabling them to embody new activities. But this infrastructure can also have inhibiting effects on participants and their decision-making, like when someone is not quite sure if everyone was included in the process, or when participants in *Wüste* feel that their concerns are not heard in the general assembly. As mentioned, participants were often left with some kind of mood to base their decisions on, which may not be helpful for people living at a camp, and who are sometimes required to make definitive decisions. One participant remembers her experience in the general assembly in the following way:

Yes, we [and our concerns] had in theory just the same value as anyone else, but then some decisions were simply majority decisions, and then it depended on who is present at this moment. And that’s where I saw the voice of a whole group disappear, because simply by chance only one of them is present right now, but like 10 people from some leftist group or party of whatever. (Interview-02, p. 17, lines 884-890)

And another adds to the picture by explaining his perspective:

Many things [being discussed at the general assembly] felt more like political stuff, which did not really concern me at all. This is one of the reasons why I began to avoid assemblies. [...] I mean political stuff like the Green Party wants to give us an *Öklo* [an eco-friendly Porta-Potti], but can we accept that? This could be instrumentalized and we have to think about how this might look and so on. And I was like: Ok, but do we need a toilet or not?! And for those questions I don’t have a lot of insight compared to this assembly community, hence why I avoided it. (Interview-01, p. 6, lines 298-309)

The concept of affect also points toward the “less easily categorizable ways in which we, in embodied ways, interact perceptively with that which is beyond us” (Markussen, 2006, p. 293). In this example it illustrates the importance of scaling as an embodied practice, as people engaged in scaling processes are always shaped by their particular histories and contexts like gender, race, class and geography (Widlock, 2022, p. 09). Engaging critically with the way the concept of scale has been applied in Anthropology (of “small-scale” societies), Nurit Bird-David argues, that “we need to pay attention to how we, and how they, scale and imagine societies and lifeworlds, and the affordances and limits entailed in these scales” (Bird-David, 2022, p. 20). Questions of scale are therefore relevant to the study of agency and structure, as scale “sets limits to the scope of option for action, but simultaneously it is the product of action” (Hylland-Eriksen, 2015, p. 102). Furthermore, scale is “situational in the sense that all actors

move from situations of small scale to those of larger scale, and back again, on a daily basis” (Hylland-Eriksen, 2015, p. 103). Drawing from Marilyn Strathern, Alberto Corsín Jiménez distinguishes between two dimensions of scale that are useful for my analysis: When scale is understood as orders of knowledge, “particular orders of relations (of economy, or religion, kinship, etc.) are mobilized and measured up against other scales” (Jiménez, 2005, p. 158). And when scale is understood as magnitude, “actions are measured in terms of the scale of their effects.” (Jiménez, 2005, p. 158). The former will be illustrated in this subchapter, and the latter in the following subchapter.

General assemblies are often the time and place where one can experience how scales are measured up against each other as orders of relations, like when some participants in *Wüste* feel that their concerns are not being heard enough in the general assembly. When I ask about this during our interviews, the participant who avoided the general assembly recalls his experience further:

They [people who do not spend time at the camp] sit at home in front of media, are networking and have time and resources to differentiate their arguments [...], while my input is more like a thought or a feeling. [...] It was very frustrating for those living on site, for those who should’ve had more influence but didn’t. And that was maybe why some people split off from the assembly community, because they couldn’t identify with it anymore. (Interview-01, p. 26f, lines 1420-1436)

This does not mean that concerns of the camp were ignored or deemed unimportant. Rather, different scales as orders of knowledge are relevant to the movement, and the importance of each depends on the specific situation and the people present. For those that do not spend much time in the camps and participate mainly in the assemblies or are engaged on social media, different environments are expressed in the question of how the movement is represented. For people who spend considerable amounts of time on site these matters are not irrelevant but may be subordinate to the material conditions of the camp. The importance of specific environments to be considered in relation to organization becomes especially apparent in *Wüste* when eviction is imminent, and pressure grows on participants.

On December 9th the status of *Wüste* camp as a political gathering is suspended by the city of Vienna, and only 2 days later several people receive threats of impending lawsuits if the site is not cleared. The atmosphere at *Wüste* camp changes immediately, and different needs are suddenly brought to the fore. When I enter *Wüste* camp for the first time after the eviction has

become a real possibility for the near future, I promptly note that the tripod is now positioned right in the middle between pyramid and the hut, whereas before it stood somewhere on the side and almost forgotten. Activists clearly signal their plan to stay. One participant remembers the change in this way:

One incisive point was of course the suspension of the camp as a political gathering. [...] This is when it became really stressful. [...] Because then many more people came to the camp, and we suddenly had to plan very different things. Then we somehow had morning and evening assemblies again, and everyone had to coordinate, so there are real plans for what to do during the day, daily tasks, and specific roles so that everything is eviction ready. (Interview-02, p. 7, lines 355-366)

She explains further:

Before it was more about getting ready for the winter and thinking of new ideas about how we can do this more sustainably and be like an example for others. We had big dreams, but then reality came crashing in and so we dealt more with questions of strategy, like our political proposal for alternatives. (Interview-02, p. 11, lines 540-544)

The day after the camp is suspended as a political gathering an assembly takes place and participants are faced with an influx of new people and different sets of needs, which presents problems to the previously established governance and recreation infrastructures, as she remembers the assembly right after news had been reported and about 70 people are present in *Wüste*:

During this terrible assembly, where the action consensus was supposed to be established, which did not fit the situation at all. We had experience from the day before [...] and then we are supposed to establish an action consensus real quick [...], but it included nothing practical at all, rather some leftists ideals which sound totally fine, like anti-this and anti-that or maybe for something else, but nothing relevant for the night. [...] Some simply broke out in tears, because there was so much pressure to function. (Interview-02, p. 8f, lines 407-435)

Protest camps nurture and care for bodies in action as a community of resistance (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013, p. 51f), but as different scales as horizons of possibility have to be considered, a problem arises when previously established infrastructures are unable to afford necessary care for participants. The potential imminence of eviction creates a highly stressful environment that challenges the established norms and routines of participants, and so, the usual ways of working together were put under pressure. The regulars, with their accumulated experience and their focus on the practicalities of surviving the night, had a different scale and

set of priorities compared to some of the newcomers who might have been more focused on broader “leftist ideals” and an abstract action consensus. From the newcomers’ perspective of course, establishing some ground rules to work with in such an unusual situation makes perfect sense, and this is what the regulars were mostly concerned with: Who sleeps where? Is there enough space, material, and food? What else do we need to care for everyone? But the form of embodied knowledge and shared history of regular participants is not readily accessible to the newcomers. The attempt to impose a formal consensus process that did not fit the situation illustrates some limitations of rigid structures in the face of fluid and urgent circumstances. The fact that some activists simply broke out in tears underscores the emotional toll of this systemic breakdown, because the pressure to function within a process that felt irrelevant and unresponsive to their immediate needs was overwhelming. Her comment about leftist ideals that were not relevant for the night underscores the tension between the priorities and perspectives of the regular group those of newcomers who might have been more invested in broader political agendas. The example therefore illustrates the importance of embodied experience, and the affective infrastructure constituted through multiplex relationships, especially as it breaks down. The regulars had developed an implicit understanding of what needed to be done and who could be relied upon based on their shared experiences in the contingent environment of the camp. The influx of newcomers and the imposition of a less context-sensitive formal process disrupted this established affective infrastructure, leading to emotional distress, and a breakdown in effective decision-making. This situation therefore highlights the importance of time and shared practice in building the kind of affective infrastructure that appears to be shaken by the new circumstances.

But even without outside pressure, such an integration into the affective infrastructure may fail to some extent. Based on my data and participants’ recollection I would identify three phases of *Wüste*: In the months of September and October participants remember an “atmosphere of departure”. Because of the weather it is decided to build the pyramid, so on each weekend about 20-25 people work together. When the weather gets colder, participation in all camps decreases. Sometime in mid-November a handful of people who were previously at Base camp arrive at *Wüste* camp, and something begins to change as one participant describes:

And then some dynamics suddenly broke down, and like I said, before that point people arrive dropwise and you can go to them and accommodate them, include and welcome them, and also introduce them. But then suddenly, they sit there and apparently have their own group culture. And this group culture is more fixed than a singular person.

And then that group suddenly began sitting in the hut, and everyone else at *Wüste* just kept on hustling. And to me this felt like a stone in a well running system, and so the system has to flow around that stone, it flows like before, but with a stone in this one corner. (Interview-01, p. 19, lines 1004-1015)

I believe this frustration is why I, an outsider with interest in their social organization, am invited so enthusiastically by some participants in *Wüste*, as they felt something was going wrong, or at least different than before. His description provides a concrete example of how the affective infrastructure can become strained when new people with different frames of reference enter the system. He contrasts the earlier dropwise arrival of individuals which allowed for personalized integration, with the disruptive impact of a whole group arriving. He points out that it appears to be more difficult to integrate a group with its own ways of doing things than it is to integrate individuals into the existing “camp culture”. His metaphor of a stone in a well running system is well chosen because it conveys how the arrival of this group disrupted the established flow of interaction and the embodied understanding that characterized *Wüste*’s social fabric. The image of the system having to flow around that stone further illustrates how *Wüste* continues like before, but now with a persistent element that is not fully integrated. This example suggests potential limits to the affective infrastructure, because the shared understanding and implicit knowledge that facilitated smooth interaction among the regulars might not extend to this pre-formed group. The established system of interaction in *Wüste* is based on a history of individuals coming together and learning to work and live alongside each other in the specific context of the protest camp, but the sudden arrival of a group partly bypasses this process of gradual integration and the development of shared norms and understandings. In the next chapter I will examine this apparently well running system of informal decision-making participants developed organically over time in *Wüste*.

5.3.2. Recreation through “soft assembly”

Research suggests that if small groups of face-to-face interaction are in situations of high resource dependency and institutional multiplexity, then informal and ad hoc institutions emerge (Schnegg, 2018, p. 1027). And in protest camps especially, the affinity shared by participants may mean that there is no need for formal decision-making procedures. And if there is more than one camp, then groups with specific preferences can coexist within the broader movement. In the beginning of the *Lobau Bleibt!* occupation, camps communicated and shared participation. Over time, the camps become more autonomous as people find the camp they feel

the most comfortable in. The frequency of assemblies is high at the beginning as well, but as recreational needs of the camps come to the fore, a shift to more formal decision-making processes takes place in *Wüste*. Based on role reversal in daily taskscapes the intensity of interaction grows, and participants get to know each other in diverse situations. Trust and understanding of other participants make formal structures less necessary over time:

And when we had discussions, there was this culture of conversation involved, which, I don't know why, but it worked. We softened this formal structure where everyone raises hands and we note all topics and go through them sequentially, we softened this and talked casually, and that worked. (Interview-01, p. 9f, lines 495-500)

Because he increasingly felt that topics relevant to daily life at the camp fell to the wayside during the general assembly, he began to search for people interested in working on these needs outside the plenary structure:

Which lead to the point, where I didn't even bring up many topics at the general assembly, but rather looked for a group underhand so to speak, and then we just did it. And then we somehow have this *Wüste* rule: "Who does it determines it." (Interview-01, p. 8, lines 424-429)

"*Wer macht der macht.*" is a remarkable rule in light of prefigurative politics of consensus and inclusive decision-making critical of hierarchical organization. But this rule, expressed in the subtle word play on the German terms *machen* and *Macht* ("doing" and "power"), aligns prefigurative means and ends aligned in practice. Another participant calls this procedure "small-scale lobbying" and goes on to illustrate further how this works in *Wüste*:

Then the question is whether she can decide herself, or if the idea has to be introduced and promoted first, in the hope she gets enough support, at which point the community would decide how it should be done. I mean, theoretically this is how it works in society as well, but there are so many levels in the political system. [...] I mean there are thousands of levels, but in *Wüste* it was possible, because the hierarchies were so flat, and the circle of people so small. It was very different. (Interview-03, p. 10, lines 532-541)

But how can one decide if an idea should be introduced and acted upon or not? How does one get a project off the ground in *Wüste*?

Simply by coming to the camp, going to the place and by talking about it with as many people as possible. And then over time somehow, you really need to have time, and then you'll get to know people somehow and you get a feel for who might be the right contact. (Interview-02, p. 20, lines 1048-1054)

Here we get to the affect of scale understood as magnitude, where actions are measured in terms of the scale of their effects, for it is the effect actions may have on others that ties this all together, as she explains further:

Depending on how big the effect of such a decision is. You just need to get a feel for this: Ok, that's a decision we should make in the bigger group, or in the *Wüste* general assembly, or maybe even at Base camp. Or I decide this on my own, or together with one or two people. But then you still have room for others to participate and feel included. (Interview-02, p. 21, lines 1087-1094)

The gut-feeling of this affective horizon is the opaque social structure of *Wüste*. The soft assembly emerges as an informal decision-making procedure from role reversal in multiplex relationships and cooperative interaction in tasksapes. Over time, participants get a feel and understanding for other participants' perspectives, which stretches the decision-making process over time and space, because it happens during daily life on and maybe offsite, not fixed dates and places like proper assemblies. It also enables to make decisions without someone present who might want to be involved, because one can infer someone's position on the matter based on previous experience in diverse situations. And even if someone might feel excluded or disagrees with a decision, conflict is softened as one participant explains:

Well, it makes a lot of sense, because you have many more points of connection, and even if I disagree with this or that, there are many other dimensions where we agree and want to work together. (Interview-01, p. 17, lines 890-894)

But not everyone in *Wüste* spends as much time on site as the regulars, and so the experience of people can differ considerably. Part of the affective horizon of participants is also about knowing which decision one feels qualified to be part of, as one participant remembers when I ask her if she felt included in the decision-making processes in *Wüste* camp:

As a woman: yes. As someone not present on site all the time: maybe less than others. [...] For this reason, I felt that I could not decide on some matters because I didn't have the background knowledge. And because I sometimes decided: Ok, that's a decision without me, because I don't know enough about it, and it might not even concern me, the effect of the decision I mean. (Interview-03, p. 12, lines 642-649)

She then tells a story about someone who was not able to get a sufficient feel for the affective infrastructure in *Wüste*:

I had a long conversation with someone, in which he told me that he would really like a little private area for himself in *Wüste*. And that he doesn't know with whom he should

talk, because if he claims this private area, then he makes himself special and better than anyone else. And that meant a lot of insecurity and anxiety for him. [...] So, this thought was very different, I mean someone else just does it, right? And he is so occupied with this that he cannot act, and so he never got his private area. (Interview-03, p. 16, lines 826-841)

In this case someone is not sure who to talk to because the affective horizon is not developed enough to get an assuring gut-feeling. Private areas do exist in *Wüste* however, as during the warm earlier months some participants had built very small huts on the outskirts of the camp area, though they were rarely used. And even within the pyramid itself, a small and confined area was used by some privately. As the quote highlights, there was always some anxiety about hierarchies for some. Participants on site regularly, however, begin to intuitively differentiate between different kinds of hierarchy, which is best described in terms of functional and structural hierarchy. The latter is what we generally understand as hierarchy, like the top-down structure of a military. The former describes the “hierarchy of decisions that are higher than, or come logically before, other decisions” which “does not need to be replicated in an organizational structure that is itself hierarchical” (Swann, 2020, p. 55). Some decisions just have to be made at some point, and even if everyone is included, making a decision creates a hierarchy in time and space, like when something is built at a specific time or place, or in a specific way. The soft assembly is a way to deal with this in the daily recreation of the camp and the needs that arise from this. It is structurally heterarchical, because anyone interested is generally included and welcome to participate. But functionally the process is also hierarchical by necessity, because otherwise people at the camp would have been frozen on my arrival, since some decisions just have to be made.

The following example taken from my film (Hähnlein, 2022) will bring some more clarity to the soft assembly. For this particular day we had planned to film the main footage concerning the construction of a new kitchen canopy and counter, which is supposed to make it easier to share prepared food outside the tiny kitchen hut. It is a beautiful December day and some only wear T-Shirts, a very uncommon sight for me during research. A woman, who introduces herself as Rose and an occasional visitor, had arrived some time earlier to bring food and now enjoys the sunny day sorting through empty boxes. As we stand in front of the kitchen, she notices how Peter is measuring some cut wood. She approaches us and shows interest in what he is planning to do with the material. Peter explains the idea of a kitchen counter and they begin talking about the proper height. He shows her how he had planned to do the counter and she shows concern that it may be too high, by pointing out that “a buffet can be lower in height

because pots stand on it and you have to be able to reach into them.” Because we had agreed to not film faces, the frame tends to be focused on the lower half of people’s bodies, naturally illustrating the body language of scale in embodied horizons. Peter asks her to show him to which she responds with her hand against the pillar followed by a motion with both hands simulating how one might take something out of a pot at this height. As an experienced carpenter Peter immediately sees her point and together, they decide on a good height which he marks with a pencil.

Figure 3. *Rose communicates her embodied horizon.*



About an hour later a man and woman enter *Wüste* and approach us in front of the kitchen. As they come closer we recognize him as someone who had been on site a few days before asking if we needed help with any kind of construction. We told him about our film and construction plans and invited him to join, which he enthusiastically accepted because “building stuff” is his favorite hobby. He introduces his girlfriend to us and they explain that media coverage had made them curious about the protest and they wanted to see if any help is needed. While his girlfriend starts helping to carry window frames to the storage area, leftovers someone had donated to *Wüste*, Peter explains the project and shows how high the counter is supposed to be. The newcomer nods, looks around and then says that the counter seems pretty low to him. “Well,” Peter says as he turns around, “someone made the good suggestion that if there are pots on top then you have to be able to reach into them”. The newcomer nods mostly convinced and

replies that “one says the general kitchen height is 85cm”, a comment Peter, as one of the few self-professed anarchists in *Wüste*, does not seem particularly amused about. After the counter frame is finished and we spent some time together, it must now be decided which wooden boards will be used to finish the front, some of which had been selected earlier that day. With the new lower height of the counter however, boards that were previously too small can be considered. Within this context Peter offers to see if maybe it would be possible to cut some boards to 84cm for an additional cupboard, clearly trying to include a different perspective he had previously rejected with some frustration.

Figure 4. *The newcomer introduces a different order of knowledge.*



The arrival of Rose bringing food and her immediate engagement in the kitchen counter discussion exemplifies the fluid boundaries of participation in the soft assembly. Her “input” arose organically from her presence and interest in what we were doing, and the interaction between Rose and Peter illustrates the affectual scale in embodied horizons. The use of her hands demonstrates the appropriate height for reaching into pots and conveys a practical, bodily knowledge that Peter, despite his carpentry experience, might not have immediately considered from the more abstract measurements made earlier. The quick consensus reached between Peter and Rose highlights the efficiency and effectiveness of informal negotiation based on shared practical understanding as Peter recognizes the insight of her embodied knowledge and readily adjusts his plan. The arrival of the newcomer and his reference to the general kitchen height of

84cm introduces a different scale of knowledge: a standardized and more top-down perspective that contrasts with the approach taken earlier. Peter's initial exasperation towards the standardized measurement, likely stemming from his anarchist leanings and rejection of rigid norms, highlights some of the underlying ideological tensions within *Wüste*. However, his later willingness to consider cutting boards to 84cm demonstrates the softening of position and the eventual integration of different perspectives within the process. The change in the counter height and the subsequent reconsideration of the wooden boards illustrate the adaptive nature of the soft assembly. Decisions are not fixed but evolve based on new information, perspectives, and practical considerations. While the initial design and measurements were largely driven by Peter's application of the *Wüste* rule ("who does it determines it"), Rose's input immediately influences the design, demonstrating how this rule is tempered by the openness to incorporate someone else in the process. The scene illustrates the soft assembly as an informal process driven by the needs and desires of people's interaction in taskscape. The process is structurally heterarchical because anyone can contribute, but functionally hierarchical in the sense that Peter, as the one actively building, initially takes the lead. However, his "leadership" remains open to influence and adaptation, and this form of collaborative approach to building the kitchen counter can therefore be seen as a prefigurative enactment of a more horizontal way of organizing and decision-making, contrasting more top-down or standardized approaches.

Decisions made from within such embodied horizons co-create a contexture through social interaction with other participants in the context of *Wüste*, as different sets of explicit and implicit dimensions inform their perspectives and potential actions. The interactions within the scene are essentially a series of transjunctions, that is, attempts to bridge the differences between these individual horizons and arrive at a shared understanding and course of action as a workable contexture ("Let's build a kitchen counter"). Rose's finger pointing demonstration of the proper height is a transjunction, because she is attempting to translate her embodied, practical knowledge into a communicative form that resonates with Peter's carpentry expertise. His immediate understanding and acceptance demonstrates a successful transjunction because he incorporates her perspective into the plan. The newcomer stating the general kitchen height is another transjunctional attempt, because he is trying to introduce a different order of knowledge into immediate and practical considerations. Peter's frustrated can be seen as a moment of rejection and a refusal to immediately integrate the newcomer's perspective. Later revisiting the 84cm measurement, however, illustrates a delayed but ultimately successful transjunction as he finds a way to connect standardized knowledge with practical knowledge

fitting to the task. In this sense, the ongoing dialogue and the eventual agreement on the counter height and the selection of wood for the front and additional cupboard represent a series of transjunctions towards a shared contexture. By combining both explicit and implicit structuration of experience participants are building a common understanding to align their actions for this specific task.

The experiences of inefficiency, endless talking, lack of real consensus, and the feeling that the general assembly did not represent everyone's voice is driven by the embodied frustrations and affective responses of participants to the limitations of the more formal assembly structure. While not explicitly abandoned, its practical authority is undermined by the feeling that its operational logic is not leading to the desired outcomes. This rejection is therefore not necessarily about the principles of the assembly but its performance, while the desire for inclusiveness and some form of collective decision-making remains. And so, at “each successive level of integration, new ordering principles come into play (suspension of old forms), drawing upon a store of knowledge (preservation of some elements found in the old forms) and providing creative solutions to new challenges (transcendence and transformation of older forms)” (Crumley, 2007, p. 15). The given example illustrates how the soft assembly operates as a continuous process of individuals with different horizons interacting together to address the practical needs of the camp. Different forms of rejection are part of this process when different ideas and perspectives are voiced, negotiated, and potentially put into action. But rejection is not necessarily “negative”, because it is a crucial part in the process of co-creating and navigating differences and establishing a multi-valued perspective. Peter’s initial rejection of the standardized height illustrates the potential conflict between different orders of knowledge and values within the camp, and this rejection is not absolute but rather a temporary holding of a different perspective. The eventual integration of the 84cm idea demonstrates how initial rejection can be overcome through further transjunctions, potentially leading to the development of a more nuanced understanding that incorporates different perspectives and a new horizon for a workable solution. The soft assembly emerges as the informal way contextures are navigated until a good enough consensus is reached that can be acted upon. In this sense, the gut-feeling of decision-making may be seen as an intuitive understanding of when and how different contextures need to be brought into alignment. Participants navigate their different individual horizons through ongoing communicative interaction, with moments of disagreement but also mutual understanding, ultimately contributing to the outcome of the kitchen counter and protest camp *Wüste*.

6. Conclusion

The emergence of the soft assembly may be seen as a prime example for self-organization, because it arises from the interactions and frustrations of participants within the existing system of the general assembly and represents a spontaneous adaptation to better meet their needs within the established governance infrastructure. Different scales of concern influence the preference for certain ways of doing the protest and explain why the more formal general assembly might not always be the most effective or preferred mode of decision-making for the immediate needs of *Wüste*. Frustrations about the general assembly induce the development of a more flexible and context-sensitive alternative, which illustrates how non-linear system dynamics generate new patterns and structures.

The often-unpredictable nature of daily life on site experienced within ever developing taskscape, where roles shift based on presence and need, required a form of organization that enabled participants to adapt to each immediate concern. This continuous reshuffling of roles fosters a dense social fabric of multiplex relationships, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of other participants' perspectives. This allows for a degree of inferential understanding, reducing the need for lengthy discussions, or being physically present at all. The affective infrastructure becomes especially visible when an influx of newcomers during a high-stress situation creates an environment that disrupts the system by the attempt to introduce an action consensus that "did not fit the situation at all." The existence of multiple autonomous camps and the micro-spatial architectural affordances within *Wüste* reflect a desire for decentralized control and the ability to operate according to their own internal values, rather than being dictated by a larger structure.

This echoes the historical context ideas of prefigurative politics emerged in, namely, as a reaction against hierarchical, top-down organizational models and the deferred utopia of traditional social movements. Protest camps combine traditional forms of antagonism aimed at influencing existing power structures with the additional dimension of prefigurative politics, by attempting to embody the desired future in their present organizational structures and practices. The tension between the immediate antagonistic goals of the protest (stopping the highway) and the longer-term prefigurative aspirations for a better society emphasizes how the practicalities of maintaining a protest camp create a space where different horizons of choice become manifest in daily life. The example of the debate around blockading *Wüste* to resist

eviction is used to illustrate how participants mediate diverse perspectives. By identifying four distinct contextures (“police”, “blockade”, “open”, and “compromise”) with their own horizons and logics, I attempt to demonstrate how transjunctions as reflective rejections occur as activists engage with and attempt to understand the perspectives and potential actions of the police and each other, ultimately leading to the negotiated compromise (blockading only the pyramid). Introducing a dynamic view of subjectivity in which individuals are not fixed entities but actively shape (operator) and are shaped by (operand) the social world, agency and structure are seen as being mutually constitutive. This relationship is likewise dynamic as it depends on specific contexts giving meaning to a situation. By taking a cue from a participant describing life in the camps as an “improvised performance”, a stage with actors present may be considered as the context of a situation (this is a play). A contexture would then describe how the actors on stage understand their roles and the rules of the play. But the context of actors on stage is only meaningful if the audience plays along within the context of sitting in their seats watching the play. By temporarily suspending their understanding of the situation in order to immerse in the play as “real” the explicit and implicit dimension for both actors and audience come together in the contexture “theater”, which simultaneously entails both frames of orientation (this is theater/this is real) and orientation schemas (therefore I am quiet/I am immersed) for each individual horizon in the audience. Breaking the fourth wall then, may be seen as a moment of dis-contextuality, the uneasy feeling that something is not quite right and contexts may need to be re-ordered in order to bring horizons into an experiential alignment, so that the contexture of “theater” can emerge again.

The soft assembly emerged as a practice that allowed for more flexible and nuanced ways of relating different horizons, often driven by the immediate needs of specific taskscapes and the embodied knowledge of those involved. Feelings of frustration signaled the limitations of existing contextures and the need for new ways of relating and interacting. Navigating the uncertainty of *Wüste* and the “prescriptions” of the general assembly, participants develop a shared understandings and implicit rules for across different contextures and horizons, led by the desire of horizontal bottom-up social organization. Such organizational models are politically not self-explanatory, however. Understanding the “why” of prefiguration then, my analysis attempted to show how these practices are connected to a broader philosophical and ideological shift influenced by the cybernetic understanding of how complex systems function and change. By illustrating how cybernetics fostered the development of ideas around fluid, flexible, and networked forms of organization, emphasizing decentralized control, information

flow, and adaptation, I argue that cybernetics not only facilitated the interlinking of research and economic production but also the development of a new form of power, with its rhetoric actively promoting networking and entrepreneurship, contributing to its rise as a dominant postwar intellectual paradigm. I propose that these organizational models, initially conceived in a specific intellectual and technological context, diffused beyond the realm of science and technology and have become increasingly prevalent in various dimensions of modern societies. I suggest that the political impulse behind prefiguration, particularly within the context of New Social Movements, can be understood as a kind of conscious embodiment of ideas concerning circular causality that emerged in cybernetics in the decades before. The utopian dimension of non-linearity and feedback proposed by some cyberneticians resonated with the desire for bottom-up, decentralized, and self-organizing social change, contrasting linear top-down models associated with established power structures many students saw themselves in. Ultimately, I suggest that the temporality of prefigurative politics and cybernetic modeling exhibit a strong resonance, meaning they share similarities in how they conceptualize time, causality, and the connection between present actions and future outcomes.

Considering the widespread but often forgotten diffusion and adoption of cybernetics, especially in terms of a New Economy, I wondered if these historical changes may have contributed to the formation of a new kind of habitus as a set of deeply ingrained dispositions, perceptions, and practices that align with these networked, flexible, and entrepreneurial modes of being and organizing. But as ethnographic analysis demonstrates, the flexible and boundless network form does not feel entirely frictionless for participants in *Wüste*. The tensions, struggles for consensus, and the emergence of the soft assembly all point to the challenges inherent in such a decentralized model. In this sense, participants do not coincide with their environment per se, rather perhaps, they attempt to coincide with it through a conscious attempt to change their habitus in terms of horizontal, inclusive, democratic bottom-up organizing and decision-making.

As Gregory Bateson explored in his only anthropological monograph, the act of observing a social system is not neutral and self-evident. The observer's perspective and the theories they employ can shape what they are trying to understand, potentially reinforcing certain patterns or overlooking others. Some words on the limits of this thesis' approach are therefore warranted, potentially opening further routes of investigation. In general, cybernetic models have the tendency to abstract from social and cultural specificity, by applying a high level of abstraction

on patterns of information flow, feedback loops, and system regulation. Such a focus on communication can reduce political action and discourse to mere information exchange which strips away crucial aspects of human agency, ideology, and subjective experience. Applying these models to specific political contexts may therefore risk overlooking the rich social, cultural, and historical dynamics that shape interactions on the ground. From such a perspective the soft assembly could be seen as a process of self-organization “at the edge of chaos”, leading to the emergence of a higher-level system with feedback mechanisms and rudimentary control functions, enabling a solution for participants that “just worked”. But as ethnographic evidence demonstrates, the affect of embodied interaction is the glue that enables and constrains social dynamics in *Wüste*, and with these deeply felt and potentially incommunicable gut-feelings we move from communication to meaning. By exploring possible alternatives that did not come to pass, people’s reflections on their relation to different environments is opened. The perspective applied in this thesis is therefore fundamentally cybernetic, because it interprets events not as the result of a linear chain of cause and effects, but rather by asking why possible alternatives did not occur, leaving what happened as one of the few possible courses of action.

It is sensible to ask why one should bother at all with such a seemingly obscure history and approach, because as Renato Rosaldo remarked, people’s histories and the interplay of domination and resistance seems more compelling than “textbook discussions of system maintenance and equilibrium theory”? But if we design a world that designs us back, should we not understand our designs with a precision that enables us to understand these infrastructures? If people feel trapped in precarious and contingent conditions of a networked economy, trapped in endless feedback cycles of digital algorithms, or simply trapped in car traffic control systems prioritizing efficient flow rather than place, should we not wonder how to avoid the trap or refrain from laying it out in the first place? In other words, when cyberneticians put mechanical mice into labyrinths to (not always successfully) demonstrate the validity of their ideas, I see emancipatory potential not in finding a way out of the trap, but in understanding its’ design and the affordances and constraints as well as limits and potentials it entails.

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8. Data index

Data entail field notes, observation protocols, video material, and interviews.

Observation protocols

ID	Date
Protocol-01	28.11.2021
Protocol-02	01.12.2021
Protocol-03	15.12.2021
Protocol-04	28.12.2021
Protocol-05	29.12.2021
Protocol-06	30.12.2021
Protocol-07	31.12.2021
Protocol-08	02.01.2022
Protocol-09	04.01.2022
Protocol-10	06.01.2022
Protocol-11	07.01.2022
Protocol-12	13.01.2022
Protocol-13	14.01.2022
Protocol-14	16.01.2022
Protocol-15	25.01.2022
Protocol-16	27.01.2022
Protocol-17	28.01.2022
Protocol-18	31.01.2022
Protocol-19	01.02.2022
Protocol-20	04.02.2022
Protocol-21	06.02.2022

Interviews

ID	Duration	Date
Interview-01	02:00:33	21.02.2022
Interview-02	02:22:56	23.02.2022
Interview-03	01:44:31	24.02.2022
Interview-04	02:08:30	25.02.2022
Interview-05	02:12:20	27.02.2022
Interview-06	01:35:19	02.12.2022

English abstract

This thesis explores the interplay between deeply personal embodied experiences and collective direct action in *Wüste*, one of three protest camps occupying construction sites in Vienna. And while participants may share the goal of stopping construction, as individuals with diverse motivations converge, daily experience on site is deeply personal, value-driven, and ambiguous. Situated in this intensely communal and contingent environment, *Wüste* provides space for enacting alternative futures in the present, with participants finding resonance within the movement's rhythms through the convergence of their embodied horizons of choice.

The central question guiding this research is how “gut feelings” shape collective decision-making, simultaneously enabling visions of alternative futures while constraining potential pathways. Drawing inspiration from participants' descriptions, the concept of “soft assembly” is introduced to interpret the informal decision-making process that is animated and sustained by affective dimensions of dense social interactions, which enables a form of inferential understanding that helps participants make decisions in the context of daily life on an occupied construction site without undermining the movement's ideals for organizing.

German abstract

Diese Arbeit untersucht das dynamische Zusammenspiel zwischen verkörperten Erfahrungen und kollektiver „direct action“ in *Wüste*, einem von drei Protestcamps, die Baustellen in Wien besetzen. Obwohl die Teilnehmenden das Ziel die Bauarbeiten zu stoppen teilen mögen, kommen Individuen mit den unterschiedlichsten Motivationen zusammen, und so ist die tägliche Erfahrung vor Ort zutiefst persönlich, wertorientiert und ambivalent. In dieser intensiv gemeinschaftlichen und kontingenten Umgebung bietet *Wüste* einen Raum, in welchem alternative Zukünfte in der Gegenwart gestaltet werden, wobei die Teilnehmenden durch das Aufeinandertreffen ihrer verkörperten Horizonte eine Resonanz innerhalb der Rhythmen der Protestbewegung finden.

Diese Forschung wird durch die zentrale Frage geleitet, wie „Bauchgefühle“ kollektive Entscheidungsfindung prägen, und gleichzeitig Visionen alternativer Zukünfte ermöglichen und einschränken. Inspiriert von den Beschreibungen der Teilnehmenden wird das Konzept des „weichen Plenums“ eingeführt, um den informellen Entscheidungsprozess zu beschreiben, der durch die affektiven Dimensionen dichter sozialer Interaktionen belebt und aufrechterhalten wird. Dieser Prozess ermöglicht eine Form gegenseitigen Verständnisses, welches den Teilnehmenden erlaubt im Kontext des täglichen Lebens auf einer besetzten Baustelle Entscheidungen zu treffen, ohne die Ideale der Bewegung zu untergraben.