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"Infrastrukturproteste" and the German Autonomous Movement: The Struggle Against "Startbahn-West" and Logistics in the Late 20th Century

On the morning of November 2nd, 1981 a small makeshift village bordering the construction site for a new runway at the Frankfurt International Airport was brutally cleared by a large contingent of German police. The village consisted of a vast assortment of politically engaged citizens including disgruntled farmers, middle-class families, and veterans of the German left. While the police were successful in their eviction of the communal village, they unwittingly emboldened a movement that would soon grow beyond the regional politics of Frankfurt.

This project will be an attempt to narrate a brief history of the autonomous movement in Germany, focusing on their protests against infrastructural projects. It represents a synthesis of social history and the discourses of Science and Technology Studies to present multiple arguments on the ways that social movements contest logistical development. My focus will be placed upon the movement to stop the construction of Runway 18 West ("Startbahn-West") at the Frankfurt International Airport between 1980 and 1987. This construction process and the movement to stop it emerged at a time in the twentieth century that saw the inception of logistical systems en masse—in the form of large shipping ports, railyards, and distribution centers. Countering the story of economic recovery in the 1970s that prioritizes the emergence of financial systems as key to economic growth, I would like to turn our attention to these new technologies devoted to circulating commodities. Thus, this is an attempt to read the "Keine Startbahn-West" ("No Runway West") movement as an attempt to stop the construction of new technologies of capitalist accumulation—and forge new ways of living while doing so. This project will be accomplished by beginning with a narration of common theories of post-World

War II economic development. In particular—critiquing narratives that coalesced around an analysis of neoliberalism and financialization. To counter this hegemonic understanding of economic history, I will propose that we instead turn our attention to narratives of logistical development, taking great care to note its emergence following the global economic crises of the 1970s. This will be paired with a more focused analysis of the position of the airport within modern systems of capital accumulation, focusing in particular on the centrality of securitization for the proper functioning of airports. I will then turn to a history of the formation of the autonomous movement in Germany that draws out their roots in the postwar communist movements of Italy, and the various student movements of '68. Paying particular attention to the movements against nuclear power and the strategy of occupation that emerged from them. Following this section, I will focus more specifically on narrating the particular movement to stop the construction of Startbahn-West in Frankfurt. In this section I will take great care to note how autonomy was expressed in this particular movement. I will conclude with an analysis of the Startbahn-West movement influenced by contemporary writings on anti-logistical social movements and broader histories of land defense.

Neoliberalism as a descriptor of the contemporary status of political economy has become dominant over the past decades, widely accepted by both critics and supporters of the attributes of society that it hopes to describe. Though despite its dominance, it seems to have become too wide in its definitions to continue to serve an analytical purpose. With articles arguing that neoliberalism can be found "at the root of all our problems"[1], it is worthwhile to draw out the main attributes of the neoliberal turn, before turning to a critique regarding the efficacy of neoliberalism as a term and story of economic change. David Harvey is an excellent

[1] George Monbiot, "Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems," *The Guardian*, April 15, 2016.

writer to use to define the discourses that surround arguments regarding neoliberalism as he was an early proponent of the term. By laying out his general argument and historicization in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, I will point out that his analysis is missing a crucial argument regarding the materiality of the shifts that get subsumed under the label "neoliberal". By placing Harvey's argument within histories of logistics and heterodox historians of post-World War II economic transitions, a clearer story of the 1970s begins to coalesce.

Harvey begins his history of the neoliberal turn in the immediate aftermath of World War II when, as he argues, the global capitalist class were heavily invested in stopping a resurgence in the movements that had threatened their hegemony in the early 20th century. He defines that states shifted to a system of "embedded liberalism", characterized by a leading ideology of state-led development, full employment, and a general compromise between capital and the working class[2]. As the 1960s came to a close, Harvey argues that the consensus of post-war liberalism was beginning to crumble under the pressures of increased inflation and skyrocketing unemployment. He also notes that these trends were exacerbated by the downfall of fixed monetary regimes with the failure of Bretton Woods. In the wake of this moment of economic collapse, Harvey lays out two possible scenarios for the recovery of capital. Either states could continue on with state-led development, or they could turn to "liberating corporate business power and re-establishing market freedoms"[3]. The latter would prove to be the path taken, though Harvey is quick to note that this was in no way preordained, arguing that neoliberalism's rise to hegemony is an example of the contingency of historical development. Harvey would like the reader to focus on one attribute of this transition: the way in which the crisis of capital accumulation threatened the political and economic power of the "economic elite and ruling

[2] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11.
[3] Harvey, *A Brief History*, 13.

classes everywhere"[4]. He supports this claim with data regarding the shifts in share of wealth held by the top economic shareholders over the 20th century. It is with this key feature of the economic transition that Harvey puts forth two possible interpretations of neoliberalism: one utopian, and one political. The utopian view of neoliberalism interprets it as primarily a grand theoretical project of reorganization, while the political envisions it as a project to restore capital accumulation and the economic power of elites. Harvey argues in favor of the political view, with one large caveat, writing that neoliberalism "has not been very effective in revitalizing global capital accumulation"[5].

Harvey continues tracking the emergence of neoliberal theory by highlighting some of the key figures of early neoliberal thought and those who were at the forefront of the application of these theories. Thus, he traces the founding moment of neoliberalism to be the meeting of the Mont Pelerin Society in 1947, in which prominent thinkers such as Milton Friedman, Fredrich von Hayek, and Karl Popper would meet to diagnose the ills of post-war capitalism[6]. Harvey then goes on to argue that it was through the financing and boosting of prominent corporate figures—as well as the vast institutional support, most famously through Friedman and the "Chicago Boys". Eventually these ideas are taken up by Western states (particularly, for Harvey, by Marget Thatcher in the U.K. and Paul Volker in the U.S.) signalling the supremacy of neoliberalism[7].The application of neoliberalism takes many forms, but for Harvey can be exemplified by a few key moves: deregulation and the privatization of state-run enterprises, the mass break up of unions, a shift to a monetarist fiscal policy to control inflation, and general corporate tax cuts[8]. Finally, Harvey argues that neoliberalism was able to become dominant

[4] Harvey, *A Brief History*, 15.
[5] Ibid, 19.
[6] Ibid, 20.
[7] Ibid, 23.
[8] Ibid, 26.

globally due to the systems in which funds were recycled through investment firms in the metropole to finance extractive practices in the periphery. In tandem, he argues that similar practices were deployed by institutions such as the IMF and World Bank; in which they would offer predatory loans to peripheral nations in exchange for power over fiscal arrangements[9].

Throughout Harvey's analysis he remains focused on the ways neoliberalism proliferated through the financial systems of global governments; painting the history of this financialization as a collection of somewhat random moments in the attempt to restore capital accumulation. While Harvey adequately supports his overarching argument that the attributes of what he terms neoliberalism have greatly affected the social landscape of the world, a key aspect of the story seems to be missing. Namely a materialist account of what was occurring within the sphere of the productive forces of capitalism.

Stephen Collier in *Post-Soviet Social: Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics* is also questioning the efficacy of naming the economic shifts of the past decades as "neoliberalism". Beginning with the work of Harvey and his contemporary, Naomi Klein, he questions whether it is right for them to present a vision of neoliberalism that is necessarily totalizing in its scope. While he tacitly accepts the general premise of their historicization, he wonders whether or not the economic transitions of the immediate post-Soviet moment can be said to be fruitfully connected to the larger project of neoliberalism[10]. My critique of Harvey runs along similar lines—but breaks off from his in that the project of logistics, and the massive network of infrastructure it requires, is almost never connected to the reforms of neoliberal thinkers. It is in this massive erasure that I will call into question whether an analysis of the economic transitions of the 1970s and 80s that ignores the history of logistics can be said to

[9] Harvey, *A Brief History,* 29.
[10] Stephen Collier, *Post-Soviet Social: Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 13.

present any semblance of a total history of capitalism. Within this problematic, I question the hegemonic status histories of "neoliberalism" have assumed in describing the political economy of the postwar moment. In this I am not interested in offering logistics as a replacement analytic, but rather I aim to shed light on an underrepresented aspect of the historical moment in question.

Deborah Cowen's *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade*, provides an excellent overview of the rise of logistics as arguably the primary concern of global capitalists following World War II. She tracks the emergence of logistical technology and knowledge as being in military campaigns, with a history that is difficult to date—as Cowen cites writings on logistics as early as the Roman empire[11]. Logistics remained a military enterprise until the late 1950s and early 60s, as management experts began pointing to physical distribution as one of the lone sectors of potential value that remained untapped. Cowen also notes that it was the congruence of residual studies of military logistical planning following World War II and burgeoning advancements in computational technology that paved the way for the "revolution in logistics" of the 1960s[12]. Firms began shifting away from a model of business calculus that revolved around the minimization of costs, but instead one that "emphasized value added" through logistical operations[13]. Much of this relied on the new quantitative power of firms that began employing total cost analyses that allowed them to track flows of costs/profits at nearly every level of production and circulation. Cowen offers this succinct summary of early innovations:

> "Logistics was transformed from a least-cost analysis of discrete segments of distribution into a science of value added through circulatory systems. The

[11] Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 27.
[12] Cowen, *Life of Logistics*, 33.
[13] Ibid, 34.

> revolution in logistics [...] thereby put the entire spatial organization of the firm, including the location of factories and warehouses, directly into question. From this point onward, logistics became a "science of systems," and its more circumscribed concern with distribution transformed into an umbrella science of spatial management."[14]

This shift to a system of intense management was predicated on physical and social technologies—both of which broke down the historically strong labor movements of shipping industries. The physical technologies that logistics relied on came in the form of massive shipping containers that found their roots in the military technologies of Vietnam, while social technologies came in the form of mass deregulation. In many ways, Cowen's analysis of deregulation is somewhat similar to Harvey's, though she offers a much more nuanced analysis of how specific sectors were affected. She notes that in rail-oriented industries union levels and wages stayed consistent yet saw a massive decrease in employment numbers; whereas in the airline and trucking industries, unionization plummeted while the workforce increased[15]. This attack on organized labor was exasperated by new techniques deployed in the 1970s/80s: intermodal shipping. Intermodalist shipping essentially refers to a new practice in which goods were circulated by multiple vehicles (barge to plane, to truck, etc.)[16]. Cowen points out the connection between intermodal shipping techniques and the military history of logistics, arguing that the military development of the pallet in the 1930s was the first attempt at developing intermodal containers; it was the development of the shipping container for use in Vietnam that would make mass intermodalism possible[17]. She also links these developments to the more

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[14] Cowen, *Life of Logistics*, 40.
[15] Ibid, 43.
[16] Ibid, 44.
[17] Ibid, 45.

abstract shift in shipping from centering around national bodies to the globalized routes of contemporary logistics. It is through this point that she touches on the spatial politics of these logistical operations, a point worth focusing on.

Cowen argues that through the new spatial calculations that logistics entails, the experience of space in capitalism has fundamentally changed. She argues that due to the ways logistics introduced the notion that distribution was inherently linked to production and circulation, biological and organic metaphors for the organization of space were common[18]. This was predominantly found in the emergent field of systems theory, and was influential in fostering the conception of the entire logistics system as a system of flows; Cowen argues, "Systems theory thus posits a biological imperative to flow, wherein disruption becomes a threat to the very *resilience* of the system."[19] While Cowen cites Henri Lefebvre's triadic conception of space here in reference to the scientific representation of space, his arguments regarding spatial flows are also important to note. In his essay, "The Worldwide and the Planetary", Lefebvre argues that the double division of technical and social labor that is present in Marx's writings on industrial production is increasingly being extended to global spatiality[20]. He writes that the "procedures of planning and semi-planning [...] give way to *spatial planning*. Spatial planning deals with *flows*: of energy, raw materials, money, the labor force, various goods, mixtures of people and things, signs, information and understanding, symbols, capital, etc. It endeavors to connect and coordinate these multiple flows in space."[21] Later, in a passage that seems quite prescient, Lefebvre argues that one of the ultimate contradictions of space (and therefore of political

[18] Cowen, *Life of Logistics*, 48.
[19] Ibid, 48.
[20] Henri Lefebvre, *State, Space, World*, trans. Neil Brenner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 201.
[21] Lefebvre, *State,* 201.

economy writ large) is that between flows and "fixities"[22]; between the endless circulatory technologies and the centers that facilitate their production and management. As I highlight later, this contradiction between fixities and flows are highly important for the securitization of logistical infrastructure and resistance against it.

Cowen, finally notes that the military past of logistics is still quite present in the colonial metaphors (she cites discussions of "dark continents" and "last frontiers") of contemporary management scientists[23]. She argues of the significance as it relates to the shift away from the territorialist nation state of colonialism to supranational "geo-economic" space[24]. This shift entails a reevaluation of territorial control; Cowen argues that control over territories becomes less necessary as the constant flow of goods is favored over anything. This necessitates a vast overhaul of spatial representation and practice. She argues that geo-economics "does not operate 'beyond space' or after geography'; rather geo-economic political geographies transform rather than dispense with spatial calculation, and the work of logistics is concerned precisely with the production of space beyond territory."[25] While Cowen's arguments are essential in showcasing the importance of logistics for shifts in capital accumulation of the 1970s, I would like to turn to the work of Jasper Bernes, who is more forceful in his writing against Harvey's conception of neoliberalism.

Jasper Bernes', "Logistics, Counterlogistics, and the Communist Prospect", narrates a similar history of circulation and the rise of logistics to Cowen's—though the differences in his analysis are useful to highlight. Additionally, he specifically deploys logistics against a history of financialization that is particularly relevant in the discussion regarding Harvey's neoliberalism

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[22] Lefebvre, *State,* 202.
[23] Cowen, *Life of Logistics*, 50.
[24] Ibid, 51.
[25] Ibid.

thesis. Finally, Bernes is vaguely writing within the tradition of the autonomen—making explicit references to the history of ultra leftist political theory. This aspect of his writing will be deployed later in the essay as a way to analyze the Startbahn-West movement.

Bernes begins his account by focusing on the blockades of the port of Oakland in 2011 in connection to the ongoing Occupy movement and labor struggles of the ILWU (dockworkers) union. He argues that despite what may seem like a contradiction between the strategy of the strike and the blockade (and the motives of a militant labor movement and those of often unemployed blockaders) there was an intuitive sense of the centrality of the Oakland port in both Northern California's economy and the world[26]. Bernes argues that this intuitive sense of logistics and circulation has often been mobilized to write theories of a newly birthed globalized capitalism, yet he is quick to point out that capitalism has always necessarily been a global enterprise: "emerging from within the blood-soaked matrix of the mercantile expansion of the early modern period. Later on, its factories and mills were fed by planetary flows of raw material, and produce for a market which is likewise international."[27] Bernes—in a more forthcoming manner than Cowen—argues that the logistical revolution that characterizes nearly all of modern capitalism is not so much defined by its speed and global reach, but rather its ability to combine movements of production, consumption, and circulation.

This is what makes Just-In-Time (JIT) manufacturing so central to Bernes' thesis, it was this innovation in management sciences—which is characterized by the constant movement of disaggregate components of commodities— that allowed manufacturers to combine the movements of production and circulation[28]. Bernes argues that JIT techniques have led to a shaft

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[26] Jasper Bernes, "Logistics, Counterlogistics and the Communist Prospect," Endnotes 3, (September 2013).
[27] Bernes, *Logistics*, sec. 3, para. 1.
[28] Ibid.

towards production models in which stock is "pulled" according to the statistics of retailers (rather than "pushed" from factory to market)—aiming for an inventory that is both lean, but never fully exhausted. These innovations in the field of management all point to the features of logistics that are truly novel in the history of capitalism. That is, that logistics is revolutionary in the way that it works as a new medium to collect and distribute knowledge about nearly every aspect of production and circulation. Bernes argues that logistics' true innovation is "the active power to coordinate and choreograph, the power to conjoin and split flows; to speed up and slow down; to change the type of commodity produced and its origin and destination point; and, finally, to collect and distribute knowledge about the production, movement and sale of commodities as they stream across the grid."[29] This aspect can be compared to Cowen's arguments regarding logistics' continuation of Taylorist production models. She cites Frederick Taylor's motion studies, where he analyzed workers movements in the context of the factory, before breaking down their labor activities into component parts to be optimized. Cowen argues that this is happening on a larger scale in the context of logistical technologies, with the advent of "process mapping"[30]. This interscalar mode of analysis simultaneously tracks the actions of workers, transport vehicles in intermodal systems, and productive technologies, allowing for a complete view of the productive-circulatory system. Finally, Cowen notes that this information is plugged into Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems that allows for real-time flows of circulatory information[31]. Bernes further relates this definition of logistics as one that revolves around the highly organized control of both infrastructure and information, to Deleuze and Guatarri's "hydraulic capitalism" wherein, "surplus value results not so much from the irreversible transformation of worked matter but from the conjunction of one flow (money)

[29] Bernes, *Logistics*, sec. 3, para. 4.
[30] Cowen, *Life of Logistics*, 109.
[31] Ibid, 110.

with another (labour)."[32] This picture of capitalism and its infrastructure as revolving around constant flows is helpful in understanding the ways that logistics reaches beyond the formal labor process and into the realm of social reproduction.

Bernes' account of how logistics came to arise as the guiding logic of accumulation in the 1970s is important for his own political goals, but it is also fruitful for a rejoinder to the typical story of neoliberalism, as represented by David Harvey. Bernes argues that logistics was one solution to the economic crises of the 1970s' "long downturn"[33] in which value extracted from improvements in industrial processes began to dwindle. One solution to this crisis, according to Bernes (and espoused by Harvey and those that present normative histories of neoliberalism) was a vast inflow of capital to financial and real estate markets. While Bernes doesn't dispute that this process took place, he does argue that accounts that focus on this aspect of capital's restructuring leave out the crucial background of logistical development. Relating these two movements he writes, "The shipping container and the commodity future were thus complementary technical innovations"[34]. These developments all pointed towards a logistical capitalism that was more agile in its accumulative strategies. Bernes then finally connects this agility to the military history of logistics, already previewed by the Cowen text. He also notes that some of the most important logistical technologies (the shipping container and RFID tags that allow for the tracking of merchandise) were originally conceived of by U.S. military research institutes. Through this history, Bernes argues that logistics in the contemporary sense should be confronted as a "war by means of trade"[35], highlighting the offensive capacities of logistics to saturate and control markets through maximalist productive capacities (something

[32] Bernes, *Logistics,* sec. 3, para. 5.
[33] Ibid, sec. 4, para. 2.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid, sec. 4, para, 5.

harkens back to Cowen's use of "geo-economics"). Though he also argues that logistics bears a defensive toolkit, one that is characterized by an intense need for stability and adaptability, a need that Bernes predicts leading to logistics largely becoming a science of "risk management and crisis mitigation"[36] as further crises unfold. It is at this moment that logistics begins to reveal itself as a highly nervous technology of planning, with this contradiction between its offensive and defensive mandates mapping onto Lefebvre's ultimate contradiction of spatial flows and fixities.

Mark Salter's chapters in *Politics at the Airport*, are excellent analyses of the entanglements and expressions of political and economic power of airports and are quite useful to read alongside Jasper Bernes' work on logistics. Salter's work is also useful as it provides a more specific context to the reasons for redevelopment at the airport in Frankfurt. His introduction to the book provides a more theoretical engagement with airports as expressions of power, while his chapter, "The Global Airport: Managing Space, Speed, and Security", is a longer history of how airports have transformed and expanded in the past decades. Both of these sections are important in relation to Bernes as they provide anecdotal evidence of a very specific instance of the circulatory and/or logistical turn of capitalism that took place in the 1970s. While his writing mainly focuses on the time period of the late 1980s to the changes to airports that occurred following 9/11, he pays careful attention to how airports fundamentally changed following the economic crises of the 1970s. His work also grapples with questions of security and how the security practices of the aviation industry have begun to creep outside the clear boundaries of airports in recent decades. He argues that this is in response to the changing nature of attacks on airports in the decades since the 1960s. Situating the confrontations at Startbahn-West within this timeline is helpful in understanding the tumultuous change airports

[36] Bernes, *Logistics*, sec. 4, para. 5.

were going through in the 1970s and 80s, and how this might be a reflection of larger currents within capitalism.

In his introduction, Salter takes great care to note the ways in which airports often escape conventional mappings of state, society, and the market; instead he would like to introduce two methodological concepts as a more interesting way of studying airports—governmentality and assemblage. Salter argues that airports have become increasingly important as an arena in which states are able to experiment with and practice new modes of governance, as they are situated as spaces of mobility with intense focus on surveillance and security[37]. Paying debt to Foucault, Salter would like to turn away from studying airports as instances of a particular governmental apparatus, and instead focus on how governmentality is expressed in the actions and conduct of airports. While he notes that airports are nowhere close to the totalizing institutions that Foucault studied (such as the prison or the clinic), he argues that airports introduce and problematize questions of mobility, and how those networks of mobility are controlled[38]. Salter, taking cues from the work of Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, turns towards the question of how airports might be seen as an assemblage of power and/or control. He argues that in an attempt to escape the "state/society dualism that has so dogged the social sciences" that it is crucial to undertake an analysis of airports that views them as a "messy system of systems, embedded within numerous networks"[39]. This method of analysis is fruitful as it allows us to hold multiple objects of study at once, and look at the ways they overlap and are implicated in each other. Salter writes, "In contrast with the governmentality approach, which assumes a common impulse to govern and to render certain problems amenable to government, the assemblage theory simply takes the

[37] Mark B. Salter, "Introduction: Airport Assemblage," in *Politics At The Airport*, ed. Mark B. Salter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xi.
[38] Salter, "Airport Assemblage," xii.
[39] Ibid, xiii.

resultant field of human activity as the object of study."[40] This approach allows us to look at the ways in which emergent fields of logistics affected the development of the Frankfurt airport, through the connection of large ocean freight networks to airline cargo routes. It also encourages a much more expansive view of the interactions between airports, urban spaces, and populations, something exemplified in the confrontation between the protestors and politicians of Frankfurt—and how that confrontation contributed to a reconceptualization of security and surveillance at the airport.

In "The Global Airport: Managing Space, Speed, and Security", Mark Salter examines the effects that the explosion of both passenger and cargo flights have had on the larger network of airports. He argues that since World War II there has been steady growth in the amount of airline traffic, with exponential growth occurring in the past few decades. Coupled with massive changes in the technology of aviation (the introduction of wide body jets in the 1970s, and larger cargo planes in recent years) has prompted a near continuous expansion of the physical spaces of airports. Through this expansion, Salter argues that new anxieties have arisen surrounding both the space that these airports occupy and the ways in which they are policed.

Salter tracks the spatial footprint of airports as being one of continuous expansion and change, a process that leads to constant tension between the urban planners, local officials, and the population that surrounds them[41]. He gives the example of the 1970s which saw the complete overhaul of most passenger and cargo jets which necessitated an expansion of runways and terminals in "nearly every airport in the country"[42]. Salter also argues that this spatial expansion has had massive ramifications for the security culture of nearly every airport; one that has

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[40] Mark B. Salter, "The Global Airport: Managing Space, Speed, and Security," in *Politics At The Airport*, ed. Mark B. Salter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 4.
[41] Salter, "The Global Airport," 5.
[42] Ibid, 7.

required an outreach of surveillance and policing beyond the physical boundaries of the airport terminal. There is tension in this drive for the securitization of airports, these are sites in which the efficient flows of goods and people are necessary for their success, but this has been hampered with the rise of attacks against aviation infrastructure since the 1960s. Salter argues, "the arrival of the jet, the wide-body, the next-generation passenger jet, next-day courier and cargo delivery, and global supply chains—the emergence of global terror threats to civil aviation, including the use of planes as weapons themselves, has dramatically altered the shape and processes at the airport."[43] Salter concludes his chapter by arguing that it is wrong to view the airport either as a complete institution or as a heterotopic reflection of society. Rather, he would like to argue that the airport has a rhizomatic logic to it, with no discernable final goal. Similar to Bernes and Toscano's comments on the logistical turn of capitalism, he argues, "there is not a concerted "controller" of airports, each of the operating networks has an interest in an increase in the control of space and management of speed at the airport—both of which depend on a problematization of mobility."[44]

To lay out a history of the Autonomen, and autonomous politics in general in Germany, is a difficult task. The participants of these movements were often hesitant to join any political group or party that engaged in any semblance of centralized organizing. Instead, those attracted to Autonomous politics had a much more spontaneous attitude when it came to political action, often creating bonds and/or making demands in a moment of crisis or intense struggle. To attempt to present a coherent snapshot of those that would become so heavily involved with the movement against Startbahn-West, I now turn to a brief overview of the roots of the autonomous movement in Germany.

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[43] Salter, "The Global Airport," 14.
[44] Ibid, 23.

Of the few Anglophone secondary sources on the subject of autonomous organizing in Germany, Georgy Katsiaficas' *Subversion of Politics*, presents one of the best histories of the formation of what would be termed the "Autonomen". His chapter, "Sources of Autonomous Politics in Germany" presents a story of multiple movements, tactics, and ideologies coalescing behind the broad idea that a sustainable politics must be one that exists outside of the traditional avenues of political parties, unions, parliamentary discourse, etc. Of the forces that would prove to be influential in the formation of an autonomous identity, I will focus primarily on the student movements of 1968, the emergent feminist movement, the antinuclear struggle, and the massive squatting movement. I will focus in particular on how these struggles developed a politics that relied so predominantly on contentions and defense of space.

1968 saw an explosion of student movements across Western Europe and the United States, Germany was no different in this respect. The ways that the student movement evolved especially in regard to how students saw themselves in relation to the more traditional labor movement (and the constitution of labor itself) and in relation to more official or institutional routes to power. In many ways the failure of the student left in 1968 to establish any real sort of connection to a revolutionary working class movement (akin to those in France, but especially the Italian case) would prove to be one of the most influential forces in the development of an autonomous politics. Of the groups to rise to prominence during the wave of leftist organizing in the 1960s, the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (SDS) was by far the largest and most impactful. Originally a youth offshoot of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, the group was pushed out in 1961 due to their distaste for the parliamentary focus of the SPD[45]. The group functioned as a vast ideological coalition with sects ranging from disillusioned left intellectuals,

[45] Geronimo, *Fire and Flames: A History of the German Autonomist Movement*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 26.

anarchists, and older generations of the counterculture. Many of the experiences and reasons for the emergence of a youth-led revolt in the 1960s was the generational gap of Germans, specifically in regard to the history of Nazism. Students began to realize that many of those that filled the bureaucratic halls of German government or the ranks of police had at one time been an active part of the Nazi regime[46]. Ulrike Meinhof—one of the founders of the Red Army Faction, a leftwing terrorist group that became well known in the 1970s—summed up the sentiment in a television appearance before her rise to notoriety. She argued that, "Parents have lost their credibility due to their identification with Nazism. The Catholic Church has lost credibility by protecting itself behind National Socialism. It is rarely mentioned, but employers' authority has been questioned [...] due to the terrible conditions used to develop industry."[47] Many of those on the left either believed that a transition from Nazism to the Democratic Republic had never occurred, or that there would be some return to a mass security state.

The student movement in Germany was widely influenced by the Italian operaismo struggle which saw one of the more successful strategies of solidarity between the industrial working class and students. Operaismo would also prove to be an important influence in the development of autonomous politics, with much of the Italian movement succeeding due to the innovations it made in struggles outside the traditional routes of union organizing; with workers staging illegal work stoppages or occupations of factories[48]. German students formed "Workplace Project Groups" in an attempt to enter the industrial centers and form a meaningful alliance. Their goals, as stated by one group based in Munich were: "Workers' autonomy; focus on practical factory work; radical trade union critique; integration of migrant workers in the

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[46] Georgy Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2006), 62.
[47] *A German Youth*, directed by Jean-Gabriel Périot (2015; Atlanta, GA: Big World Pictures)
[48] Geronimo, *Fire and Flames*, 41.

domestic struggle; practical relation to everyday proletarian life."[49] Ultimately this strategy failed, and in a moment of self-reflection the Workplace Groups realized that they had misunderstood the applicability of Italian strategies to a German context. The demise of the German student movement led to the formation of "Spontis" groups who were uninterested in the reformist politics of the university movements. Instead they took cues from anarchist groups and launched a more general cultural attack against German society, they would become highly influential in the anti-nuclear and housing struggles of the 1970s[50].

While the factories proved to be a failed space of organization, housing struggles became drastically important in linking German students to broader sections of the public, while also providing spaces for experimentation with new political subjectivities. Squatting and housing struggles was one of the key forces that shaped the Autonomen's revolt against capitalism in the spheres of everyday life. Those involved in the Workplace Groups shifted their focus towards increasing housing inequity, one group writing, "To squat means to destroy the capitalist plot for our neighborhoods. It means to refuse rent and the capitalist shoe box structure. It means to build communes and community centers. It means to recognize the social potential of each neighborhood. In squatting and in rent strikes we can find the pivotal point of anticapitalist struggles outside of the factory."[51] The center of much of these campaigns was in Frankfurt, which saw a massive influx of real estate speculation in the 1960s, devastating the local student and migrant worker populations. Due to the demise of the SDS in the early 1970s, a large contingent of Spontis groups were established in Frankfurt, leading much of the actions against housing redevelopment. These efforts were emboldened by a year-long rent strike headed by Italian and Turkish migrant workers from 1972-73. Sponti squatters were influential in the strike,

[49] Geronimo, *Fire and Flames*, 49.
[50] Ibid, 58
[51] Ibid, 53.

though Geronimo—one of the few historians of the German autonomous movement—in his account of the German autonomous movement argues that the relationship between the squatters and migrant workers often took on a paternalistic character that limited the political potential of the movement[52]. Following the conclusion of the rent strike, the Spontis shifted their focus to the defense of squats against evictions. A usual cycle presented itself in which squats would be threatened with eviction or general police action and Sptonti groups would engage in mass rioting in retaliation, prompting conservative critics to warn against the danger of ongoing "civil war" which might lead housing councils to become "councils of occupied factories"[53]. As squats became increasingly difficult to sustain, a fragmentation of political organizing within Frankfurt (though similar trends can be found in other cities) took place—highlighting some of the limits of autonomous organizing. While struggles thrived off the flexibility and spontaneity of non-hierarchical, small group organizing, it also proved difficult to sustain the momentum of any one movement, especially in moments of crisis. Geronimo argues a similar point, noting that the Spontis and other squatters were quite skilled in "street militancy" but that long term organizing often fell through the cracks[54]. Though squatting still provided a useful space in building new notions of spatial politics and defense.

Katsiaficas in his history of the early roots of German autonomous politics, situates the emergent feminist movement as one of the most important in defining the concept of autonomy, arguing that they were the first group within the broader left to seek out independent and non-parliamentary systems of organizing. He argues that one of the reasons why the SDS crumbled was that its members succumbed to "male chauvinism" and "dogmatic Maoist and

[52] Geronimo, *Fire and Flames* 54.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid, 55.

adventurist Guevarist forces"[55]. This was apparent in both meetings of SDS and Social Democrats; in 1968 there were two instances in which autonomous feminist groups attempted to read statements and were stopped from doing so[56]. In 1972 groups converged on Frankfurt to hold the first women's congress, and it was at this event that the notion of a radical politics that revolved around autonomy began to crystallize. Katsiaficas notes that demands went beyond questions of equal pay or participation in the workplace to demands that centered around the whole process of social reproduction. They "resolved that the women's question would no longer be subsumed beneath the question of class and that they would expand their autonomous organizations. Declaring their opposition to becoming an isolated 'women's island,' they promised to 'struggle against the existing system.'"[57] Immense experimentation also took place in the realm of organizing public communal spaces organized around theorizing fundamentally different ways of engaging in questions of the family, free time, and sexuality. The first autonomous women's center opened in 1974 and by the end of the year dozens of centers across the country had been set up[58]. As the left faced increased repression in the 1970s, Katsiaficas argues that women in organizing were increasingly repressed both by the state and their organizational structures, pushing the need for autonomy. He does note that due to the history of autonomous organizing within the German feminist movement, it was able to defend itself against the threat of assimiliation and co-optation. Thus he notes that feminists, even in periods of intense struggle and militancy, continued to utilize and push the limits of autonomy[59].

The wave of anti-nuclear and ecological struggles that occurred during the 1970s and 80s in Germany are among the most relevant to the set of demonstrations that took place against the

[55] Katsiaficas, *Subversion of Politics*, 62.
[56] Ibid, 68.
[57] Ibid, 70.
[58] Ibid, 71.
[59] Ibid, 79.

construction of Startbahn-West. Not only did they find themselves fighting against similar avatars of capital, but they became important moments in the exchange of tactical and strategic repertoire of the Autonomen[60]. Anti-nuclear protests were also among the first movements to introduce the concept of occupation followed by the construction of a temporary communal village that functioned both as a strategic center of the movement and as an experiment in new forms of sociality. The movement also functioned as a point of convergence for multiple sectors of German society, moving beyond campus politics and uniting farmers, students, workers, etc[61].

Katsiaficas sets the movement opposed to nuclear power against the backdrop of the economic crisis that occurred following the degradation of the "German Miracle" of economic prosperity and mass industrialization that followed World War II (quite similar to the trends set forth by Cowen, Bernes, and Harvey). Much of the discontent regarding nuclear power revolved around the general disconnection between German industry and the supposed democratic institutions of the state[62]. Katsiaficas pinpoints one of the earliest examples of nuclear action as the protests against the construction of a power plant in Wyhl. Its significance derives from its staggering success and the way it organized around the strategy of occupation. In 1975, a few hundred protestors occupied the construction site and began building huts, following a massive 28,000 person protest the encampment grew exponentially, thus thwarting the attempts by police to clear the site[63]. The protests at Wyhl were significant in the ways that they unveiled the truly authoritarian nature of the German state. One newspaper article recounting a town hall to discuss the construction of the Wyhl plant wrote, "For the first time, people called out in a lapidary

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[60] In archived issues of leftist zines from the time period you can track an active dialogue occurring between anti-nuclear protesters and those involved in the struggle against Startbahn-West. These often included discussions of new police tactics that have become commonplace in the language of activists today (i.e. "kettling").
[61] Katsiaficas, *Subversion of Politics*, 81.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid, 82.

chorus: “The nuclear power plant will not be built!” And when the civic action groups issued a call for a walkout on the afternoon of July 10, about the only ones remaining in the hall were the government, industry, the police, and the press – quite a striking alliance.”[64]

Another anti-nuclear movement worth noting for its experimentation with communal occupation as a tactic, is the struggle to stop the construction of a nuclear dump site in Gorleben. The movement originated in a local movement largely consisting of disgruntled farmers who feared catastrophic ecological effects, staging protests from 1977 to 1979. Their protests and the recent Three Mile Island meltdown in the United States stopped construction momentarily, but when it restarted in 1980, protesters quickly occupied the partially completed construction site and built a makeshift settlement[65]. Named the “Free Republic of Wendland”, the student supporters found great support from the local agriculture community, who supported the effort with donations of food and building materials. Katsiaficas (who was present at the occupation) argues that Wendland was a momentary escape from the brutality of everyday life in Germany. “We became human beings in some essential meaning of the term, sharing food and living outside the system of monetary exchange.”[66] Wendland is also significant as it represented one of the last efforts in the anti-nuclear movement to fully engage in a strategy of non-violence. Even with the ever present threat of police eviction and violence, Wendlanders remained committed to nonviolent action. This was taken advantage of only a month following the beginning of the occupation, when “the largest deployment of police in Germany since Hitler" carried out a total eviction of the camp, brutalizing the protesters even as they remained steadfast in their

[64] Cornelia Frey, “Wachsam in Holzpalästen” [“Watchful in Wooden Palaces: Anti-Nuclear Activists Offer Resistance in Gorleben ‘Peace Village’”], Die Zeit, May 30, 1980
[65] Katsiaficas, *Subversion of Politics*, 84.
[66] Ibid, 84.

nonviolent commitments[67]. Although the dump site was completed, the movement at Wendland remained crucial in building a broad base of support for the ecological struggle in Germany.

May of 1981 would see a fundamental shift in the character and nature of the anti-nuclear movement in Germany with the struggle to stop the construction of a nuclear processing plant in Brokdorf. 100,000 protesters descended upon the construction site, against federal laws prohibiting demonstrations, and were met by 10,000 police officers. Brokdorf saw a reversal of the common scenario of demonstrators defending themselves against police aggression—instead the protesters were those that confronted the police, rushing towards their barricade. There was a drastic shift in the repertoires of contention when protesters reached the site, with many attacking the fence and defending police officers with Molotov cocktails and other makeshift weapons. The police response was also among the most brutal with the use of U.S. military-inspired tactics—periodically throughout the protest helicopters would drop small groups of police into the middle of the crowd wherein they would beat the protesters[68]. This was deployed alongside the common tactics of water cannons and tear gas. The demonstrators were unable to occupy the site as they had done at Wyhl and Wendland, but Katsiaficas notes the generative shift that the actions at Brokdorf had: "a new level of resistance had been reached by the movement against nuclear power. The passive nonviolence of Gorleben had given way to a massive active confrontation."[69] Many Germans felt justified in their violent acts against what they saw as an undemocratic government; they also felt as though the violent reactions of the German state had descended from Germany's long history of militarism, thus placing their resistance within a long history of defense.

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[67]Katsiaficas, *Subversion of Politics*, 85.
[68] Ibid, 86.
[69] Ibid.

We can now move to a more detailed overview of the movement to stop the construction of the West Runway ("Startbahn-West") in Frankfurt. Beginning with a brief sketch of why proponents of the runway supported it, and how it is connected to the trends of logistics and circulation laid out earlier. I will then shift my attention to the arguments against it and the actions taken to stop its construction.

Plans to expand the logistical capacities of the Frankfurt International Airport had existed since the 1960s, with construction not beginning until the early 1970s. Like much of the Western world, Germany was also beginning to shift its productive and distributive powers towards an economy based on the vast circulation of goods. Germany was incredibly important in this system as it was something of an industrial powerhouse resulting from the "German Miracle" which was characterized by a massive amount of successful redevelopment following World War II. The Frankfurt airport held a very important place in this economic makeup as throughout much of the middle to late 20th century it was Europe's second busiest airport for both passenger and cargo uses. The $60 million runway promised to increase the capacity of the airport by 15%, a necessary threshold to meet (as argued by its proponents) the pressures of expanding aviation companies. One contemporary account of the struggle writes, "Flight delays have become so frequent that major airlines are threatening to desert Frankfurt, putting many of the airport's 32,000 jobs at risk."[70] West Germany was also pictured as a fruitful market for American businesses, and the state of Hesse in which the airport resided was seen as a gateway for expanding profits. One advertisement in Barron's (the sister publication of the Wall Street Journal) boosted investment in Hesse with the platitude: "Remember! Western Europe has 350

[70] Howard Reason, "'Battle of Startbahn West' shocks West Germans," *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 25, 1981, ABI/INFORM Collection.

million consumers. Profit by operating in one of its most dynamic markets."[71] It then goes on to list some of the advantageous features of Hesse and West Germany more broadly. Gesturing to the increasing dominance of intermodalism in shipping, the advertisement boasts the advanced transportation networks in Hesse.

> "The State of Hesse has one of Europe's finest transportation networks, including Frankfurt International Airport, the·hub of passenger air travel for Continental Europe and ranking number one in Europe and number four worldwide in freight traffic. Hesse is also a rail hub for West Germany, and international connections put it in the mainstream of routes linking the decisive European economies. Hesse's road network blankets the entire state, and an intricate web of super highways enables deliveries in half a day to every major center in Germany, and in 2-3 days to almost anywhere in Western Europe. Hesse's comprehensive transportation network also includes rapid access to Europe's extensive system of inland waterways. The Rhine, West Germany's greatest inland waterway, forms a large part of the state's western boundary."[72]

Other articles published in business periodicals also note the changing nature of shipping and how much of the change was centered in industrial centers such as Frankfurt. One such piece, published in 1973, is celebrating the arrival of shipping containers and intermodal techniques in the shipping routes between the U.S. and Germany. It notes that the "hottest thing in international shipping" are "sea-jets"—large aircraft that carry standard shipping containers to ports where they are reloaded onto container ships—have been deployed in the routes between the U.S. and

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[71] HLT Group, "Advertisement 28 -- No Title," *Barron's National Business and Financial Weekly*, November 3rd, 1980, ABI/INFORM Collection.
[72] HLT Group, "Advertisement 28".

Europe[73]. "One bill of lading [the detailed manifest of goods on board a particular shipment] sees a cargo to its destination regardless of how many national frontiers it crosses or how many planes, ships, trucks or trains it may travel on."[74] In this same article we can also begin to see how these novel shipping techniques were prompting the expansion of aviation infrastructure, a process noted in the Salter chapter on airports. The article states, "Research and development in containerization never ceases because of competition, such as that offered by the 747 jumbo jets which can carry a 40-foot container across the Atlantic in a few hours. Jumbo freighters are already operated daily over the Atlantic by Lufthansa, the German airline."[75] The Frankfurt airport was also wrapped up in broader trends of increasing militarism in the ongoing Cold War. The U.S. had an air base colloquially termed the "Gateway to Europe" just south of the main terminals, this base functioned as one of the main European hubs of the U.S. military until 2005. Frankfurt also had private military companies testing and deploying logistical technologies; Raytheon was behind much of the air traffic control technology and was testing automated air traffic systems at Frankfurt in the 1980s[76]. All of these reinforce the notion that logistics was increasingly becoming central to capitalist accumulation in the wake of the economic crises of the 1970s, and additionally that West Germany and the infrastructure of the state of Hesse was central to the needs of circulation.

While in many ways the reasons for the massive revolt against the construction of Startbahn-West can be guessed with a significant amount of confidence, it is worth going more into the details of people's contentions with the airport, as well as providing a brief overview of

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[73] Nation's Business, "Bounding Over the Main: Freight flies now, goes by ship later; and it's 10 days or less from San Francisco to Frankfurt," *Nation's Business*, October 1973, ABI/INFORM Collection.
[74] Nation's Business, "Bounding Over the Main".
[75] Ibid.
[76] Raytheon, "Now West German air traffic controllers are getting a better look at what's up," *The Economist*, November 14, 1981, The Economist Newspaper Limited.

the specific actions that took place. Although construction was being planned as early as the 1960s, an organized movement against the proposed runway did not coalesce until the 1970s in the form of Bürgerinitiativen (BIs or "citizen initiatives") that took a strictly parliamentary approach to contesting the construction. The initial movement was mainly composed of local citizens who were mainly concerned with the immediate effects the runway would have on the area, issues such as pollution, noise, etc. Geronimo argues that these citizens' groups were often granted meetings with the local parliament but that these amounted to nothing and were purely symbolic gestures or half baked promises[77]. It was in May of 1980 that the construction of the Hüttendorf began and a sizable contingent of the movement began to live on the outskirts of the proposed construction site. Like the movements at Gorleben and Wyhl this site functioned as a place wherein different contingents of the movement meet and form a broader base of support. It was through the occupation that the movement moved beyond its purely local makeup and began attracting students or those more involved in autonomous organizing, this increase in support also had to do with the experience being gained in similar movements such as Brokdorf. Like other occupations this was also a space in which experiments of communal living took place—there were not just students living in the Hüttendorf, but families as well, all working towards a mutual goal and collective experience of defense. The book published shortly after the demise of the movement, *Startbahn-West Fotos und Interviews,* portrays the contradiction between the idyllic experience of collective life and the brutal police response to Hüttendorf's existence.

The dynamic of the protest would be fundamentally altered with the police eviction of the village on November 2nd, 1981. The police attacked in the early hours of the morning, clearing the inhabitants of the village out with tear gas, water cannons, and brute force. The eviction

[77] Geronimo, *Fire and Flames*, 107.

brought national attention to the movement to stop the construction of Startbahn-West, and in the days following there were solidarity protests and smaller autonomous direct actions that occurred throughout the country. Geronimo notes the changing composition of the struggle following the eviction, "At its peak, it included automobile workers from the Opel factories in Rüsselsheim, the entire Frankfurt left, and revolting youths from across the region."[78] He also notes the significance it had for the anti-militarist politics of the Autonomen by arguing that they often emphasized the significance of the runway for NATO and the U.S. military purposes[79]. A contemporary account of the movement notes that it began as a "suburban movement uniting anxious citizens concerned about noise and air pollution, preserving scarce woodland, and protecting the value of their property. But it escalated into a relentless battle of wills between the modern industrial state and its critics."[80] Although construction was finally fully approved in the courts in 1982, with construction concluding in 1984, the movement was able to continue its momentum through the tradition of "Sunday Strolls" wherein protesters would walk along the fence bordering the runway[81]. These Sunday Strolls became important moments in which Autonomen were able to meet and discuss tactics, and sometimes wage surprise attacks against the construction site or the police guarding it[82]. These were moments that allowed some semblance of the collective experience of Hüttendorf to continue. Geronimo also narrates the success of an "Action Week" planned for the opening of Startbahn-West in 1984, throughout the week protests happened at the site of the airport and in surrounding cities. He cites an autonomous Frankfurt group writing about the longevity of the movement during this Action Week:

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[78] Geronimo, *Fire and Flames*, 109.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Reason, "'Battle of Startbahn West' shocks".
[81] Katsiaficas, *Subversion of Politics*, 87.
[82] Ibid, 109.

> "It will be a long struggle and it will be aimed at the entire social and political system. The success of the struggle will not be measured by how many of our demands will be met, how much property damage we can inflict, or how much air traffic we can disrupt … but by how much we can help people escape individualization and alienation, to take control of their lives, and to start fighting."[83]

The movement continued with a significant amount of momentum until 1986/87, in which several incidents involving protesters and the police caused the struggle to disintegrate. The first revolved around autonomous actions that had become somewhat prevalent among the anti-nuclear movement: bringing down power poles. This was attempted at Startbahn-West resulting in severe injuries of a member of an autonomous Frankfurt group[84]. This resulted in many members of the Autonomen to enter into a period of self-reflection regarding what the ethical goals of an autonomous politics, one commenter wrote, "This kind of behavior does not only contradict the ideals of liberation from an inhumane system that readily sacrifices human life, but it also undermines the sense of community and solidarity that is crucial for any political action. This kind of behavior is self-destructive."[85] The tensions within the movement would come to a head during an action on November 2nd, 1987 commemorating the initial eviction of Hüttendorf in 1981. During the course of the demonstration two police officers were shot and killed with others suffering moderate injuries[86]. Geronimo argues that it was in this moment that the movement and broader strands of the Autonomen began to lose a sense of mass militancy and what it offered to a political movement. He argues that much of the violence that took place at

[83] Geronimo, *Fire and Flames*, 110.
[84] Ibid, 157.
[85] Ibid, 159.
[86] Ibid.

Startbahn-West (either against people or property) after 1984 took on a much more individualistic nature[87]. While this prompted increased state repression against the autonomous movement, and leftist organizing more broadly, it also fostered a productive debate regarding the uses of militancy in a mass movement. Many Autonomen were among the sentiment that militant and violent actions were necessary but that the killing of the police officers showed a certain disregard for human life that hurt the sustainability of the movement. One autonomous demonstrator wrote:

> "The deaths were neither necessary to protect the demonstration nor did they advance the overall struggle—rather, the opposite. The state forces violence upon everyone who opposes the state. In this case, however, the link to liberation was lost. In this case, the violence became an end in itself. We have to ensure that no one of us can individually decide that the time has come to shoot. We need to reject the idea that it is the level of violence that defines the radicalness of our struggle."[88]

While the struggle against Startbahn-West wouldn't continue in any meaningful way, the discussions that the killing of the police officers spawned would prove fruitful for the Autonomous movement at large. The experience at Hüttendorf and the actions following its destruction would also function as inspiration for other movements, predominantly those engaged in the anti-nuclear struggle[89]. With this overview of the movement against the

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[87] Geronimo, *Fire and Flames*, 160.
[88] Ibid, 162.
[89] Pancho, "Lessons Learned at Wackersdorf," *The Open Road*, April 1st, 1987, 5. This "report back" from an American anarchist visiting West Germany details the strategic exchange between the Startbahn-West movement and the anti-nuclear movement. With discussions detailing how damage could be done to critical infrastructure at the construction site of a nuclear plant.

construction of Startbahn-West, I turn to an analysis of it and protests against infrastructure more broadly.

Kristin Ross in "The Long 1960s and 'The Wind From The West'" is attempting to write a revisionist history of the global movements of 1968, by provincializing the oft-repeated story of revolt in Paris and focusing instead on the land-based movements of the rural countryside. She also touches on the decades-long protest against the construction of an airport in an agricultural suburb of Tokyo in 1966. She argues that these land-based defensive movements were symbolic of the realization that "the tension between the logic of development and that of the ecological bases of life had become the primary contradiction of their lives."[90] This focus on the often violent defense against large infrastructural projects that threatened the sociality of vast communities and ways of life, make it directly applicable to the movement against Startbahn-West. Of the arguments she makes I will focus on the distinction she makes between resistance and defense.

Ross makes the notion of defense central to her thesis that these land-based movements of the 1960s engendered a completely new political subjectivity. She articulates that the movements she is studying—the early zone à défendre (ZADs or "zones to be defended") and struggle against the construction of the airport in Narita, Japan—all revolved around a crucial understanding of defense. Of the Narita movement, she writes that farmers resisted the encroachment of industrial development with "their conviction that the airport would destroy values *essential to life itself*."[91] For her, these movement's implicit understanding of the difference between defense and resistance is what allowed them to succeed and generate momentum for so long. She writes, "*Resistance* means that the battle, if there ever was one, has

[90] Kristin Ross, "The Long 1960s and 'The Wind From The West'," Crisis and Critique 5 no. 2 (November 2018), 321.
[91] Ross, "The Long 1960s," 325.

already been lost and we can only try helplessly to resist the overwhelming power the other side now wields. *Defending*, on the other hand, means that there is already something on our side that we possess, that we value, that we cherish, and that is thereby worth fighting for."[92] It was also this distinction that generated a movement that sought not to come to agreement with the state to produce some non-existent humane development. Instead the communal nature of the land-based movements generated the potential for a fundamentally different way of living. She notes that defense is always a contingent notion, over the course of an occupation or an experiment in communal living, what is being defended is constantly in flux. These movements went beyond the simple defense of land, and instead morphed into a defensive project against all those that threatened, "the new social links, solidarities, affective ties, and new physical relations to the territory and other lived entanglements that the struggle produced."[93] It is in this way that often these land-based movements were defending something that had yet to be fully ascertained. The defense of these new socialities were a cherishing of what might follow the eclipse of the state, capitalism, etc. It is here where the links to Ross' analysis and the history of Startbahn-West become clear. The Autonomen were correct to note that the successful construction of the airport did not necessarily entail a total collapse of the movement (or invalidate any of the movement's goals). They ascertained a key aspect of their own movement when they noted that following the eviction of the forest village, they could still fight against "individualization and alienation". It is why the Sunday Strolls were so essential to fostering the links made in the initial occupation; it was also in these strolls and the continued actions that the movement was able to lay claim to the space of the airport as one that required further defense. The reaction against the killing of the police officers is also crucial here. The Autonomen were quick to understand the threat that such

[92] Ross, "The Long 1960s," 325.
[93] Ibid, 328.

an intense and individualistic action had on the movement's longevity. Defense against the newly created socialities of the movement is not just defense against external threats, but against internal ones as well. Ross's analysis of defense becomes much more significant when paired with Jasper Bernes' understanding of how a movement against logistics might orient itself.

Jasper Bernes is interested in the development of logistics from the standpoint of writing revolutionary theory that adequately diagnoses the present moment, while also laying out a road map of how struggles might proceed. Taking a cue from Frederic Jameson, Bernes is advocating a non-didactic "cognitive map" of one's present, a "survey of the terrain in which we find ourselves, a way of getting our bearings in advance of any risky course of action."[94] Bernes is predominantly interested in approaching the question of logistical infrastructures from the standpoint of the blockades of the Oakland ports in 2011. He argues that the assortment of those present at the blockade—those recently evicted from Occupy movement, the traditional labor movement, and the marginally employed—generated a reconfiguration of the disparate movements and their relation to the act of blockading. He argues that all those present were able to recognize, at least partially, the significance of the port in totality of capitalism and its circulatory infrastructure. He writes of the blockade, "the quieted machinery of the port quickly became an emblem for the complex totality of capitalist production it seemed both to eclipse and to reveal."[95] It is from this moment— that finds relation to other mass movements that have interrupted the flow of goods— Bernes asks how a social struggle might begin to imagine a strategy or theory of action suitable for the immense network that confronts them. Bernes argues that what is necessary is a "logistics against logistics, a counter-logistics" which confronts the systematic planning apparatus of modern capitalism and begins to map out the vulnerabilities of

[94] Bernes, *Logistics*, sec. 1, para. 3.
[95] Ibid, sec. 2, para. 3.

such a network; “to give our blockaders a sense of where they stand within the flows of capital.”[96]

Bernes recognizes two roadblocks in devising how a movement can proceed in the face of such a vast landscape of capitalism’s infrastructure. First being the issue of how the transition to logistics has affected traditional notions of workers’ identification with their own labor, and secondly with the question of what a movement should do in the unprecedented moment in which the controls to the logistical empire are seized. Bernes argues that any particular struggle or movement is emboldened by their own self-recognition in the actions of their fellow demonstrators. He argues that one reason for the explosion of movements related to something like the Arab Spring is due to, “the affirmative effect of transmitted images of struggle. Being able to see one’s own action in the face of state violence reflected in and even enlarged by the actions of others can be profoundly galvanising.”[97] But a problem arises, Bernes argues, when a movement is engaged in a revolt against logistical infrastructure; namely the far-reaching abstraction of technical knowledge within and about circulatory systems make it fundamentally opaque to anyone involved in an anti-infrastructural struggle. This heightened by the shifting nature of labor under a regime of pure logistics, much like commodities in a system reliant upon Just-In-Time systems of organization, workers are organized across vast and disconnected geographic locations. Bernes argues that the consequence of this organization of labor is, “that it is not only impossible for most proletarians to visualise their place within this complex system but it is also impossible for them to identify with that place as a source of dignity and satisfaction, since its ultimate meaning with regard to the total system remains elusive.”[98] According to him this forecloses one of the most traditional and fundamental goals of the

[96] Bernes, *Logistics*, sec. 5, para. 1.
[97] Ibid, sec. 5, para. 2.
[98] Ibid, sec. 5, para. 8.

historical worker's movement: the seizure of the means of production to be controlled and planned through a worker-owned state.

This critique directly relates to his critique of what he terms the "reconfiguration thesis", a view advocated by those within Bernes' milieu that argue that in a post-capitalist future, logistical infrastructure could be reconfigured to the needs of society[99]. While Bernes argues that it is unattainable due to the limits of labor organizing, he also argues that circulatory technology is fundamentally hostile to non-capitalist directives. He writes, "the machinery of contemporary logistics aims to streamline the circulation of commodities and not use-values, to produce not the things that are necessary or beneficial but those that are profitable"[100]. The vast interconnectedness of the modern logistics system is also a roadblock to any strategy of reconfiguration; sites of circulation only become logical when they are placed within the vast totality of supply chains[101]. An airport in Frankfurt is only useful when it is connected to a port in Oakland, which is only useful when it is linked to a warehouse in San Bernardino, and so on ad infinitum.

Though he paints a somewhat bleak picture of the prospects of successful struggles against the ever increasing encroachment of circulatory technologies, he is not without hope in his prescriptive statements of what a future movement might look like. While he characterizes many of the tactics adopted by the modern left (the riot, the blockade, the occupation, etc.) he argues that they contain an intuitive sense of how this new formation of capital has placed structural limits on the progress of any social movement[102]. The future of any communist or anti-state movement thus exists, for Bernes, in devising how a society may exit from the vast

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[99] Bernes, *Logistics*, sec. 6, para. 1.
[100] Ibid, sec. 6, para. 2.
[101] Ibid, sec. 6, para. 3
[102] Ibid sec. 7, para. 2.

network of logistics. It is alongside this point that he offers a potential vision of future organizing:

> "For instance, we might try to graph the flows and linkages around us in ways that comprehend their brittleness as well as the most effective ways they might be blocked as part of the conduct of particular struggles. These would be semi-local maps — maps that operate from the perspective of a certain zone or area. From this kind of knowledge, one might also develop a functional understanding of the infrastructure of capital, such that one then knew which technologies and productive means would be orphaned by a partial or total delinking from planetary flows, which ones might alternately be conserved or converted, and what the major practical and technical questions facing a revolutionary situation might look like. [...] This would be a process of inventory, taking stock of things we encounter in our immediate environs, that does not imagine mastery from the standpoint of the global totality, but rather a process of bricolage from the standpoint of partisan fractions who know they will have to fight from particular, embattled locations, and win their battles successively rather than all at once. None of this means setting up a blueprint for the conduct of struggles, a transitional program. Rather, it means producing the knowledge which the experience of past struggles has already demanded and which future struggles will likely find helpful."[103]

This frame of analysis, offered by Bernes, places the struggle against Startbahn-West in a fundamentally different—but helpful—light. If we are to take Bernes seriously, the Autonomen in their movements against the runway, nuclear power, and other large scale infrastructure, had

[103] Bernes, *Logistics*, sec. 7, para. 3

an intuitive sense of how these vast consolidations of power existed within the totality of the capitalist system. This is evident in their writings and speeches following the completion of the runway, in which they argued that it was not the amount of property damage that marked a successful social movement, but rather their ability to "help people escape individualization and alienation, to take control of their lives, and to start fighting."[104] The repeated use of occupation as a strategy gestures to the ways that the Autonomen attempted to position themselves in close proximity to sites of infrastructure as a way of collecting and disseminating valuable information about the functioning of an airport, nuclear plant, etc. These occupations were thus not only an experiment in collective living, but also the deployment of a counter-logistical politics.

At the time of writing, there are currently multiple forest occupations being held across Germany in protest of infrastructural expansion in the form of highways, gravel pits, and the expansion of factories and warehouses[105]. This is occurring alongside the eviction of longstanding squats in major cities, such as Berlin, resulting in massive street fights with police and attempts to reoccupy these formerly communal spaces[106]. All of this points to the enduring nature of autonomous politics in Germany, and more specifically to the endurance of movements that position themselves against the encroachment of the state and capital arriving in the form of infrastructural development. Outside of the German context, we can see the influence of Autonomous politics on events such as the WTO protests in Seattle in 1999, wherein anarchists deployed black bloc as a strategic measure. The influence can be seen in the strategies of the Occupy movement of 2011, in which major metropolitan spaces were taken over by protesters as an attempt to build a coalition against corrupt banking practices, and capitalism at large. Finally,

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[104] Geronimo, *Fire and Flames*, 110.
[105] CrimethInc, "The Forest Occupation Movement in Germany," *CrimethInc.*, March 10th, 2021. and Philip Oltermann, "Activists try to stop autobahn being built through German forest," *The Guardian*, October 4th, 2020.
[106] BBC, "Berlin Liebig 34 squat: German police evict dozens," *BBC*, October 9th, 2020.

we can see the impact of the Autonomen in the explosion of protests following the murder of George Floyd in the summer of 2020. Many of the strategies that emerged, followed a similar pattern to those of Germany in the 1970s and 80s, namely the logic of occupation and defense. Above all, the ever growing network of logistics facilitated by massive multinational corporations such as Walmart and Amazon point towards the continuing relevance of the experience of the Autonomen at Startbahn-West.

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