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Marginalised Neo-Rurals and Alternative Trailerists: Self-made Housing as a Counter Concept of the 1970s and 1980s in Germany and France

Abstract

Alternative concepts for everyday life often unfold in the context of social movements, as marginalised niches become laboratories for new ways of living. This was especially true in Western Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, when new forms of self-made housing experienced a fundamental shift. Until that time, light and self-made dwellings brought to mind socially scorned shanty towns. But when countercultural groups appropriated similar construction techniques and adopted corresponding daily routines, these dwellings became an influential image and reference point for a freely chosen, off-the-grid lifestyle beyond capitalist consumer society.

In retrospect, this process appears straightforward and self-evident, and the ruptures, contingencies and specific conditions accompanying it are easily overlooked. This article seeks to expose those gaps by describing the challenges and experimental steps that led to the introduction of light, ephemeral and mobile housing alternatives in Germany and France as a lived practise. To do so, it relies on a qualitative examination of publications and grey literature from countercultural movements in France and Germany. This provides new insights into how this form of alternative housing evolved from the first reports of US-American examples, and how diverse directions were taken in the two different national contexts.

Keywords: *alternative housing, site squatting, spontaneous architecture, self-construction, alternative trailer sites, commune movement, mobile housing, Germany, France, new social movements*

DOI: 10.13154/mts.58.2017.29-50 Moving the Social · 58 (2017) · p. 29–50

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Introduction

Typically, the general public only takes notice of light, ephemeral and mobile housing communities when they cause public disturbance, for example, in cases of site squatting or eviction. Thus, one of the first cases in point in Europe was a dispute over land use for the Stonehenge Free Festival in Wiltshire, England. In 1985, this culminated in police attacks on a hippie convoy of around 140 vehicles.[1] In the aftermath, public as well as scholarly attention grew and questions were asked regarding the background of the conflict,[2] the character of a life on the road[3] and the paths of traveller biographies.[4] These approaches became emblematic for the further discussion of the phenomenon.

Today, alternative trailer parks and ephemeral settlements exist in many European countries. This light, ephemeral and mobile housing in trucks, huts, vans, tents etc. provides homes for several thousand people in Europe. Fluctuant, in motion and eluding control, the phenomenon is hard to quantify. The fuzziness continues with regard to discerning personal motivations, since freewill and poverty are often interlaced. Therefore, it is already difficult enough to distinguish bare poverty and social exclusion from alternative conceptions that were actively chosen. However, something qualitatively new happened in the course of the 1970s. At that time, shanty towns and self-made light dwellings evoked an image of poverty and a lack of resources. Within the space of few years, this was complemented by a concept that valued a simple life as a means and personal lifestyle to counter the costs and negative effects of the work-centred existence in an industrialised consumer society.

This article goes back to the beginning, at which the first reports of the architectural counterculture in the United States met with the alternative movements of the 1970s. Thus, it covers the shift in alternative concepts of living from conventional dwellings toward light, ephemeral and mobile housing in West Germany and France after 1968. Specifically, it examines how, over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, the phenomenon evolved into a common countercultural image and feasible option for alternative ways of life. This evolution from first ideas to concrete realisations is traced by means of sources from contemporary underground publications, (grey) literature out of or about the alternative movements of that time.

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[1] Andy Worthington: The Battle of the Beanfield, Teignmouth 2005.

[2] Tim Cresswell: In Place, out of Place: Geography, Ideology and Transgression, Madison 1992.

[3] Kevin Hetherington: New Age Travellers: Vanloads of Uproarious Humanity, London 2000; Marcelo Frediani: Sur les routes: Le phénomène des new travellers, Paris 2009.

[4] Richard Lowe/William Shaw: Travellers: Voices of the New Age Nomads, London 1993.

In looking back, it has to be remembered that the phenomenon was not simply introduced, adapted and practised, but that it needed several connecting points, points that sometimes proved their relevance only in retrospect.

Though new concepts in alternative living originated in the 1970s, their influence extends to the present. Even today, alternative, light, mobile and informal settlements exist in rural France. In Germany, however, they are closely connected to urban life. To explore these and other differing cultural dynamics, I will contextualise the evolution of countercultural architecture within the general developments of the new social movements on both sides of the Rhine.

Both societies were strongly influenced by the movements and social upheavals around 1968, but the political and cultural effects resonated differently. A contrasting presentation of the respective ideas, driving forces and dynamics will show how this resulted in different forms and concepts of alternative housing in Germany and France, two countries that were equally shaken and changed by the upheavals around 1968 and the following ‘long decade’.

Steps Toward Alternative Housing in France

The post-war boom in France combined economic growth, mass consumption, rising wages, industrialisation and the expansion of the welfare state. This swift modernisation severely disrupted French society, brushing aside artisanal traditions and family values. The precariously balanced coexistence between the old, rural society and industrialisation became even more fragile.[5] Rural France experienced a veritable rupture characterised by massive farm closures, an exodus of large numbers of people, rapid urban sprawl and a radical industrialisation of agriculture.[6] According to the French sociologist Jean-Pierre Le Goff, many of the numerous people born after the war were especially sensitive to these transformations. Particularly for those raised in traditional environments, the common generational experience was the shaping of their adulthood by capitalist business and consumption, technological upheavals and the anonymity of mass society. To counter this, images and ideals of a faded and often romanticised past—such as those supplied by French revolutionary history—were invoked to combat a disenchanting and technocratic modernity. Thus, for Le Goff, the contradictions between tradition and modernity were the driving forces behind the 1968 generation. This political heritage was mainly adopted by leftist and sectarian parties but also complemented by a strong cultural left, which postulated another way of leading one's life in the here and now, outside the 'oppressive system'. The intention behind this refusal of modernity was to break with repressive, mechanistic institutions and most importantly with alienated capitalist labour, patronising state education and the bourgeois nuclear family.[7]

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[5] Jean-Pierre Le Goff: Mai 68: la France entre deux mondes, in: le débat 29:149 (2008), pp. 83–100, pp. 84–85.

[6] Claus Leggewie: Propheten ohne Macht: Die neuen sozialen Bewegungen in Frankreich zwischen Resignation und Fremdbestimmung, in: Karl-Werner Brand (ed.): Neue soziale Bewegungen in Westeuropa und den USA: Ein internationaler Vergleich, Frankfurt/Main 1985, pp. 83–139, pp. 90–91.

For many activists, the despised, emblematic point of demarcation became the capitalistic city where the insurrection of 1968 had failed: the metropolis of Paris. Thus, many people turned to deserted, rural areas that appeared to be far from the capitalist consumer society. In the empty spaces of old, rural France, where the devastations of capitalistic development were seemingly most visible, utopian recollections of a harmonious past were envisioned and the rural fringes seen as places of liberated lands, experimentation and alternative living.[8] At that time, the storied image of the urban worker shifted towards the rural peasant.[9] Of course, the alternative, urban movement also gained ground over the course of the 1970s.[10] But compared to West Germany, alternative urban housing was rather rare in France.[11]

The Commune Movement

Instead, a 'utopian exodus' took place. Starting in the summer of 1968, young people roamed rural France in droves searching for an isolated ruin or abandoned hamlet in which to establish a community of like-minded people. At the beginning of the 1970s, in the early heyday of the movement, the phenomenon had already grown to around 500 projects with 5,000 to 10,000 residents.[12] In a mid-1980s retrospective, the total number of these neo-rural experiments was roughly estimated at around 100,000.[13] While this seems somewhat exaggerated, the total number of people involved surely amounted to at least several tens of thousands. Sometimes the number of new arrivals easily surpassed the dwindling indigenous population. The latter's attitude usually shifted quickly from curious to hostile, since the newcomers were regarded as bums and linked to drugs, promiscuity and other challenges to the traditional rural order. However, even those who found shelter rarely made it through the winter. Of the many new settlements, only a few lasted longer than a year. Due to the underestimated difficulties of farming, hard living conditions and gruelling conflicts, only the most-ambitious and better-equipped communes persevered.[14] A rough estimate of the situation in the mid-1980s shows that around 10 per cent of these experiments succeeded. But the following summer inevitably brought the next wave of urban migrants.[15]

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[7] Jean-Pierre Le Goff: Mai 68, pp. 88–96.

[8] Steven Jezo-Vannier: Presse parallèle: La contre-culture en France dans les années soixante-dix, Marseille 2011, pp. 126–131.

[9] Hervé Tanquerelle/Yann Benoît: La Communauté: Entretiens, Paris 2010, p. 67.

[10] Philippe Outrequin/Anne Potier/Patrice Sauvage: Les entreprises alternatives, Paris 1986, pp. 17–18.

[11] Claus Leggewie: Propheten ohne Macht, p. 117; Danièle Hervieu-Léger/Bertrand Hervieu: Le retour à la nature: "Au fond de la forêt … l'État", Paris 1979, pp. 46–47; Patrick Démerin: Communautés pour le socialisme: Pratique de la vie collective chez les étudiants de Berlin-Ouest: Origines, développement, perspectives, Paris 1975, pp. 135–138.

[12] Steven Jezo-Vannier: Presse parallèle, p. 127.

[13] Pierre José Chadaigne: La communication alternative: la presse parellèle en France des années soixante à la fin des années quatre-vingt-dix, Lille 2002, p. 362; Philippe Outrequin/Anne Potier/Patrice Sauvage: Les entreprises alternatives, p. 17.

Communes that survived the first winter soon became a social hub for a network of people on the move. Valuing openness and hospitality, migrating guests soon became the hallmark of many communes. For a holiday stay, a desire for long-term inclusion or just passing through, the number of people roaming from place to place created a network that linked isolated settlements, but also often challenged fragile subsistence economies and social coherence.[16] Yet, the volatile communes were on the lookout for new members to replace those who had given up or left after a dispute.

To replace those who had departed or to discover new ideas, communes turned to the underground press. The French underground press of the early 1970s is full of commune-related want ads. Some magazines, such as *C.—le Bulletin des Communautés* (1968–1973) or *Tripot* (1973–1985), were dedicated mainly to matters in the rural communes.[17] Other publications included commune issues within a broader countercultural and political framework. In its first issue, *La Gueule Ouverte* (1972–1980) stated that the "only real means of combating society's suicidal tendencies is to live in completely autonomous communities, with gentle technology, turning our backs on the world."[18] The want ads were a rich resource for social dropouts. The same was true for the high-circulation *Actuel* (1970–1975). Its founder, Jean François Bizot (1944–2007), spent the late 1960s in the United States where he was influenced by the flourishing counterculture. Back in France, Bizot transformed a former jazz and arts magazine into the most important vehicle for the French adoption of countercultural ideas from the United States. It brought together a broad variety of topics such as music, festivals, alternative travel, drugs, ecology, feminism and much more of what Bizot subsumed under the label "underground."[19] As an early advocate for alternative travel, *Actuel* praised the travelling experiences of the Beat Generation, published underground locations, as well as tips on travel, accommodations and squatting:

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[14] Steven Jezo-Vannier: Presse parallèle, pp. 139–140; Hélène Détraz: L'integration des populations nouvelles en millieu rural: Les néo-ruraux du Séronais (Ariège), Toulouse 1998, p. 19.

[15] Philippe Outrequin/Anne Potier/Patrice Sauvage: Les entreprises alternatives, p. 17; Danièle Hervieu-Léger/Bertrand Hervieu: Le retour à la nature, p. 14.

[16] Danièle Hervieu-Léger/Bertrand Hervieu: Le retour à la nature, pp. 15–16; Steven Jezo-Vannier: Presse parallèle, pp. 137–138.

[17] Pierre José Chadaigne: La communication alternative, pp. 362–363; Steven Jezo-Vannier: Presse parallèle, pp. 131–137.

[18] As cited in Caroline Maniaque-Benton: French Encounters with the American Counterculture 1960–1980, Farnhan 2011, p. 143.

> In the countryside, if you have contacts to locals, it is easy […] to borrow abandoned houses that lack modern comfort but are habitable. The problem in the small villages is that the police know everybody and that they soon become interested in newcomers.[20]

Roaming around and looking for something better than the monotony of everyday life were strong motivators for post-'68 youths. For hippies, travellers and marginalised people, migration meant an escape from the hated system.[21] This was a common impetus for backpacking and travel, as well as for urban flight and settlement in isolated rural areas. *Actuel* contributed to this escapism, stating that it preferred "the road with its surprises, its detours, its disappearances; for us flight is not a dishonour" but "[e]nrichment and change of scenery, away from the concrete and the police forces of the system."[22] Along with tips for an escape inside France, it published backpacking reports and guides for many other countries throughout the world. This came along with a special spirit of backpacking that took a stand for responsible encounters and authentic experiences. It is in this context that the new French word "*routard*" (backpacker) was coined and popularised. Later, the *Guide du routard*, one of the most important backpacker book series in France, would evolve out of these reports.[23]

Assisted by advice from the underground press, thousands of young people, especially during the summer holidays, roamed from commune to commune looking for cheap accommodation, company and new experiences.[24] Thus, in its early years, the new phenomenon of alternative travel was entangled with the urban flight of post-'68 youths. As a result, the French rural community movement was inextricably linked with the formation of what contemporary sociologists called 'marginal nomadism' and a moving and floating population. However, even for those who successfully settled down, mobility continued to shape their lives. The new peasants had to cope with the difficulties of leaving behind the capitalist organisation of labour and consumption for agricultural autarchy. But the crops rarely sufficed and the image of abundant nature that easily satisfies basic needs was quickly demystified. Agriculture had to be supplemented with outside forms of income such as seasonal harvesting, building crafts, artisan production and selling at markets and fairs. This led to the regular and continuous absence of many group members.[25]

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[19] Steven Jezo-Vannier: Presse parallèle, pp. 93–96.

[20] "Circuler en France", in: Actuel 2:9 (1971), p. 8, translated by the author.

[21] Philippe Outrequin/Anne Potier/Patrice Sauvage: Les entreprises alternatives, pp. 16–17.

[22] *Actuel* editors: Tout au bout de la route, in: Actuel 3:21 (1972), p. 25, translated by the author.

[23] Philippe Gloaguen/Patrice Trapier: Génération routard, Paris 1994; Jérôme Dupuis: La face cachée du Routard, in: Lire 30:331 (2004), pp. 44–49.

[24] Pierre José Chadaigne: La communication alternative, p. 362; Steven Jezo-Vannier: Presse parallèle, p. 127.

During the 1970s, finding and acquiring isolated hamlets and abandoned farms became difficult and expensive as officials began to realise the value of isolated areas for touristic and environmental purposes. But during the second half of the 1970s, the economic crisis and the formation of an alternative and ecological movement fostered the urban exodus of young, marginalised and unemployed city-dwellers hoping to escape pollution, alienated divisions of labour and the rhythm of *métro-boulot-dodo* (commute, work, sleep). These new arrivals were less inspired by insurgent plans to combat the system from the margins and more influenced by the desire for a better (or simply less bad) life in the country. In light of the many dysfunctional communes, small groups of friends and couples became more frequent. But even they found it difficult to find affordable homes. This dynamic, between the scarcity of low-priced real estate and the desire to live another kind of life in the country, inspired the next chapter of the alternative housing story.[26]

Do It Yourself (DIY) Constructions

By this time, the French underground press had already covered the architectural counterculture in the U.S. The geodesic domes of the hippie commune *Drop City* near Trinidad, Colorado being the most emblematic but certainly not the only ones. From the houseboats of Sausalito, California, to handmade houses, from domed structures to houses on wheels: this architecture was light, ephemeral and mobile. The dwellings and their construction techniques were popularised in books and magazines, such as Stewart Brand's *Whole Earth Catalogue* (first edition 1968),[27] Steve Baer's *Dome Cookbook* (1967)[28] or Lloyd Kahn's *Shelter* (1973)[29] which were brought back from trips to the

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[25] Danièle Hervieu-Léger/Bertrand Hervieu: Le retour à la nature, pp. 15–21, p. 56, pp. 112–121; Danièle Hervieu-Léger/Bertrand Hervieu: Les immigrants de l'utopie, in: La Gueule Ouverte 8:259 (1979), pp. 4–5, p. 4.

[26] Hélène Détraz: L'integration des populations nouvelles, p. 20; Danièle Hervieu-Léger/Bertrand Hervieu: Le retour à la nature, pp. 21–31, pp. 101–103, pp. 219–220; Danièle Hervieu-Léger/Bertrand Hervieu: Les immigrants de l'utopie, pp. 4–5.

[27] Steward Brand: Whole Earth Catalogue, n.p. 1968.

[28] Steve Baer: Dome Cookbook, Corrales 1967.

[29] Lloyd Kahn: Shelter, Bolinas 1973.

U.S. or available in special bookstores. Preaching a DIY spirit, these publications were instruction manuals as well as radical pamphlets with the aim of expanding the post-'68 self-empowerment approach to the construction of living spaces.[30]

But despite the availability of American literature, a French adaptation gained momentum only slowly. Although *Actuel* introduced the dome pioneer Richard Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983) early on,[31] it took two full years for the focus to shift from the person to the dwellings themselves, the construction and the life within. Now the dome was praised for its adaptability and portability, features which were seen as the primary advantages over permanent houses that required the acquisition of land. The narrative in the pages of *Actuel* showed a striking resemblance to the challenges and desires of the commune movement and concluded with a frenetic appeal to adopt this form of living:

> The dome has the best characteristics for commune activities. The land is available. Meet your friends and find a place. Grow your food, buy geese, chickens, a cow. Live in a house, a grotto or a tepee. Construct circular structures and destroy the rational reality of the boxes.[32]

From now on, the interest in self-made and light dwellings grew steadily. In 1972, in their anarchist magazine *Vroutsch* (1970–1973), students from Strasbourg's *École nationale supérieure des arts décoratifs* published a special issue on self-construction. It was addressed to those who wanted to build living spaces on their own in order to foster new relationships. The issue was meant as a tool and point of departure for taking the environment into one's own hands and to counter technological rationalism. The construction tips covered light dwellings such as domes, huts or igloos as well as movable shelters like tents and tepees. It also included a guide for transforming a bus or even a 2CV van into mobile lodging. The promised benefits were freedom, anonymity and independence from spatial constraints. This mobile life was seen as an effective challenge to mainstream society: "If we are a cancer, if we are a tumour, we have to spread everywhere and become impossible to eliminate, like a virus that is everywhere and nowhere."[33] In 1974, *La Face cachée du soleil* expanded the horizon by paying attention to practical solutions of everyday problems in self-made homes. For example, this publication explained the self-construction of heating facilities and solar energy.[34] A year later, *Le Catalogue des Ressources* appeared, a French adaptation of the *Whole Earth Catalogue* that largely followed the American original.[35]

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[30] Caroline Maniaque-Benton: French Encounters, p. 99, p. 121.

[31] Henri Bonnemazou: Doctor Bucky and Mister Fuller, in: Actuel 1:1 (1970), pp. 58–61.

[32] Jean-François Bizot: Dome, Sweet Dome, in: Actuel 3:18 (1972), pp. 8–11, p. 8, translated by the author.

[33] Henri Rosenfeld/Jean Terrier: auto construction, in: Speciale Vroutsch 3:6/7 (1972), p. 53, translated by the author.

Despite these early publications, countercultural architecture did not reach a wider audience until late 1975, when the exhibition *Marginal Architecture in the United States* opened at the American Cultural Center in Paris. At that time, the phenomenon in the U.S. was already in decline. The exhibition was widely applauded in the architectural scene and reached an even wider public when it caused a proper scandal. After his visit, the U.S. American ambassador called for major changes in the depictions of the United States. He especially disliked the combination of self-made and shabby looking dwellings with radical ecologist statements (e. g. by Herbert Marcuse). But instead of changing the criticised parts, the exhibition was moved to the *Musée des Arts Décoratifs*. The uproar in the French media boosted interest in the exhibition (which then went on a long and successful tour through France, Europe and Canada) and countercultural architecture as a whole.[36] It seems that the attempted censorship sparked the interest of left-wing papers who now took up the topic. For example, the widely circulated ecological magazine *Le Sauvage* (1973–1991) first published an article on natural, untamed architecture in its last issue of 1975.[37] In addition, *La Gueule Ouverte* reported not only about the exposition and the scandal, but also suggested further reading for those interested in building along the same lines.[38]

By the end of 1975, French literature on this topic was broadly available[39] and more was to be published in the following years.[40] This shows that there was an increasing interest in light-weight, vernacular and traditional architecture. Outstanding was the French adaptation of *Shelter* which was released in 1977. *Habitats. Constructions traditionnelles et marginales*[41] covered a broad variety of dwellings, including tents, huts, tepees, domes and tree-houses and, once again, did not ignore mobile and reversible dwellings. So-called 'no-mad' living was illustrated by tepees and vehicles such as house trucks, gypsy wagons, campers and houseboats.[42] *Habitats* combined construction tips, dwellers' narratives and basic anthropological background on indigenous as well as traditional, light architecture. However, all of its illustrations were taken from *Shelter* and therefore showed no constructions in France. This begs the question as to whether these publications inspired action. According to the French architectural historian Caroline Maniaque-Benton, the new architecture, despite its broad media reception, resulted in the construction of only a few buildings. She notes that compared to the U.S., France (in the 1970s) had and still has stricter building regulations. Another issue was traditional French attitudes towards materials and techniques. In contrast to the U.S., French DIY-construction rejected chemically based materials and relied more on traditional procedures.[43] Of course, this was fostered by the needs and experiences of the commune movement, which centred on dilapidated, traditional buildings. In addition to repairing many run-down hamlets and farms, countercultural, self-built structures were erected in rural France. The rural communities often proved to be open to adding light, ephemeral constructions to existing buildings, since they were initially uninhabitable. Most of these structures were unauthorised, clandestine and in the middle of nowhere, which might explain why this kind of housing was not yet in the public eye. Nevertheless, examples of self-built shelters as well as experiments with mobile and portable homes were reported.[44]

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[34] Bricolo Lezardeur: La Face cachée du soleil, Paris 1974.

[35] Gérard Aimé/Philippe Bone/Marie-Paule Nougaret: Le Catalogue des ressources, Paris 1975, pp. 173–218.

[36] Caroline Maniaque-Benton: French Encounters, pp. 76–90.

[37] Jean-Louis Hue: architecture sauvage: l'opéra de quat'clous, in: Le Sauvage 3:22 (1975), pp. 74–83.

[38] Dominique Simonnet: Self-Construction made in U.S.A., in: La Gueule Ouverte 4:83 (1975), p. 6.

[39] For instance, Anie Politzer/Michel Politzer: Cabanes des champs, Paris 1974; Arthur Boericke/Barry Shapiro: Maisons de charpentiers amateurs américains: Vers une architecture sauvage?, Paris 1975.

[40] For instance, Bernard Rudofsky: Architecture sans architectes: brève introduction à l'architecture spontanée, Paris 1977; Enrico Guidoni: Architecture primitive, Paris 1980.

[41] Pierre Gac: Habitats: Constructions traditionelles et marginales, Paris 1977.

In the area of mobile housing, the American counterculture again led the way. Strongly influenced by the travelling experiences of the beatniks, the 1970s hippie movement took up the mobile home phenomenon in numerous publications.[45] But again, the transfer to France took some time. In 1974, *Le Catalogue des Ressources* still subsumed mobile homes in the transport chapter.[46] Three years later, *Habitats* included a small chapter on the '*Vie Nomade*'.[47] Finally, in 1980, the time was ripe for independent books on mobile housing. *Habitats nomades* by Dennis Couchaux took a historical and anthropological approach with examples of traditional dwellings from all over the world and also included contemporary mobility. The book concludes with a section on "camping vehicles of contemporary nomads"[48] with photos and descriptions of trailers, vans and house-trucks. Also in 1980, Jane Lidz's *Maisons sur roues. Des nouveaux nomades* was published in

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[42] Ibid., pp. 128–136.

[43] Caroline Maniaque-Benton: French Encounters, pp. 121–141.

[44] Danièle Hervieu-Léger/Bertrand Hervieu: Les immigrants de l'utopie, p. 5; Anne Attané/Katrin Langewiesche/Franck Pourcel: Néoruraux: Vivre autrement: Expériences choisies en pays de Forcalquier, Manosque 2004, pp. 38–39.

[45] For instance, Jodi Pallidini/Beverly Dubin: Roll your own: The Complete Guide to Living in a Truck, Bus, Van or Camper, New York 1974; Kaye Condon: The Complete Guide to Mobile Homes, Garden City (N.Y.) 1976; Jane Lidz: Rolling Homes: Handmade Houses on Wheels, New York 1979.

[46] Gérard Aimé/Philippe Bone/Marie-Paule Nougaret: Le Catalogue des ressources, pp. 137–138.

[47] Pierre Gac: Habitats, pp. 128–136.

[48] Denis Couchaux: Habitats nomades, Paris 1980, pp. 144–148, translated by the author.

France.[49] This photo-book on house-trucks, buses and caravans highlighted the extensive upgrades performed on the vehicles. The publication dates of these books correspond to the appearance of what has been described as the second generation of neo-rural dropouts. Driven by the ongoing economic crisis of the late 1970s, they had less utopian points of departure and fewer financial means than the previous wave. Given these conditions, a life on the road was in all probability more feasible than the acquisition of property.

Construction Site Occupations

Apart from these individual or group-related experiments, light, mobile and ephemeral housing received another boost from novel forms of political resistance practised by a new generation of social activists who required a higher degree of mobility. The most illustrative moment was the fight for the Larzac (1971–1981), a struggle against the expansion of a military training area. Here, long-established farmers and post-'68-inspired neo-rurals joined forces for pacifist purposes, to prevent misappropriation of farmlands and to emphasise the value of ranching and agriculture. The combination of different means was innovative and influential and included squatting farms, mass meetings with up to 100,000 people, hunger strikes and spectacular actions, such as the grazing of sheep under the Eiffel Tower.

In the summer of 1973, to underscore the adherence to traditional ranching on threatened land, activists wanted to build a sheep shelter in the hamlet *La Blaquière* (municipality of Millau). However, building permits were no longer being granted. So the activists got down to business: on 10 June 1973, 3,000 volunteers began illegally constructing a traditional pen.[50] This campaign transformed a mundane sheep pen into a symbol of resistance. But more importantly, self-construction as a means of social activism was established and soon picked up elsewhere, namely in Marckolsheim near the German border. In the mid-1970s, a German chemical factory was projected for this small village, but heavily opposed by locals. At the time, a strong environmental movement had already emerged in conflicts against the atomic power plant in Fessenheim.[51] On 20 September 1974, activists and locals occupied the construction site and in a DIY manner built a hut, the so-called 'friendship house'. This time, it was not for animals but for human gatherings and assemblies. The fact that the factory plans were dropped in February 1975 proved how successful this type of action could be, and it inspired others. More or less as a side effect, collective experiences with DIY constructions were gained by many people who originally had come together to stop an unpopular major project. In early 1975, building sites for nuclear power plants were occupied in Wyhl,[52] Germany (23 February–7 November 1975), and in Kaiseraugst, Switzerland (1 April–11 June 1975). Reporting on the latter, *La Gueule Ouverte* offered a rare description of the camp life that unfolded in the shadow of the political struggle:

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[49] Jane Lidz: Maisons sur roues: des nouveaux nomads, Paris 1980.

[50] Pierre-Marie Terral: Larzac: De la lutte paysanne à l'altermondialisme, Toulouse 2011, pp. 86–88.

[51] Tony Chafer: The Anti-Nuclear Movement and the Rise of Political Ecology, in: Philip G. Cerny (ed.): Social Movements and Protest in France, New York 1982, pp. 202–220, pp. 204–206; Thierry Jund: Le nucéaire contre l'Alsace, Paris 1977, pp. 92–93.

> The terrain is completely transformed: it looks like a small village with a wooden circular building in the centre where the general assembly takes place each evening. […] Next to the circular house is the nursery and farther away the playground for the kids. All things are done on a rotating schedule. Tens of chickens are strolling around. In a corner there is a huge rabbit hutch! They even built a pig sty. […] A solar technology group constructed a demonstration stand. One rainy day the water was warmed to 45°, which quite impressed the visitors. Kaiseraugst shows that it is possible to realise the creative potential that exists in us all.[53]

This short excerpt shows how the means used to oppose large-scale projects came to exemplify an entirely different way of living. Occupations continued on other construction sites in France. Protests in Gerstheim (26 January–24 August 1977) or Heiteren (March–July 1977) were accompanied by resistance villages of self-constructed dwellings and everyday life activities. In this context, new, low-tech and environmentally friendly techniques, which were not dependent on public infrastructure, were given a try. It is no coincidence that reports on alternative power and heating became a topic in the French alternative press at that time. As a result, political and self-construction activists formed an alliance. At Creys-Malville (Isère), for example, the violently contested construction of the fast breeder reactor *Superphénix* was also countered by the construction of an autonomous (supply) house as a meeting place to collect alternative experiences.[54] This kind of DIY engineering was more than a demonstration for eco-friendly resources and their delivery. It also offered essential solutions for dropout settlements and mobile living independent of public infrastructure and energy suppliers. These solutions provided concrete examples for alternative-dwelling construction manuals, especially related to aspects of autonomous energy supply—a precondition for long-term feasibility—and for a continued positive perception of the dropout lifestyle in lightweight, ephemeral and mobile homes in France.

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[52] Cf. Stephen Milder: From Wyhl to Wall Street. Occupation and the Many Meanings of “Single-Issue” Protest, in: Moving the Social 56 (2016), pp. 93–113.

[53] Henri: Alsace, poubelle industrielle de l’europe, in: La Gueule Ouverte 4:51 (1975), pp. 4–6, p. 6, translated by the author.

[54] Jean-Louis Lavigne: Une maison autonome à Malville, in: La Gueule Ouverte 8:275 (1979), p. 16.

We have seen that the general development of alternative housing in France first took the step from conventional urban housing to abandoned traditional buildings in the countryside. As the second step, it then developed further to self-made, light and ephemeral dwellings that were not necessarily bound to land ownership, but more adaptable to hidden areas and fallow land. A third step was taken with the adaptation of genuine mobile dwellings. Despite the availability of guiding literature (first from the U.S., later also from France), the architectural counterculture gained momentum only slowly. Serving as an important catalyst were the experiences made at occupied building sites—whether they proved to be politically successful or not. This at least partial cross-border experience also influenced alternative housing in Germany where the phenomenon had unfolded under different circumstances.

Alternative Housing in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)

In the FRG, the alternative movement also gained experience with ephemeral forms of housing through site occupations. The example of Wyhl can justly be called a landmark in protest innovation and site squatting in the 1970s. There were of course protest camps on occupied sites before then.[55] But during the nine months in the Wyhl Forest, fellow travellers from all over the country were streaming in. Importantly, it also exhibited innovative facilities and novel ideas for organising daily routines.[56] Similar hut-village experiments were carried out in resistance campaigns by the anti-nuclear and eco movements, for example, in Grohnde (13 June–23 August 1977), Gorleben (3 May–4 June 1980) or near Königstein im Taunus (5 May 1979–12 May 1981). Beyond the political goals, it was the everyday life experiences that most impressed participants and spectators alike and led to several publications.[57] A famous example is the hut village that sprung up against a projected runway at the Frankfurt Airport (3 May 1980–2 November

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[55] Christiane Leidinger: Potenziale politischen Zeltens: Alte und neue Camps als Aktionslaboratorien, in: Luxemburg: Gesellschaftsanalyse und linke Praxis 4:4 (2012), pp. 110–117.

[56] Jens Ivo Engels: Geschichte und Heimat: Der Widerstand gegen das Kernkraftwerk Wyhl, in: Kerstin Kretschmer/Norman Fuchsloch (eds.): Wahrnehmung, Bewusstsein, Identifikation: Umweltprobleme und Umweltschutz als Triebfedern regionaler Entwicklung, Freiberg 2003, pp. 103–130, p. 116; Bernd Noessler: Wyhl: Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends, Freiburg 1976, pp. 145–150, pp. 241–242; Nina Gladitz: Lieber aktiv als radioaktiv: Wyhler Bauern erzählen: Warum Kernkraftwerke schädlich sind: Wie man eine Bürgerinitiative macht und sich dabei verändert, West-Berlin 1976, pp. 108–110.

[57] For instance, Bernd Noessler: Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl, pp. 145–150, pp. 241–242; Nina Gladitz: Lieber aktiv als radioaktiv, pp. 108–110; Burckhard Kretschmann: Gorleben: Eine

1981). Although mostly experienced as transiently, it provided widely noticed insights into a radically different way of building, housing and living. Accordingly, the dwellings also drew the attention of architects who referred to them as 'spontaneous architecture',[58] a term that was coined to underline aspects of resistance over alternatives such as 'marginal' or 'vernacular architecture'.[59] The Frankfurt hut village even had a village chronicler who later published his notes. Here we find rare descriptions of the inhabitants: graduate students from shared flats, young people who had interrupted their studies and the underprivileged from broken homes, prisons or lives on the streets—a multitude that was often on bad terms with society as well as among themselves.[60] This also resulted in different housing needs. But a common element was the fact that alternative housing was given a trial run in a way that seemed to be impossible elsewhere: bottle houses, circus wagons, tree houses, caves, tepees, cabins and huts were employed as living spaces. Compared to the building restrictions in legal housing, almost everything seemed possible.[61]

Naturally, the constructions reflected knowledge from the architectural counterculture. In 1975, *Handmade Houses. A Guide to the Woodbutcher's Art* (first edition 1973)[62] was published in German[63] and quickly followed by a second edition.[64] In the foreword, great optimism was expressed regarding the strength of DIY constructions in the face of reluctant building authorities.[65] Other books on self-construction and atypical dwellings followed.[66] Moreover, issues of important American publications circulated as original imports or bootleg copies. Although less pronounced than in France, in West Germany there was also interest in atypical forms of housing. And similarly, the turn to mobile forms took some time. In 1980, Jane Lidz's *Rolling Homes* came to Germany. Strangely enough, it was

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Fotodokumentation über die Republik freies Wendland, Frankfurt/Main 1980; Günter Zint: Republik Freies Wendland: Eine Dokumentation, Frankfurt/Main 1980.

[58] Ute Wittich: Hüttendorf: Spontane Architektur im Flörsheimer Wald, Frankfurt/Main 1982.

[59] Caroline Maniaque-Benton: French Encounters, pp. 79–80.

[60] Horst Karasek: Das Dorf im Flörsheimer Wald: Eine Chronik vom alltäglichen Widerstand gegen die Startbahn West, Darmstadt 1981, pp. 105–106.

[61] See the numerous illustrations in: Ute Wittich: Hüttendorf: Spontane Architektur im Flörsheimer Wald.

[62] Arthur Boericke/Barry Shapiro: Handmade Houses: A Guide to the Woodbutcher's Art, San Francisco 1973.

[63] Arthur Boericke/Barry Shapiro: Handmade Houses: Von der Kunst der neuen Zimmerleute, Darmstadt 1975.

[64] Arthur Boericke/Barry Shapiro: Handmade Houses: Von der Kunst der neuen Zimmerleute, Frankfurt/Main 1977.

[65] Ibid., p. 2.

[66] For instance, Monika Hartmann/Wolfram Koblin/Roswitha Näbauer: Selber & gemeinsam planen, bauen, wohnen, München 1978; Mark Gabor: Hausboot: Vom Wohnen auf dem Wasser in schwimmenden Palästen, Frankfurt/Main 1979; Gernot Minke: Alternatives Bauen: Untersuchungen und Erfahrungen mit alternativen Baustoffen und Selbstbauweisen, Grebenstein 1980.

not released by an alternative publisher, but as part of a series of construction guidebooks. The foreword regretted that due to administrative barriers in Germany, hardly anybody would have the chance to wander around in equally bizarre dwellings.[67] Nevertheless, the subject became popular, and in October 1981 images of alternative trailer life appeared on television. Peter Lustig (1937–2016) was the main character in the children's television series *Löwenzahn* (dandelion) which combined a child's perspective on modern life and nature with the alternative, unconventional and green attitude of the main character. It premiered on 4 October 1981, at the time when the conflict over Frankfurt's new runway was at its peak. In the first episode, Peter Lustig still lives in a permanent house. But when a new airport opens in his area, he is irritated by the excruciating noise of the airplanes. Wondering about other forms of housing and getting away from modern life, he refers to Jane Lidz's book and compares different means of mobile living. Ultimately, he ends up in a blue construction-site trailer.[68] Peter Lustig very soon became the most prominent German trailerist. Another TV character subsequently experimented with mobile-home living: in the late 1980s, Franz Joseph Pichelsteiner, also known as Zorro, was an artist, left-wing activist and the ecological conscience in the TV-series *Lindenstraße*, which is set in a Munich neighbourhood. After difficulties in his shared flat, Zorro moves into a trailer in the yard where he practises self-sufficiency by gardening and keeping small animals.

Although fictitious, these depictions contain many elements that were true for the time and place. But, in fact, light and mobile housing in Germany had an easier time on TV than in real life. Densely populated, West Germany lacked isolated areas where no one cared if a wild settlement sprung up. Additionally, building codes, land development plans and building inspections stood in the way of self-construction. As late as October 1977, Germany lacked official examples of alternative self-construction.[69] So the phenomenon appeared in places where authorities could not prevent it. In contrast to France, these sites were not in the middle of nowhere, but in the extra-legal sphere of squats and occupations like the Frankfurt hut village. But the manner in which light, ephemeral and mobile dwelling in Germany became a phenomenon of urban life needs further explanation.

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[67] Jane Lidz: Rolling Homes: Handgemachte Häuser auf Rädern, Wiesbaden 1980, p. 5.

[68] Klaus Hein Fischer (writer)/Tim Moores (director): Peter zieht um, in: Wolfgang Mann (executive producer): Löwenzahn. Mainz (ZDF) 1981.

[69] Manfred Hegger/Wolfgang Pohl: Selbsthilfe und mittlere Technologien, in: Arch+ 10:35 (1977), pp. 57–65, pp. 64–65.

The Post-War Context of the Federal Republic of Germany

In post-war West Germany, the image of the farmer remained steadfastly conservative and still echoed the Nazi ideology of blood and soil. Against the advancing industrialisation of agriculture, German farmers' associations emphasised traditional, conservative and even '*völkisch*' racial positions to oppose the negative effects of modernity, massification, rootlessness and the so-called 'illnesses of urbanity' in general. Thus, the image of the West-German farmer represented a counterbalance to the perceived decay and decadence of a chaotic present.[70]

This and the poisoned symbolic heritage of rural Germany made it very difficult for urban social movements to tie into it. This is already apparent in the terminology employed. The left-wing milieu of the 1970s does not mention the countryside or rural life, but uses the word 'province' ('*Provinz*'), which does not describe a discrete entity, but a spatial unit in contrast to the metropolis. It also carries negative connotations: the adjective 'provincial' ('*provinziell*'), in particular, is used synonymously with 'backwoods'.

This is also mirrored in the leftist perception of the "province as a political problem" (the title of an article in a contemporary left-wing journal),[71] since social pressures demanding conformity made it difficult to have a foreign partner, to live in a shared flat, or to belong to any organisations of the left. The hope for change relied on the urban working-class which still dominated theoretical debate and practical activism.[72]

For the New Left in Germany, the province was thought of as what is left over from before modern time, "a relic of the past, a hoard of authoritarian and traditional structures of the personality."[73] Hence, it is not surprising that contemporary activists turned their backs on the countryside as a way to escape boredom and familial constraints. In their quest for freedom, a vibrant (sub)cultural life and fields of political activity, they turned to the major cities. The territorial reforms of the 1970s with their many mergers did the rest to cut down the political leeway of small villages. Those who ended up in the province tried to limit this transitional phase to a minimum.[74] This is why rural communes remained marginal to German alternative movements in contrast to other European countries, and any urban exodus was looked down upon. The groups or individuals in rural areas at that time were isolated, and the communes were widely dispersed; autonomous settlements were rare and cooperation on a regional scale practically non-existent. According to a contemporary activist, the challenges were compounded by expensive land, dense population, intense farming, restrictive laws and rigid socialisation which still echoed Nazi-fascism. In 1978, he estimated there were around 200 groups (60 of them reported, the rest estimated and unreported).[75] This moderate number succinctly encapsulates the insignificance of rural communes in the West-German alternative movements of the 1970s. It is even more obvious when set against the general vitality of the urban alternative movement at that time.[76]

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[70] Gesine Gerhard: Das Bild vom Bauern in der modernen Industriegesellschaft: Störenfriede oder Schoßkinder der Industriegesellschaft?, in: Daniela Münkel/Frank Uekötter (eds.): Das Bild des Bauern: Selbst- und Fremdwahrnehmung vom Mittelalter bis ins 21. Jahrhundert, Göttingen 2012, pp. 120–124.

[71] Dieter Bellmann et al.: "Provinz" als politisches Problem, in: Kursbuch 11:39 (1975), pp. 81–127, translated by the author.

[72] Dieter Bellmann et al.: "Provinz", pp. 84–90.

[73] Ibid., pp. 85, translated by the author.

[74] Ibid., p. 90.

The Magnet West Berlin

In contrast to the situation in France, it was city life that attracted German subcultural and new social movements, especially the cities of Hamburg, Frankfurt and most notably Berlin, which is my focus here. In Berlin, the war and the city's division had led to a drastic population decrease in the densely built-up working-class districts close to the Wall. Most strongly affected was Kreuzberg, which had a population of around 400,000 in the mid-1930s, but only 140,000 at the beginning of the 1980s. Amongst the inhabitants were some 40,000 migrants without German citizenship and nearly as many from West Germany.[77] Especially young men fleeing conscription came to Berlin. According to the allied Four-Power Agreement of 1945, neither laws concerning military service, a German army, nor military service for the residents were allowed in Berlin. West German draft authorities had few means to apprehend West Germans living in Berlin. By 1990, an estimated 50,000 conscription dodgers settled in Berlin and shaped the city's atmosphere.[78]

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[75] Gerhard Glätzer: Landkommunen in der BRD: Flucht oder konkrete Utopie?, Bielefeld 1978, pp. 47–61.

[76] Sven Reichardt: Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren, Frankfurt/Main 2014, p. 459, pp. 465–469.

[77] Hans Halter: "Niemand hat das Recht": Über die Bewegung der Hausbesetzer in Berlin, in: Michael Haller (ed.): Aussteigen oder rebellieren: Jugendliche gegen Staat und Gesellschaft, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1981, pp. 99–113, p. 104; Hans-Günter Kleff: Die Bevölkerung türkischer Herkunft in Berlin-Kreuzberg—eine Bestandsaufnahme, in: Forschungsinstitut der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Abt. Arbeit und Sozialpolitik (ed.): Ghettos oder ethnische Kolonie? Entwicklungschancen von Stadtteilen mit hohem Zuwandereranteil, Bonn 1998, pp. 83–93, p. 85.

[78] Ulrich Bröckling: Truppenflüchter und Totalverweigerer. Fahnenflucht, Eigenmächtige Abwesenheit und Dienstentziehung in der Bunderepublik, in: Ulrich Bröckling/Michael Sikora (eds.): Armeen und ihre Deserteure: Vernachlässigte Kapitel einer Militärgeschichte der Neuzeit, Göttingen 1998, pp. 288–319, pp. 299–301.

In 1985, the Senator of the Interior expressed the fear that the city would become a "refusal oasis for quitters."[79] In this way, West Berlin became an attractive safe haven for all contemporary subcultures.[80] This sociotope also gave birth to many alternative housing projects. The first experiments were undertaken by residential communes in the context of the 1968 student movement.[81] Even though most of these eccentric and/or programmatic experiments failed, shared flats soon became quite common. In this milieu, an anti-bourgeois attitude and a demarcation from the standardised homes of nuclear families were widely spread concepts.[82]

Later, more and more groups turned their backs on ordinary flats and moved into old factory buildings.[83] Over the course of the 1970s, the development of alternative housing was taken to another level. In November 1976, a hut village was built on a construction site for a power plant in Spandau Forest.[84] The phenomenon soon gained ground in the city. In the summer of 1978, an ecological festival took place which expanded on recent experiences from the hut villages. For six weeks, members of grassroots groups installed a shanty town on a wasteland in Berlin's Westend. Their aim was to try out new forms of work and life and to exhibit alternative constructions. Domes, tree houses, windmills and various cabins arose out of recycled scrap and waste. Around 200 people lived on the site and provided several thousand visitors with information about alternative energy, architecture, nutrition, recycling and ecological requirements. Reports from participants show that they were excited about possibilities outside the norm and valued the life-work experiences in a self-created and self-governed environment.[85]

> For the first time, we had an opportunity to live without external constraints from homeowners, moralizers, employers, to live like we envisioned as ideal, collectively with many other people with similar ideas and views of life; and not just live together but also work for a common cause—where else can we realise this?[86]

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[79] As cited in Ulli Kulke: Die Drücker-Kolonne, in: Die Welt, 26 October 2010, p. 8, translated by the author.

[80] Wolfgang Müller: Subkultur Westberlin 1979–1989, Hamburg 2013, p. 28.

[81] Kommune zwei: Versuch der Revolutionierung des bürgerlichen Individuums: Kollektives Leben mit politischer Arbeit verbinden, West-Berlin 1969; Sven Reichardt: Authentizität und Gemeinschaft, pp. 380–393.

[82] Ibid., pp. 351–380, pp. 451–455.

[83] Rainer Graff: Zur Aktion "Großer Überblick", in: Arch+ 12:46 (1979), pp. 18–19; Reiner Kruse: Neues Leben in alten Fabriketagen, in: Arch+ 12:46 (1979), pp. 20–22.

[84] Uwe [no last name mentioned]: Spandauer Wald—unser Wald, in: Info BUG 3:133 (1976), pp. 2–3.

[85] Bernd Uhde: Ein Sechs-Wochen-Dorf im Großstadtbauch—Ein Bericht, in: Arch+, 12:46 (1979), pp. 14–17.

[86] Ibid., p. 17.

For many of the dwellers, the experience of liberty and community made it hard to return to their ordinary apartments and structured daily routines. By now the idea of a collective turning away from the mainstream of the industrial society had become attractive not only as a temporary means for protest but as an end in itself.

Further experiments took place in the evolving squatters' movement. Reaching its apex in 1980/1981, the city had more than 160 squatted buildings in the summer of 1981, housing 2,000–3,000 mostly young people from very different life situations. Most squats were characterised by a high fluctuation among the inhabitants, many of them students but also including runaway kids, unemployed persons, drug users, college drop-outs and other escapees from the rat race who came for temporary refuge while searching for something other than a predictable life. Thus, the resident structure partly resembled the situation in the longer-term protest camps and also resulted in tensions and conflicts.[87] Nevertheless, intentions to keep state interference to a minimum and to determine one's own living conditions were broadly shared. This explicitly included residences, streets, squares and districts.[88]

After the conservative victory in the local elections of May 1981, squatting became more and more difficult and police pressure grew. The movement split into a moderate fraction trying to save at least some houses by way of contracts, and a radical one calling for unity and militant street actions against evictions. While this polarisation received some attention,[89] little has been written about what else—besides disputes and riots—happened when the movement was still strong but squatting had become increasingly difficult.

The First Alternative Trailer Sites

In March 1981, local activists occupied a wasteland close to some squats and the Berlin Wall. They cleared it of rubbish and scrap and built an animal farm for children. They planted trees, created vegetable patches, brought in tents and site trailers and employed

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[87] Armin Kuhn: Zwischen gesellschaftlicher Intervention und radikaler Nischenpolitik: Häuserkämpfe in Berlin und Barcelona am Übergang zur neoliberalen Stadt, in: Hanno Balz (ed.): "All we ever wanted …": Eine Kulturgeschichte europäischer Protestbewegungen der 1980er Jahre, Berlin 2012, pp. 37–52, p. 42; Hans Halter: "Niemand hat das Recht", pp. 101–103; Sven Reichardt: Authentizität und Gemeinschaft, pp. 519–520, pp. 534–542.

[88] Berliner Besetzerrat: der Besetzerrat, in: Radikal 6:86 (1981), p. 10; Sven Reichardt: Authentizität und Gemeinschaft, pp. 543–550.

[89] For instance, Andrej Holm/Armin Kuhn: Häuserkampf und Stadterneuerung, in: Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik 55:3 (2010), pp. 107–115; Armin Kuhn: Zwischen gesellschaftlicher Intervention und radikaler Nischenpolitik, pp. 42–45; Sven Reichardt: Authentizität und Gemeinschaft, pp. 559–561.

DIY construction for stables, huts and hutches.[90] The *Kinderbauernhof* (children's farm) was part of the squatters' movement and also served as a hideaway for some homeless squatters who had participated in the so-called 'trek of the evicted', a procession through the city led by a truck and a construction trailer to protest against recent evictions. Its motto was: "from squatter to vagabond."[91] After the trek, the trailer found its temporary home at the children's farm. The site later became one of the first alternative trailer communes. From its inception, the *Kinderbauernhof*'s approach to extending squatting to urban wasteland influenced others: just a few months after its creation, in August 1981, another site was squatted, this time with settlement as its explicit intention. The *Rollheimer Dorf* was founded in the westernmost corner of Kreuzberg. Using circus caravans and trailers, it was the first trailer commune in Berlin, and most likely in Germany.[92] The name referred to Jane Lidz's book on rolling homes, published just a year earlier in German. It also alluded to *The Flintstones* characters Betty and Barney Rubble (in German: *Geröllheimer*), who improved their Stone Age life with creative, low-tech solutions.

At the same time, the Berlin squatters' movement called for a *Tuwat* (regional dialect for 'do something') congress against the impending eviction of several squats. The name was an allusion to the *Tunix* (regional dialect for 'do nothing') congress in 1978, when several thousand participants gave the starting signal for the creation of an alternative parallel society.[93] *Tuwat* consisted of political gatherings, information, party and festival events, demonstrations and direct action. In an effort to prevail against the evictions and to accommodate visitors, tent camps were constructed on abandoned sites close to the squats. These camps were dedicated to DIY construction, and an attempt was made to tie them into the other experiences at the squatted building sites. As the illustrations in the reports show, the atmosphere was reminiscent of that at the Gorleben site-squat.[94] From that time, it had become common to extend the (former) squats with self-constructed and mobile homes.[95]

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[90] Kinderbauernhof am Mauerplatz e.V.: Kurze Selbstdarstellung, at: http://kbh-mauerplatz.de/wir.html (accessed on 18 April 2017); "Kinderbauernhöfe", in: Südost Express: Die Kreuzberger Lokalzeitung von Bürgern aus SO 36 4:5 (1981), p. 21; "Instandbesetzung Mauerplatz", in: Instand-Besetzer-Post 1:3 (1981), pp. 9–12.

[91] "Obdachlose Besetzer", in: Instand-Besetzer-Post 1:18 (1981), pp. 22–23, p. 22, translated by the author.

[92] Susanne Dzeik: Das Spannungsfeld dominanter und nichtangepasster Lebensformen in historischer Perspektive am Beispiel der Berliner Wagenburgen [unpublished diploma thesis at Freie Universität Berlin], 1995, pp. 34–35.

[93] Wolfgang Kraushaar: Autonomie oder Getto? Kontroversen über die Alternativbewegung, Frankfurt/Main 1978.

[94] "Bauseiten", in: Instand-Besetzer-Post 1:20 (1981[a]), pp. 34–35; "Bauseiten", in: Instand-Besetzer-Post 1:21 (1981), pp. 34–35.

[95] Susanne Dzeik: Das Spannungsfeld dominanter und nichtangepasster Lebensformen, p. 35.

In 1988, another innovation in alternative dwellings was developed. This time a hut village was to be constructed in the very heart of Berlin. In 1962, the construction of the Berlin Wall had not followed the border of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) exactly. Some parcels on the western side still belonged to the GDR, in particular, an area near Potsdamer Platz, where the western government wanted to build a link to the urban highway system. In March 1988, West Berlin and the GDR agreed on a land exchange. But after the GDR removed the fences, squatters and environmental activists rushed in and constructed a hut and tent village. Their aim was to prevent the highway, but also to "realise resistance practically, […] to try out new ways of living and to somehow show that the state cannot get away with everything."[96] They built a kitchen, brought in animals, all under the eyes of the West Berlin police, who were not allowed to enter GDR territory. The occupation was staged by a few hundred people and lasted from 26 May to 1 July 1988, the day on which the land exchange legally took effect. The West Berlin police immediately began the eviction. To escape penalisation, the action ended in a strange flight of nearly 200 squatters eastwards over the Berlin Wall.[97]

After the fall of the Wall, the experience was repeated and sites were opened on GDR territory where the West German police forces could not intervene until autumn 1990. In the last days of the GDR regime, East German authorities paid little attention to these sites.[98] By 1990 trailer-life had become a common and well-established way of life within the pool of countercultural habits and alternative lifestyles.

Different Paths of the Architectural Counterculture

We have seen that the implementation of light, ephemeral and mobile housing only slowly gained momentum in Germany as well as in France. At a time when the American counterculture already had abundant experience with self-determined drop-out life in handmade dwellings, the alternative movements of the 1970s had major difficulties adapting this to their particular situations.

For both countries, stricter building regulations were mentioned as a fact that the people had to deal with. And they did so in different ways. In France, it was bypassed by means of a withdrawal to depopulated regions and abandoned hamlets, which were numerous at the beginning of the 1970s. The phenomenon indeed gained ground there, but knowledge of the hidden and clandestine dwellings at first did not reach a wider public and therefore did not emblematically establish light and ephemeral housing as a countercultural concept. This development only started in the mid-1970s when the American example reached a wider (alternative) public. Another catalyst was the fact that self-construction had been discovered as a promising means of promoting the environmental movement. On occupied sites, thousands experienced that dropping out and leading a simpler life apart from consumer society was a practical possibility. This was especially true for practical routines beyond architecture and construction, like cooking and heating without public utilities. Moreover, this occurred at a time when abandoned farms and hamlets had already become scarce and the wave of escapists was less driven by collective experiments to challenge an oppressive system, than by a more individualistic search for possibilities for dropping out and alternatives. This tendency continued in the 1980s when French social movements experienced a drastic decline in members and activities. This increasingly fostered the tendency towards individual, clandestine and, therefore, less visible exit strategies.

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[96] Anonymous interviewee, in: Kubatstan 26. Mai bis 1. Juli 1988: eine live-Dokumentation [documentary film], West-Germany (Dortmunder Medienzentrum e. V.) 1988, tc. 00:05:37–00:05:57 [partly accessible at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OC8wSltRGQ (accessed on 26 July 2017)], translated by the author.

[97] Martin Schaad: "Dann geh doch rüber": Über die Mauer in den Osten, Berlin 2009, pp. 139–160.

[98] Susanne Dzeik: Das Spannungsfeld dominanter und nichtangepasster Lebensformen, pp. 40–41.

In Germany, however, a retreat to depopulated regions and villages was hardly an option for dropouts because village life had other connotations and conditions. The scarcity of rural communes in Germany is a tangible result. Thus, other niches had to be found for self-built dwellings, for example in the extra-legal spheres of site occupations and later of squats at a time in which the forces of order had other priorities than the compliance with building regulations. Thereby, a strong connection with the (mostly urban-based) social movements, namely the squatters and the environmentalists, remained. Of course most of the huts were only temporarily inhabited and sooner or later quashed. Hut villages were therefore not a long-term option for dropouts. But, as in France, they inspired people to search for more feasible options. In Germany, this took place at a turning point for the squatter movement which was still alive and strong but had to face declining chances of achieving new squats because of growing repression. This specific situation resulted in the still known concept of alternative trailer sites with a collective approach as well as strong connections to neighbouring urban landscapes.

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