You May Destroy This Village, But You Cannot Destroy the Power Which Created It

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Abstract

To develop a historical archaeology of hope, post-medieval European archaeology should shift the focus beyond dark heritage to sites and events opposed to daily destruction and alienation. This case study of an antinuclear protest camp in 1980s Germany shows that cracks in capitalism formed when people protested *for* something; as they experimented with alternative lifeways and envisioned an alternative future. Archaeological intervention can help to reveal these fault lines in capitalism as we remember these heritage sites of hope, but intervention also reveals a cautionary tale of how these blurry pictures of an alternative future can so easily be concealed.

Keywords Capitalism · Germany · Antinuclear movement · Cracks · Protest village

Beyond Dark Heritage

In Germany, the historical archaeology of the last two centuries is slowly gaining traction in research and heritage conservation (Arndt et al. 2017; Jürgens and Müller 2020). Unlike our American counterparts whose research spans all aspects of the modern capitalist world, studies on the recent past in Germany mainly focus on dark heritage - on sites of national socialist terror, concentration camps, and sites of forced labor (Bernbeck 2017; Hausmair 2020; Müller 2017a; Theune 2018). These studies and conservation efforts share a political motive, that of memory work through excavation (*Ausgrabenden Erinnerns*). Through archaeological interventions, these sites, which bore witness to mass atrocities, stay present in memory, encouraging

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deeper engagement with their histories (Bernbeck 2017:8,363; Theune 2009:764, 2013:242). In this contemporary moment, when the far right is on the rise again (Ehmsen and Scharenberg 2018), not only in Germany, the need to remember this history is more important than ever.

This focus on "Dark Heritage" is not limited to Germany, and recently similar archaeological work has been undertaken on a global scale. In other words, archaeologists have increasingly discussed the emergence of postconflict trauma, modern ruins, and the scars that fast capitalism has left on postindustrial landscapes (Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014; Storm 2014), "painful sites" (Piccini and Holtorf 2011:22), the "dark side of capitalism" (Lucas and Hreiðarsdóttir 2012:607, 620), and "traces of supermodern destruction" (González-Ruibal 2008:248). Gonzalez-Ruibal (2008:247–248, 262) argues that contemporary archaeology should be concerned with the ever-increasing scale of global destruction and coined the phrase a "time to destroy" to highlight that this haunting presence of failure should be emphasized rather than remain hidden or repressed.

I am sympathetic to their arguments but would suggest that the archaeology of capitalism must also go beyond simply acknowledging and managing dark heritage sites as possible beacons for admonition. It is not only destruction to which archaeologists should draw attention, but also to the past efforts of many peoples who opposed this destruction and violation. An archaeological focus on annihilation, failure, and loss diverts our attention away from our common heritage of hope and the power of collective action, which challenges the accumulation of the ruins and scars of capitalism.

This hope is often manifested in sites of resistance geared toward creating alternative futures. The very existence of these sites reveals that there has always been resistance to the suffering that capitalism has caused. Strangely, this heritage of hope, resulting from people's struggles within the cracks of capitalism, exists only in the shadows, and is rarely recognized as a part of our daily lives. This is not accidental; these sites may be concealed by various power technologies which block our ability to learn from previous achievements and defeats, reinforcing the idea that there are no viable alternatives. The archaeology of these sites - witnessing and telling their stories - challenges the present ideology of TINA ("there is no alternative") because feasible alternatives are possible, and people have always struggled to create a different and better future. The goal of this paper is to archaeologically recover one of these sites of resistance so that we can recognize just how common they were. These sites of resistance are a powerful reminder of people's "other doing" within capitalism's cracks (see Dézsi and Wurst this volume). My hope is that this recognition of already existing resistance refocuses our efforts on the possibility of change through dignity and collective agency instead of being mired in the passive descriptions of suffering and the destructive effects of capitalism.

Connecting Sites of Protest to the Future

Not all historic protest sites are ignored, and archaeologists have produced case studies of several iconic and locally well-known protest sites. Examples include the site against systemic racism at Birmingham's Kelly Ingram Park (Howett 1994), and the

protest camps of Greenham Common and the Nevada Peace Camp, both primarily constructed to campaign against nuclear warfare, but with additional emphasis on patriarchy (Greenham Common) and colonialism (Nevada Peace Camp) (Beck et al. 2007, 2011; Marshall et al. 2009; Schofield and Anderton 2000). In the UK, archaeologists have worked at environmental protest sites near Twyford Down (Schofield 2005, 2009:87–98) and a stone quarry in Endcliffe (Badcock and Johnston 2013), demonstrating the significance of these local events and uncovering evidence showing how, through material culture and archaeological features, these protests manifested within the landscape.

Other closely related studies focus on countercultural sites, where people experimented with alternatives to established capitalist norms, such as the New Buffalo Commune (Fowles and Heupel 2013), the Olompali Commune (Brunwasser 2009; Fernandez and Parkman 2011; Parkman 2014), and the Burning Man (White 2013) and Woodstock (O'Donovan and Anderson 2018) festivals. Perhaps we can even see the sites of the Czech tramping movement (Symonds and Vařeka 2014), the stalled displacement of households for the Michigan Central Station and Roosevelt Park in Detroit (Ryzewski 2015) and the Sex Pistol's band room (Graves-Brown and Schofield 2011) as evidence of resistance and defiance. All this work is indeed inspiring, yet few have moved beyond the specifics of their individual case studies to look for commonalities in protest sites and attempt a comparative approach to clarify what the protest was *for*.

Some attempts have been made to connect the protests which are evident at historic sites with the continuity of past and current issues – for example, studies show the continuation of racism and the fight against colonialism at Native American protest sites (Beisaw and Olin 2020) and the continuity of class struggle from the perspective of the Ludlow strike camp (McGuire and Ludlow Collective 2008; Saitta 2007). These studies argue for the local significance of these sites and are positioned within a single conceptual framing, whether class, sexism, racism, or the rights of Indigenous people. Instead of focusing on differences, historical archaeology can highlight the commonalities and larger connections in these struggles, alongside the underlying structural relations of capitalism that produce the differences (Wurst 2015:120–122). When considered together, these different protest sites reveal the collective heritage of our globally connected cry for dignity and protest for alternatives to the daily experienced suffering and destruction in capitalism.

The people who engaged in these protests attempted to organize their everyday lives differently within the cracks in capitalism, a commonality which should not be forgotten. Recognizing that capitalism is fraught with fractures and fissures that have always allowed people to "do different" is an important way to understand the commonality of all these protest sites (see Dézsi and Wurst, this volume). The center and starting point for interrogating cracks is the insistence on dignity; the refusal to do harm to ourselves, others and nature– the rejection of the undignified life dictated by capitalism. This rejection, or scream of "No," is the beginning rather than the end:

> the initial refusal begins to open towards something else, towards an educational activity that not only resists but breaks with the logic of capital.... The No is backed by an other-doing. This is the dignity that can fill the cracks created

by the refusal. The original No is then not a closure, but an opening to a different logic and different language. The No opens to a time-space on which we try to live as subjects rather than objects.... These are times or spaces in which we take control of our own lives, assume the responsibilities of our own humanity. Dignity is the unfolding of the power of No (Holloway 2010:18–19).

This undoing of capitalism starts not with the iconic and big events, but at the level of everyday life, the small events – helping others in need, organizing in the neighborhood or workplace, creating networks of solidarity, and opposing the dictates of time and abstract labor and overflowing it with concrete, meaningful/sensual labor. All these small actions of communizing (Holloway 2014) stem from our wish for dignity and can grow into alternative lifeways and economies that counter capitalist logic. This emphasizes that protest sites must be contextualized within the wider social relations of everyday life rather than as a simple dualism of two protagonists: protestors vs. an enemy (see Müller 2017b:328). Iconic protest sites are a more visible part of these cracks and due to their scale, they are more visible in the archaeological record, but our investigations cannot stop with them. They provide a focal point to articulate the dual nature of alternatives: protest for something, situated in the material conditions in the present, while being, at the same time, the cry for an alternative future based on human dignity. My goal is to emphasize this dual nature from the vantage point of an antinuclear protest village in Germany. This is a powerful case study of the "other-doing" in capitalism's cracks since the participants' goals were not simply to protest nuclear power, but to engage collectively in creating an alternate future.

Global and Local Fight against Nuclear Power and the Nuclear State

Nuclear power, introduced worldwide in the 1950s, was widely praised as a solution for chronic energy shortages (Gaul 1974; Uekötter 2019) and is a prime example of how capitalism prioritizes industrial growth and profit over environmental and human safety. The possible dangers of radiation exposure within all stages of the nuclear industrial chain (mining and reprocessing of raw materials, operation of power plants, their decommissioning and storage of waste) are an incalculable burden, and harm, for future generations - especially the long-term storage of highly radioactive waste from power plants (Don't Nuke the Climate 2021; Jungk 1977; Squassoni 2021; Strohm 2011). Like other nations, Germany began its nuclear program in the 1950s with no clear plan for dealing with nuclear waste (Gaul 1974:85–88; Kirchhof 2018:148–149). Even today, no nation has an adequate, operational long-term storage facility (World Nuclear Waste Report 2019). Future generations will have to deal with this industrial legacy that we still are creating on a global scale (Holtorf and Högberg 2015; Kasperski and Storm 2020:683).

In 1977 the West German government began planning construction of a nuclear reprocessing and storage facility for highly radioactive waste in Lower Saxony, located near the border between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. This region, called Wendland, is characterized by low population density, and a salt dome near Gorleben was to be prospected to test its potential

for a nuclear waste storage facility (Kassel 2019). The dangers of storing nuclear waste in salt domes were already well known (Heroy 1957), and from its beginnings the salt dome in Gorleben was, and is still, not considered safe for permanent storage by geologists due to the lack of solid barriers that would stop gas and groundwater intrusions (Bundesgesellschaft für Endlagerung 2020; Strohm 2011:728–738).

The people of Wendland were well aware of these problems and, as soon as the facility was proposed in 1977, farmers set up tractor-demonstrations and connected to other local antinuclear initiatives in Germany. Their protest was so effective that the government pared down their plans from a reprocessing to a storage facility (Halbach and Panzer 1980). Protests against the proposed storage facility continued. In May 1980 local farmers and protesters, both young and old from across the country, came together to collectively organize a large-scale protest camp that comprised over 120 huts. They named their village the "Republic of Free Wendland." Their protest successfully stalled the salt dome drilling for 33 days and attracted nationwide attention to the nuclear question but in the end, the camp was demolished by the police and the people were evicted from the area. Shortly after the camp's removal, a test drilling site was set up in its place. This camp was only one of many antinuclear events in Germany, but it is connected not only to the protests that preceded and followed it (Ehmke 2012; Kretschmer 1988; Rucht 1988), but also to the largely forgotten, worldwide struggle against nuclear power.

Even today the nuclear facility in Gorleben has not been completed as planned due to ongoing protests by local citizens, farmers, and activists from around the country. However, an above ground intermediate nuclear storage facility was built next to the salt dome mine system (Gesellschaft für Nuklear-Service 2022) and every attempt at transporting dry cask storage containers was stalled through large-scale protests during the 1990s. These local protests represent 40 years of successful struggle against the nuclear repository. Fuelled by the catastrophic events in Chernobyl and Fukushima, Germany halted its nuclear power program and will close its last power plants in the near future. Even so, the legacy of nuclear waste continues in Germany and around the world. In 2020, a nationwide commission of experts proclaimed that the salt dome in Gorleben is not safe for nuclear waste, noting that other regions in Germany have safer geological conditions for long-term storage (Bundesgesellschaft für Endlagerung 2020:130). With this decision, the four decades of protest against the long-term storage facility at Gorleben came to a successful end, although protests against the local intermediate storage facility are ongoing. Yellow crosses are visible everywhere in the region - a shared heritage of protest, and a symbol against the transportation and storage of nuclear waste.

The 1980 Gorleben Protest Camp was a watershed moment for the Green movement, but it also represents a political struggle that should be contextualized beyond just Germany and anti-nuclear history. It was a starting point for participants to grow, imagine, and experiment with social and technological alternatives, to realize their power to change. This grassroots organized event, with its dual nature as protest against capitalism's destruction and simultaneously envisioning an alternative future, is part of the heritage of collective action and hope. The occupants were well aware of this; the title quote "You may destroy this tower and village, but you cannot destroy the power which created it." *Turm and Dorf könnt ihr zerstören, aber nicht die Kraft,*

die es schuf (translated by the author) was written on a banner hung upon a high wooden tower in the center of the village and encapsulates the idea that the power of dignity and hope cannot be stopped or destroyed.

Historical Archaeology of an Alternative Future

In order to reclaim this heritage of hope, my research used a multisource approach that integrated historical aerial photos, hundreds of pictures taken during the camp's existence, archaeological survey and excavations, and a dozen oral history interviews with former participants of the camp. A comparative analysis of historic photos contextualizes the archaeological record and provides insight into the material expression of activities in the protest village. Interviews with former participants and a policeman gathered information to reconstruct what the participants experienced during their everyday life in the camp (Dézsi 2019). Aerial images were used to reconstruct the spatial organization of the 1 ha camp, and its location in the current forest. Survey results demonstrated that despite the camp's destruction, hundreds of artifacts relating to the protest site were still scattered on the surface. While no traces of the structures survived above ground, many depressions correlated with the position of larger buildings shown in aerial photographs. Excavations showed that some features were buried under a up to 1 m-thick layer of sand and debris – an intentional machine-made action to cover all traces of the camp and prepare the area for drilling. The five units investigated a pit house in the center of the former camp (S4), an incomplete camp structure which was reused as a dump (S1) and other traces of the camp's destruction (S2 and S5). Remains of the drilling site were also present, represented by pavements and foundations for the drilling rig and defense structures (S3). Selected aspects of the archaeological record are presented here to dissect the materiality of cracks in capitalism.

During the camp's existence hundreds of photos were taken and over 638 were collected from local and private archives. Most of the photos, collected from analog and digital archives (e.g., Gorleben Archiv, Wendland Archiv, News reports), had no metadata about their origin or their creators, and were missing time stamps, which made it impossible to situate them spatially or temporally within the camp's duration. Half of them were selected for a comparative analysis to reconstruct the spatial arrangement of the buildings, material culture, and activities in the camp. Most of the photos of the camp were shot spontaneously and do not focus on people, but, instead, provide views into many camp areas. Most of the pictures (93%) were shot outside, but some show interior spaces and none were taken at night. It is possible that the hut interiors were considered too private to document but due to the lack of provenance it is just as likely that the photographers were outsiders who did not have access to interior spaces or that these types of photos were not submitted for the public archives.

The most prominent feature in all of the pictures were the buildings. At the camp's greatest extent, 105 completed buildings, 47 incomplete structures, and up to five towers were discernible from the aerials - all built in just 33 days. Two general styles can be identified – buildings dug into the sandy soil or built above ground with posts,
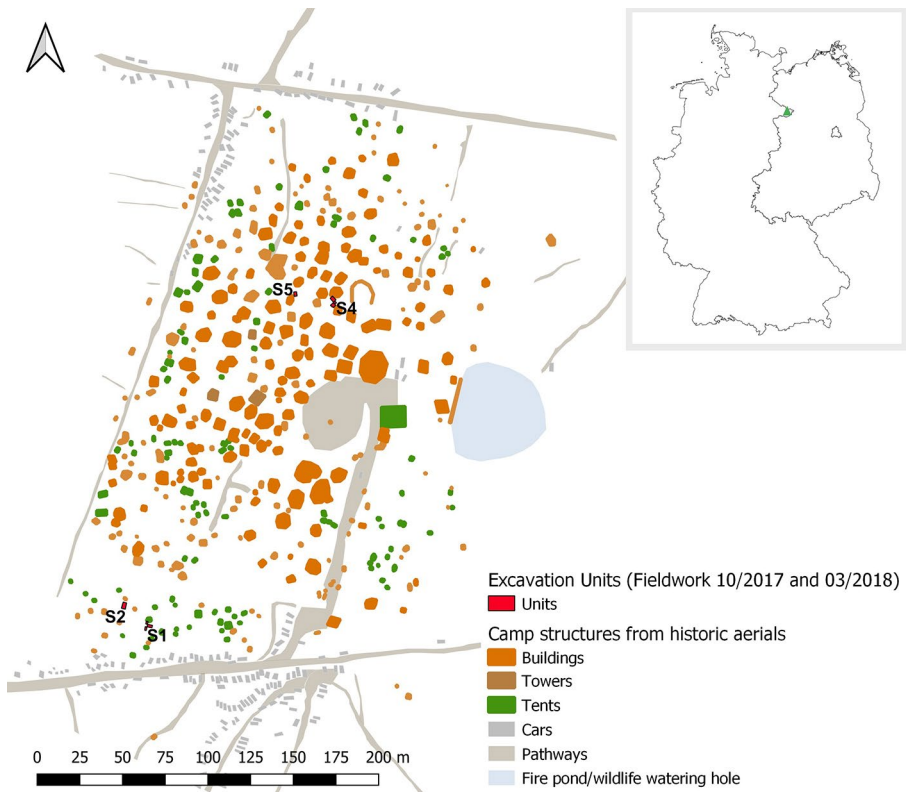
Fig. 1 Camp structures of the Republic of Free Wendland, visible from historic aerials from May 1980 and excavation units S1, S2, S3 and S4

but they were all different in construction, architecture, style, and color. The most frequently used building materials were soil, wood from the nearby forest, prefabricated timbers, tar paper, glass bottles and windows. In a georeferenced aerial of the last week of the camp, 144 structures were visible and had an average size of 23.7 m² (smallest 2.25 m², largest 217.52 m²). Most of the houses could fit more than eight people (3 m² each) who engaged in communal living. All together the range and robustness of the buildings created an impression of a village rather than a short-term camp. The protestors built to stay and created an infrastructure in the middle of nowhere – the next town was a 30-minute drive away and all everyday objects and building materials had been deliberately brought to this place.

The huts were a key visual and material part of the camp – but they also embodied a central collective or shared experience. The structures and the skills employed in building them helped the people develop a deep connection to the village, the environment, and the collective as a whole. During the eviction, people assembled in the center of the camp and, while waiting to be removed, had to endure the destruction of their huts at the hands of the police. This was a deliberate attempt to demoralize people. Oral histories testify that the people felt hurt that their huts were destroyed

Fig. 2 View south from the center of the protest village Republic of Free Wendland, May 1980 (Wendländische Filmkooperative 2020:4mins28secs)

by brute force under their eyes. This emotional distress shows the deep connection between the villagers and their village. Reducing the buildings to the function of a blockade to sabotage and stall the drilling - to a simple "being against" - does not feel appropriate. The huts became much more than defensive structures, they became a common sensual activity that connected former strangers to one another and to the site.

Shared Spaces, Collective Labor, and Alternative Energies

This ideal of a big, shared village opened up the possibility to organize everyday life differently. Instead of recreating closed households, boundaries and land property, the participants shared their spaces and infrastructure. Chores of food production and large building efforts were realized collectively.

No clear path system was established and the site's organic growth meant that any place could be reached from anywhere. The doors were not oriented in any particular direction nor did houses have clearly defined backyards. Tables for socializing were set up in shared common spaces between the huts. No fences or barricades surrounded the camp and visitors were free to stroll around. Communal infrastructure was created at specific locations within the village: collective trash collection points (differentiated into glass, paper, organics), a self-drilled water pump for washing

Fig. 3 Protesters carrying a tree together for building a defensive tower, May 1980 (Wendländische Filmkooperative 1981:78min40secs)

dishes, shared open air toilets, barrels of water for firefighting, and a big, open meeting area with a mini megalith built at its center. All these things show commonality and the sharing of space, installations, and labor.

The activities also show clear signs of mutual aid. A collective kitchen-house served food, and collective food preparation occurred outside on big tables and fireplaces. Big pots were used, and large amounts of stored and cooked food show the abundance of resources and food sharing. People also brought their own food to the camp and sometimes a food truck was available. But food was rarely eaten alone – photos show groups of people sitting and dining outside - connecting people through this aspect of everyday life.

Other examples of collective work were visible in the camp's more monumental buildings, which are represented in most often in the pictures and media reports. Over 40 m high towers, a central "megalithic" structure with large boulders, and a large central building for assembly – the house of friendship (*Freundschaftshaus*). The construction of these large-scale buildings was only possible by collective effort. Some pictures show over 40 people carrying the more than 30 m long logs which were needed for the towers, and setting them with ropes into deep pits dug by hand. Oral histories note that the use of machines powered by non-renewable energy, like chainsaws and cars, was not allowed inside the camp – indeed combustion engines are not shown in the pictures and cars were all parked outside the village. This collective work resulted in a high number of buildings and larger structures that shaped the

Fig. 4 Early experiments with solar energy providing warm water for the collective bathroom, May 1980 (Wendländische Filmkooperative 1981:83mins36sec)

appearance of the village as a collective site. None of this would be possible through the means of only a few people.

Many witnesses were proud of their creativity and labor. The buzz of the village, the soundscape of hammering and sawing, are well remembered. Interviews stressed experiments with alternative energies like solar and wind, which predated widespread commercial use. These different methods for energy production were experimental. For example, hot days were used to heat stored water in hoses on the roofs for the collective showers, sun reflectors could heat up food, and a small amount of electricity was generated by wind turbines. This early experimentation with, and usage of, renewables at the camp inspired the participants to envision the possibility of alternative and decentralized energy production at a larger scale.

Big houses, and places in the centers of settlements, are usually interpreted by archaeologists as places of wealth, power, and important people. This was the case here too – but it was a place of celebrating and collective ruling. The "house of friendship" was a place dedicated to collective decision making in a council system – which was inspired by affinity group systems of the US-American antinuclear movement at Seabrook. Everyone argued and made decisions together and there were many problems and conflicts. For example, members discussed whether the camp was to be defended by force or without violence and if women-only spaces were needed in the camp. In the end, they found ways to live with the contradictions inside

the community, but also set clear boundaries as neo-Nazis were expelled and advocates for militant direct action left the camp the night before the eviction.

Networks of Solidarity and Transformed Objects

Examining the flow of goods and where the materials used in the camp originated highlights the camp's embeddedness in social networks that were shaped by solidarity. A closer look at the things used at the camp reinforce that ideas of recycling and improvising were present, rejecting the concept of single-use products.

Most of the 6,480 small finds visible in the pictures taken during the site´s active use, and the 3,043 artifacts recovered from the excavations, had been bought somewhere outside of the camp, including the many alcohol and lemonade bottles, kitchen and table wares, as well as building materials (nails, tar paper), tools, and musical instruments. Some of these objects were put to different uses than their intended purpose: material from Trench S4 included oven parts, plastic packages, and cups which were reused as painting equipment. Sherds of transparent glass bottles were abundant and could reflect reuse of glass bottles filled with water for insulated building material, a technique visible in some photographs and mentioned in interviews. Cut tires and plastic containers were used to feed chickens. Most of the objects were bought from the market but some of these commodities were given new purpose in the daily experimentation of building huts and creating new routines.

Other objects of the camp were made on-site out of wood from the nearby forest. The huts, furniture, such as tables, seats, and see-saws, as well as tools, were made from unprocessed wood. Additional building material for the huts, including the pit house in Trench S4, were sourced from materials thrown away on local construction sites, such as old windows and cut timbers. Common discarded materials were given new use and value in the protest village.

The origin and flows of the materials and resources used and consumed in the village reflect the social relations and networks needed for the realization of the camp. The protesters partly created things themselves, using the woods, soil, and landscape to create buildings. But the whole endeavor mainly depended on the outside – they could not grow their own food or generate finances to buy materials needed in the camp. The objects recovered from the pit house, such as packaging for food products (dairy products) – dateable with their best-before dates – were bought before or during the camp's existence and were consumed at the site. But even this represents a difference since it varies from capitalism's normal commodity flows. All the resources came from locals, farmers, and visitors who supported the camp, providing a constant flow of goods from local stores and farms. This made it possible for the camp to exist for five weeks, connecting the camp's participants to a far away network of solidarity. The regular transportation of food and materials, like straw and water, was carried out by area farmers who also transported trash and refuse out of the camp. Local residents and companies often dropped off food and even livestock. In this, the lines between protestors, locals, and visitors became blurred. All groups were part of this political protest and created a short-term utopia as the witnesses termed it (e.g., Wendländische Filmkooperative 2020).

The workforce itself was provided freely. Everyday people could choose to work on their huts, participate in collective events or tasks, or not work at all. What is striking in the photos is that many people are not doing any "productive" activities. Tasks such as cooking, building and transportation are depicted, but most people are shown sitting and talking together in small groups, sleeping in the sun, reading books, dancing, singing, and making music.

The excavated pit house (S4) with a diameter of 3×3 m, was found with its ground floor and some of its furniture still intact, covered only by the layers of bulldozed debris. These in situ remains reflect the activities which are visible in the photos and show that even the hut interiors were places where people socialized, playing cards (card set), drinking alcohol (White Horse whiskey), reading satirical magazines by candlelight (Titanic, candles), and undertaking self-care (hand mirror), all in a home carved into the sand that had a strong wooden structure with eight post holes, furniture (shelf), and even a sleeping area (two mattresses).

Apparently, more labor was available than needed, and as a result many people were free to enjoy themselves, create contacts, and form friendships. The free time was also used to experiment with technologies and discuss political ideas, expressed in signs, banners, and cultural events. They also spent their time making the site beautiful. Little gardens, flowers, and stone arrangements show that although the camp grew chaotically, it was tended and well organized.

Signs of Protest Heritage

This research has shown that in all lines of inquiry, the creation of a community, socializing, and enjoyment was much more prevalent than specific manifestations of protest or resistance. There are no lock-ons (Fisher 2008), barricades, trenches, or any other intended restrictions of spatial movement evident. The site's open layout and the absence of any barriers shows that no defensive strategy was employed or needed – only the towers were specifically built to delay the eviction. An illegal radio station was set up on one of the towers to broadcast the eviction. The overall absence of militant resistance fits the oral histories that describe the camp as a peaceful protest, distanced from West German terrorism in the 1980s.

The only direct clue that this was a protest camp were the ocean of flags and the dozens of banners (see Fig. 2). Of course, people protested and argued against nuclear power and weapons, and mockups of nuclear barrels are visible. Yet it is striking that the symbol of the jokingly proclaimed "Republic of Free Wendland" (a sun created from a circle in the center and eight triangles in orange on a green background) are accompanied by equally common symbols of feminism and queerness (woman-sign and rainbows).

Interestingly, the council system employed at the house of friendship was inspired by the 1977 Seabrook antinuclear protests in the US (Halbach and Panzer 1980:153). Similarly, a stone arrangement of the 1980s antinuclear protest site Nevada Peace Camp, recorded in Beck et al. (2007:315), can be identified as the symbol of the Republic of Free Wendland. This highlights the international connections of the camp to the wider global antinuclear struggle. Other signs connect the protest to historic

events – a banner by farmers cites the peasant revolt of 1502 "take justice 1502-1979" (translated by author), while others refer to the non-action and silence of German citizens during the Nazi period. A drawing of an exploding power plants asks, "do you want to tell your children a second time you knew nothing about it?" (translated by author). The protesters clearly connected their protest to the wider heritage of resistance.

The Power, Which Can't be Taken Away

Taken together, the organization of the everyday life of the camp, with its communal spaces, collective labor, and decision-making, can hardly be framed solely as a site of negation or protest *against* nuclear power. The huts and towers were obviously part of public direct action to blockade and stall the test drilling. But out of this "no" or in the setting of the no, there was a possibility to experiment with nonalienated labor and energy production - a protest *for* and a demonstration that an alternative future is possible.

After 40 years, this collective experience not only endured in the photographs and few material traces, but also in many oral testimonies. For most of the witnesses, this event was their first experience with political agency - the ability to change their surroundings, engage in politics. They successfully turned the apparent danger of nuclear power into a public concern. The experience of protest, the victory of preventing the planned nuclear facility with a reprocessing plant in Wendland and stopping the national nuclear energy plan, shaped the lives and political consciousness of many of the participants in ways that extended far beyond the occupation of the village. Even today, former protesters are very proud of their involvement and said that they learned they no longer have to obey authorities, parents, and even state politics:

> It was fascinating what came together. On the one hand the confrontation with nuclear power. And on the other hand, the search for how one could live differently, how it's possible to organize your life differently. (interview 1, translated by author)

They sometimes reflected on their ability to experience a protest *for* an alternative future made possible by the *"spirit"* of the camp:

> I'm hearing this from many other people. It was not just about nuclear power; it was a place for setting out. A place to think about utopias. (interview 2, translated by author)

From that point in their biographies many started to change their own life, and that of others – they went into politics (green movement), built organic farms, established companies for alternative energies, or even communes. For many, this crack in capitalism that this camp represented became a special turning point and reference in their biographies. But the significance of the actual physical place of the former

camp has changed for the participants; it has become deterritorialized as they carried the village and social networks in their heart and spirit.

The banner that hung on the central tower of the camp had a quite representative message: "You may destroy this village, but you cannot destroy the power which created it!." This slogan explains why no defensive structures were created to prevent the eviction. I would argue that the power the banner refers to is the dignity which Holloway suggests is located at the center of the cracks, that something which cannot be taken away. It seems that the protesters were aware that the materiality of their camp was not needed for the long-term, but the experiences entailed by creating it would stay as long as the power was there.

This is the point where all the former protest sites connect and why they keep appearing, regardless of time and size. Here, protest against nuclear power was a central starting point, but there was an urge to experiment and show that it is possible to "do different." It is a crack that shows the "doing-beyond" and the action after the "no." To live, to create, to produce together and share this experience openly while being situated inside of capitalism. But this is where we start. Not to think in the totalizing terms of either capitalism or communism, but to see and appreciate the relationships created and experiences gathered during the ambivalent process of figuring out how to do things different. This "figuring it out" was itself an experience of empowerment. The protest site shows that all the things needed to communize were already there. No special things were needed to express protest and experiment with new ways of living; the objects you would find in any household or workplace from the everyday life of the 1980s were enough.

Wrongly Aimed Concealment

The experience and lessons learned are still alive with the contemporary witnesses. These lessons have been transmitted across generations after 40 years of struggle and are seen in the still vibrant, antinuclear protest in Wendland. The site itself has lost its prominence to more recent sites of antinuclear protest in the region, but it still holds an appeal and fosters interest. Artifacts dating to the 1990s onwards found during the survey (such as alcohol bottles and cans, food packaging, a rubber balloon, and a film canister) are probably connected to protest revival-events on anniversaries, and to tourists. But the processes of eviction, destruction, building the drilling site and dismantling it afterwards, have reshaped the area in a way that has had a profound effect on former witnesses and people who want to relate to the place today.

Their alienation from the camp may stem from a power technology called "concealment." In Holocaust studies, concealment is defined as an intentional act to make events invisible, to get rid of traces of crimes (Stury Colls 2015:235,245) – like intentionally destroying traces of mass graves and concentration camps (González-Ruibal 2016:156; Stury Colls 2015:246; Theune 2013:247), covering up concentration camp sites with layers of sand and rubble and obscuring them even more by and systematically planting trees (Sturdy Colls 2015:247, 249).

Yet concealment can also be aimed at making a political enemy invisible. The deliberate destruction of traces of defiance could explain why cracks and their poten-

tial for inspiration are so often invisible. For example, homeless camps (Howe, this volume), squads (Dézsi and Schlingmann 2017), street manifestations, or self-organized factories are cleared out, demolished, or cleaned up. Graffiti, or other remnants, are rarely kept on the streets and other residues are not visible or relatable anymore. At the site of antinuclear protest at the Nevada Peace Camp, the whitewashing of the historic protest graffiti was lamented (Beck et al. 2011:107). A 2019 visit by the author and members of the Nevada Desert Experience showed that many stone arrangements of the historic site are being destroyed, like the iconic shadow children, and other lithic structures were intentionally overrun by motorcycle tracks.

The pit house (S4) in Wendland exhibits similar traces of concealment. Alternating layers of debris from other huts and clean sand, up to 1 m deep, covered the features of the village. The whole area was bulldozed and flattened – even traces of bulldozer-tracks were visible in between the layers. A lot of effort was put into moving vast amounts of soil to cover up the site, partly in preparation for the drilling after the camp's removal. After coring, the area was planted with pine trees which contrast sharply with the well-tendered forest in the neighboring land parcels. The trees over the former camp were planted too closely together, hindering healthy growth and the possibility of achieving an economic surplus from logging (Eric Drake, pers. comm.). Many trees died because of the lack of sunlight. Another effect of this deliberate flattening and planting of the area is that any topographic resemblances was lost, and the visibility of the site was blocked by the density of the mostly dead trees.

The ability to see, interact with, or relate to traces of alternative activities vanished with the repurposing of the area. The local result was that some of the witnesses were unable to locate the site of the camp. Future generations are alienated from this place and the alternative lives that the residents worked hard to create has been erased. The intentional concealment reinforces ideas that there are no viable alternatives and serves as a disconnect from the alternative activities or "other-doing" of people. The concealment can be seen as a technology of power and control that is very visible in the archaeological record of Wendland, and at other sites of protest too.

It could be argued that the destruction of the village and its concealment could prevent a wider opening of the crack. But at Gorleben the power that "won't be destroyed" - the memories, knotted bonds and hopes that moved the protesters - survived and could not be concealed as easily with sand and rubble. In addition, the archaeological intervention was itself an act of deconcealment that, once again, made the site and its antinuclear cause visible. While well known in the region, the survey, excavation, public discussion, and exhibition of the findings created nationwide public attention. Over 50 news, TV, and radio pieces, and a documentary (Wendländische Filmkooperative 2020) reported on the archaeology and the camp's story which opened up a discussion on its heritage status. But more importantly, it created a condition for the possibility of sensual remembrance of the site through its relocalization, public dissemination of the material culture, and links to present causes.

Conclusion: Beyond Protesting Nukes and Nuclear Waste – Radical Hope

> How can you miss something that is not yet there? Perhaps because it is already emerging in outlines. Perhaps because these outlines reveal a form in which the violence of the past would be overcome. Perhaps because each life, which touches the borders of the material rule, awakens an inkling of greater freedom and connectedness. The second longing that guides the revolution for life thus misses what it cannot yet know: a world in which we nurture rather than dominate, share rather than exploit, regenerate rather than exhaust, and save rather than destroy. Everything we need is there. (Redecker 2020:287, translated by author).

The Republic of Free Wendland reminds us of a problem that will stay prevalent for the future in capitalism and beyond: we still do not have a solution for the nuclear waste we have accumulated, stored in interim-storage facilities around the world (World Nuclear Waste Report 2019). This question, foregrounded at the camp and in current anti-nuclear protests (e.g., Don't Nuke the Climate 2021), will accompany and affect future generations.

Despite having been destroyed during the "time to destroy," sites like the village in Gorleben provide inspiration and give us the ability to grasp that alternative actions and solutions are neither impossible, nor require specialist equipment and materials – everything we need is there. It reminds us how cracks in capitalism are easily opened, even in remote areas, can be widened, and have a long lasting impact. Conceptualizing the site in Gorleben only as a site of protest *against* something such as nuclear power is true only in the simplest terms. It does not reflect what happened and how this experiment shaped bonds of solidarity and understanding that alternatives were possible. This dual nature of the cracks– protesting *against*, but also experiencing other ways of doing or protesting *for* a better future for all generations to come– and its material creation through mutual aid, collective action, experimentation, and openness is reflected in the material culture of the camp. It reminds us of what *is* possible, even under the conditions of the dictate of abstract labor, while overflowing its order and restrictions. The site was destroyed and perhaps deliberately concealed, but archaeology provides an act of deconcealment that makes those cracks visible again. Such experiments will emerge, and may be destroyed and buried, but the power and hope for an alternative future, focused upon dignity, is our heritage and one that cannot be taken away.

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