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## From Wyhl to Wall Street

### Occupation and the Many Meanings of “Single-Issue” Protest

#### ABSTRACT

This article studies the mass protests that took place all around the globe in 2011 in order to reconsider scholars' conclusions about the nature of protest since the 1970s. It challenges accounts that describe recent protest movements as overly self-referential by focusing on the protest tactic of occupation, perhaps the 2011 protests' most self-evident commonality. The article shows how the tactic of occupation allows broad coalitions to develop around specific demands, and also the ways that disparate occupation protests are linked together across space, particularly in the imagination of their protagonists. As a result, it shows how occupations can serve as the basis for a new collective politics in an era when mass parties appear to be in decline. Using the 1975 occupation of the nuclear reactor construction site near the West German village of Wyhl as a model, the article looks closely at how occupations develop, the problems their diverse protagonists confront as they seek to work together, and their potential to help activists imagine alternative worlds. This case study reveals the importance of the “infrastructure of re-creation” that protesters build-up on occupied sites for coalition-building, for the broadening of protesters' demands, and also for the expansion of activists' sense of the possible. Paradoxically, I argue, it is precisely their fragmented nature that makes occupations so difficult to define, so open to people from different backgrounds, and thus so significant for the social totality.

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In 1975, “city and country people, the hippies and the ‘bourgeoisie’” protested against a nuclear reactor being built near the West German village of Wyhl by physically occupying its construction site. A local Communist newsletter responded by describing the diverse group of protesters as the vanguard of a “solidary coalition of the millions of oppressed and exploited in our country.” They were engaged, the article continued, “in

a self-conscious struggle against the capitalists and their state apparatus.”<sup>1</sup> The idea that opponents of a particular reactor project in a rural hinterland were consciously seeking to end capitalism and bring down the West German state was far-fetched, but the Wyhl occupation’s ramifications were much larger than a single reactor. The protest was part of a powerful social movement that engaged many West Germans and eventually changed West German politics. In 1979, the largest street protest in West German history targeted the German nuclear program; in 1983, the antinuclear Green Party became the first new party to enter the *Bundestag* since the founding of West Germany in 1949. In parliament, the Greens introduced new issues to mainstream politics and helped transform liberal democratic praxis.<sup>2</sup>

In their assessments of social activism after 1968, several prominent scholars take issue with the idea that individual grassroots actions focused on specific, localised concerns—like a particular nuclear reactor—could comprise a larger political struggle. Instead, they assert that activism after 1968 consisted of individualised, uncoordinated, and distant protests incapable of affecting significant social or political changes across broad swathes of territory. Thus, Geoff Eley locates the chief difference between “the new politics of identity” and “the labour movement’s early twentieth century coalitions of community-based progressive reform” in the fact that “local agitations [since 1968] lacked the coordinating centre of a nationally organised party.”<sup>3</sup> Other scholars go beyond Eley’s pining for the days of mass social democratic parties, condemning recent social movements as provincial, inwardly focused, and ineffective. Slavoj Žižek, for example, has written off the women’s movement, the gay rights movement, and other so-called New Social Movements because, “they are ‘one-issue movements’ lacking the dimension of universality—that is, they do not relate to the social totality.”<sup>4</sup>

Tony Judt pushes the argument about the negative effects of social movements’ post-1968 atomisation to its logical conclusion, making activists’ turn to “self-referential concerns” like “feminism, gay rights and identity politics” responsible for the rise of neo-liberalism.<sup>5</sup> In the United States, he contends, the “McGovern-era Democratic Party [...] sought to advance the interests of every hyphenated category you could think of

- 1 *Dernières nouvelles d’Alsace: Kundgebung und Volksfest: Die neue Wacht am Rhein*, 1 April 1975; KPD Regionalkomitee Baden-Württemberg: *Kein KKW in Wyhl*, 23 February 1975, in: *Archiv Soziale Bewegung Freiburg*, Doc Nr. 3599, translated by the author.
- 2 Stephen Milder/Konrad Jarausch: *Green Politics in Germany*, in: *German Politics and Society* 33:4 (Winter 2015).
- 3 Geoff Eley: *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe: 1850–2000*, Oxford 2002, p. 467, p. 472.
- 4 Slavoj Žižek: *Have Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri rewritten the Communist Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century?*, in: *Rethinking Marxism* 13:3/4 (2001), pp. 190–198.
- 5 Tony Judt: *Ill fares the Land*, New York 2011, pp. 235–236.

[...] in doing so it undermined its own rhetorical inheritance and forgot how to speak about the collective society.”<sup>6</sup> In his comprehensive history of post-war Europe, Tony Judt connects his discussion of the continent’s women’s and gay rights movements with “‘single-issue’ movements and parties,” that arose in the 1970s, grouping such illustrious organisations as the “Campaign for Real Ale” with Europe’s Green parties as if to prove their irrelevance.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, by proposing that advocating on behalf of specific groups, categories, or interests evinces contemporary activists’ inability to see the big picture, these critiques of activism after 1968 pose an important, if unanswered, question: how, in an era that lacks the mass social democratic parties that nostalgic scholars consider the great engines of progressive change in the twentieth century, might the collective be addressed in politics and activism?<sup>8</sup> In the present article, I seek to answer this question by juxtaposing the 1975 Wyhl occupation with the uprisings that engaged people all around the world in 2011. In doing so, I propose links that allow us to see protests like the Wyhl occupation or Occupy Wall Street not as disoriented activists’ random, inexplicable outbursts, but rather as instances of a powerful approach to social activism that protesters have used to address the collective in an era when mass parties have struggled to do so.

Connections amongst disparate protest campaigns and across decades are particularly evident in the forms of protest used by 1970s anti-reactor activists and by the proponents of the uprisings of 2011. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt have pointed out that the “strategy of encampment or occupation” was the “most obvious” commonality between the topically diffuse and geographically far-flung protest movements of 2011, which ranged from the Arab uprisings, to the protests of Wisconsin labourites, to Occupy Wall Street.<sup>9</sup> Though scholars continue to struggle to define just what constitutes occupation, a growing literature on “protest camps” investigates occupation as a tactic and offers clues about how it is used to bridge the perceived divide between “self-referential” activism and a concern with social justice and the commonweal.<sup>10</sup> Building on this scholarship, I argue here that it is precisely their fragmented, and diverse nature that makes occupations difficult to define, open to people from different backgrounds—and thus significant for

6 Tony Judt with Timothy Snyder: *Thinking the Twentieth Century*, New York 2012, p. 370.

7 Tony Judt: *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, New York 2005, p. 486.

8 Just as Tony Judt argues they did when he writes that “it was fallacious in the 1970s for the hyphenated radicals to suppose that pursuing their own interest could be done without affecting the interest of the collectivity as a whole.” *Ibid.*, p. 372.

9 Michael Hardt/Antonio Negri: *Declaration*, Amazon Kindle Ebook 2012, p. 7.

10 In perhaps the most important contribution to this new literature, Anna Feigenbaum, Fabian Frenzel, and Patrick McCurdy summarise this debate as one between protesters’ desire for autonomy and their ability to take up the social question. Anna Feigenbaum/Fabian Frenzel/Patrick McCurdy: *Protest Camps*, London 2013, p. 24.

the social totality. In order to define occupation and describe its effects, I will turn first to the 1975 Wyhl occupation. In the following sections, I will use that protest's history as a kaleidoscopic lens through which to examine the diverse uprisings of 2011 and the modes of collective action they evidence. This comparative approach reveals the development, in an era when mass parties have lost their efficacy, of an approach to politics that can be used to forge diverse coalitions, connect distinct issues, and thus to effect significant change.

## Stopping Construction, Building Community: Quotidian Occupation

Anti-reactor protests, which spread rapidly throughout Western Europe and the United States in the mid-1970s, were of interest to some observers—and overlooked by many others—because they seemed new and different. Initial reactions to the Wyhl occupation, which began in February 1975, exemplified contemporaries' difficulty explaining anti-reactor actions that did not match preconceived notions of protest. Even after hundreds of people descended on the Wyhl reactor construction site on the morning of 18 February 1975, convinced workers to put down their tools, and refused to disperse, the local press was at pains to describe the action, unsure who was directing the protesters and waffling as to whether or not an occupation of the site was actually underway.<sup>11</sup> This uncertainty stemmed from the simple fact that the protest and its protagonists did not match preconceived notions of who protesters were and how they protested. The crowd was mainly comprised of rural women, not bearded sixty-eighters. Instead of advocating radical social change, the protest's spokespersons talked about preserving their threatened farms and vineyards. Nor did the occupiers provoke conflict with the police. By evening, they were protesting by peacefully making camp, eating dinner, and conversing around the campfire.

Despite observers' disbelief, the action's protagonists knew that by swarming onto the site they were taking serious action against a nuclear reactor that threatened their livelihoods, their health, and their hometowns. Though they seemed unorthodox and disorganised, the protesters' actions were deliberate and powerful. Reactor opponents had publicly declared their intention to occupy the site six months earlier. Since September 1974, many of them had participated in the occupation of a lead processing plant construction site two kilometres away from Wyhl. For these practiced occupiers, working against the reactor could mean passing time on the site drinking wine or knitting, playing

11 *Badische Zeitung*: Demonstranten erzwingen Abbruch der Arbeit, 19 February 1975.

cards or telling stories.<sup>12</sup> In fact, these mundane activities—things normally done at home or perhaps with friends in the village pub—comprised their illegal occupation of a construction site owned by the *Badenwerk* Utility Company. In order to make space for these activities and to remain comfortable on the site during the cold, wet winter, activists erected shelters and meeting spaces on the site, building up what Anna Feigenbaum, Fabian Frenzel, and Patrick McCurdy have called “infrastructures of re-creation.”<sup>13</sup> Not only were these structures and systems required for daily life, they also promoted the formation of a new community within the encampment.

The process of building and using these structures shaped the occupation’s character and gave it meaning beyond the struggle over the Wyhl reactor. As one of the men who helped build a “Friendship House” on the site put it, building infrastructure gives “one [...] a new image of his fellow activists [...] it’s not how well one can speak that counts here, but rather how one wields a tool.”<sup>14</sup> While the men were busy swinging hammers, women staffed a field kitchen that had been hauled to the site in a construction trailer.<sup>15</sup> For many local women, Jens Ivo Engels argues, participation in the occupation was also a means of incorporating the site itself into their way of life; an opportunity to enforce the sorts of morals and behaviour they expected at home.<sup>16</sup> Differently put, participation in the occupation was an opportunity to shape the sort of community it prefigured and to choose who belonged. In enabling a new community to emerge on the occupied site, the infrastructure of re-creation went far beyond meeting protesters’ basic needs. They also published a newspaper and organised a Community College. The latter hosted nightly lectures and discussions on topics from nuclear energy to travel and regional folklore as well as concerts and sing-alongs. Its meetings drew anywhere from 30 to 400 people, inviting open-ended conversation. Scientists shared their nuclear knowledge with local farmers and even protesters with little scientific training felt comfortable speaking up and asking questions in the informal atmosphere.<sup>17</sup> After eight weeks of coursework, one rural activist reported with just a touch of hyperbole, local people knew more about nuclear energy production than did their representatives in Stuttgart.<sup>18</sup>

12 One of the coordinators of the *Volkshochschule Wyhler Wald* quoted in: Wolfgang Beer: *Lernen im Widerstand*, Hamburg 1978/Berlin 1980, p. 96.

13 Anna Feigenbaum/Fabian Frenzel/Patrick McCurdy: *Protest Camps*, ch. 5, pp. 29–30.

14 Marcel: *Möglichkeiten*, in: *Was Wir Wollen*, 3 November 1974, p. 11.

15 *Was Wir Wollen: Geschichten aus dem Wyhl Wald*, undated (likely May 1975), p. 5.

16 Jens Ivo Engels: *Gender Roles and German Anti-Nuclear Protest*, in: Christoph Bernhardt/Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud (eds.): *Le démon moderne: la pollution dans les sociétés urbaines et industrielles d’Europe*, Clermont-Ferrand 2002, p. 415.

17 Wolfgang Beer: *Volkshochschule Wyhler Wald*, in: Bernd Nössler/Margret de Witt (eds.): *Wyhl: Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends: Betroffene Bürger berichten*, Freiburg 1976, p. 269.

18 *Badische Zeitung: Aufgebrachte Winzer sperren Wirtschaftsminister im Rathaus ein*, 18 June 1975.

This re-creation of everyday life in the Wyhl woods—from construction and cookery to a local newspaper and a community college—made people from all walks of life comfortable on the site and shaped the occupation. A Freiburg activist recalled that the occupiers included girl scouts, boy scouts, and Grey Panthers, followers of every conceivable religion, “critical architects, doctors, pedagogues, journalists, frustrated orchestral musicians, [and] ruminant police officers.”<sup>19</sup> Rural families “made the occupation their Sunday outing.” They built a playground, “set-up coffee and cake stands [and] sold sausages and wine.”<sup>20</sup> While it would be difficult to construe a typical Sunday outing as a daring act of anti-nuclear protest, drinking coffee and eating cake in the middle of the Wyhl reactor’s construction site was an unmistakable act of resistance. For the project’s opponents, daily life became a string of anti-nuclear actions. Rather than run-of-the-mill protest marches or rallies, however, these actions comprised Germans’ interactions with French around the campfire, farmers’ wives preparing food for urban youths on the occupied site, and families’ Sunday outings. By building a community in the woods, protesters also found a way to approach politics as a collective.

## From Specific Concerns to Common Interests at the Local Level

Though the occupation itself helped build community, the campaign against the reactor was steeped in specific, regional issues. Local vintners were concerned primarily about their valuable crops’ future beneath the trailing clouds of steam the nuclear reactor would discharge from its cooling towers. From the very beginning, the specificity of these concerns seemed fatal to the movement. At the local, the regional, and then the national level, reactor opponents overcame this potential weakness by articulating the ways that their particular concerns were closely linked to the public interest; in the process, they made nuclear energy a central issue of German politics into the twenty-first century.

It is important to remember that despite nuclear energy’s pride of place in German politics since the late 1970s, the Wyhl occupation came at a time when relatively few Germans considered it a problem. Pockets of resistance developed around several reactor construction sites in West Germany in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but these early grassroots anti-reactor protests focused on immediately local matters like the threat to

- 19 Walter Mossmann: *Realistisch sein: Das unmögliche verlangen: Wahrheitstreu gefälschte Erinnerungen*, Berlin 2009, p. 203.
- 20 Eine Platzbesetzerin: *Das Leben auf dem Platz*, in: Bernd Nössler/Margret de Witt (eds.): *Wyhl: Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends: Betroffene Bürger berichten*, p. 147.

local fisheries and agricultural production posed by drawing cooling water from rivers and the dissipation of excess heat generated by nuclear fission.<sup>21</sup> Not only did such discrete technical concerns seem distant from Slavoj Žižek's social totality, many on the Left believed that nuclear energy held significant potential for new employment opportunities and thus for the reinvigoration of the post-war economic boom, which would bring renewed prosperity to the working class. The editors of Freiburg's Communist *Klassenkampf* (Class Struggle) newspaper scoffed at the first anti-reactor protests in their region as the fight of "doctors and big vintners" who opposed nuclear energy out of "their own interest" in order to "enlarge their power and their profits."<sup>22</sup> From the Communists' perspective, anti-nuclear protests placed self-interest ahead of the commonweal.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, the same Freiburg Communists who denounced local anti-nuclear protests with such vitriol as late as 1972 strongly supported the movement by 1975. Their change of heart was not tantamount to a "value change" that replaced "material" concerns with "post-material" ones. Instead, it ought to be interpreted as recognition of a new means of building the broad coalition necessary to create progressive change. This attitude was readily apparent in the Communists' praise for local antinuclear activists who had "inspir[ed] the masses throughout the country to take part in the struggle against the decisions of the state bureaucracy, which are directed against the people's will."<sup>24</sup> The Freiburg Communists' change of heart was a product of the success with which the first opponents of the Wyhl project engaged local people in the struggle. Pioneering anti-nuclear activists recruited their colleagues and neighbours by explaining how the proposed reactor would ravage the local economy. They continued to speak about remarkably specific issues, most importantly the possibility that steam discharged by the reactor's cooling towers would affect the local climate. In a "unique production area for European wines of the highest quality," where raising grapes, making wine, and marketing the finished product sustained many families, such changes would harm a wide cross-section of the population.<sup>25</sup>

- 21 Joachim Radkau: *Aufstieg und Krise der deutschen Atomwirtschaft 1945–1975: Verdrängte Alternativen in der Kerntechnik und der Ursprung der nuklearen Kontroverse*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1983, p. 412, p. 416, p. 441.
- 22 *Klassenkampf*: Extra Blatt: 500 Kaiserstühler Bauern demonstrieren gegen Kernkraftwerk, 19 September 1972, in: Archiv Soziale Bewegung Freiburg, Doc. Nr. 3581.
- 23 As Jan-Werner Müller puts it, it was "difficult for [...] political parties of an ultimately Marxist inspiration to break with a belief in the beneficial nature of production." Jan-Werner Müller: *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth Century Europe*, New Haven 2011, p. 211.
- 24 *Kommunistische Volkszeitung*: Die Kämpfe in Wyhl haben die Volksmasse im ganzen Land ermutigt 3:15/16 (1975), p. 9.
- 25 Interessengemeinschaft der Kaiserstuhl- und Tuniberggemeinden to Das Wirtschaftsministerium Baden-Württemberg, 28 September 1972, in: Stadtarchiv Endingen III. A 842, 1971–1974.



The local appeal of anti-nuclear protest expanded further when reactor opponents linked their struggles against the reactor to the shortcomings of West German democracy. During the early seventies, reactor opponents in the Upper Rhine Valley frequently appealed to government officials to redress their grievances. After officials refused to answer their constituents' straightforward questions or offer the sort of assistance to which local people felt entitled, concerned citizens grew increasingly frustrated. When opponents of the Wyhl project were prevented from speaking at a licensing hearing in July 1974, they gave up on the state-sanctioned bureaucratic process that was getting them nowhere. After walking out of the meeting hall, angry activists marched through town bearing a coffin marked "Democracy." Their march ended with a mock funeral, staged in front of the mayor's home. They could hardly have made the link between their concern about the ways the nuclear reactor project would affect their individual economic interests and the demise of the democratic order any more clear.<sup>26</sup> Shortly after the occupation began, police brutality eroded local people's confidence in their government further still. When "the wife of a candidate for town council was attacked by a water cannon" on the occupied site, the chair of the local chapter of the Christian Democratic Union, became so frustrated that he was no longer willing to continue his efforts "to calm the [anti-reactor] waves out of solidarity to the government." Now that he had "gotten hot under the collar" he became an outspoken opponent of the project and resigned his post in the party. At the same time as the chair explained his decision to step down, village council candidates ended their campaigns.<sup>27</sup> Specific concerns about a particular reactor project were making waves in electoral politics.

By connecting the anti-reactor campaign to their region's economic future and by linking government officials' insufficient respect for local people to the democratic process, reactor opponents created a powerful grassroots movement that excited observers understood as a "popular rebellion."<sup>28</sup> Earlier anti-reactor protesters, therefore, had been stopped short not so much by the limitations of the nuclear issue, but rather the limitations of the way they spoke and thought about it. By the time they prepared to occupy the reactor construction site in February 1975, protesters in the Upper Rhine Valley had, through years of hard work, built a movement that was about far more than a single nuclear reactor. The occupation itself fostered the consolidation of the Rhenish coalition and made the anti-reactor campaign's potentially broad ramifications apparent to people far from the village of Wyhl.

26 Bernd Nössler: Das Genehmigungsverfahren, in: Bernd Nössler/Margret de Witt (eds.): Wyhl: Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends: Betroffene Bürger berichten, p. 50.

27 Badische Zeitung: CDU-Gemeinderatslisten sind gefährdet, 25 February 1975.

28 Freia Hoffmann/Walter Mossmann: Bürger werden Initiativ—Vier Beispiele, transcript (Broadcast 7 October 1973), p. 24, in: Archiv Soziale Bewegung Freiburg, Doc. Nr. 17517.



## “Wyhl is Everywhere:” The Geographic Range of Targeted Grassroots Protest

When footage of police attacking peaceful demonstrators on the construction site was broadcast on primetime television in February 1975, the Wyhl protest briefly garnered the national media spotlight. Citizens across the Republic were horrified by images of police blasting singing demonstrators with water cannons and siccing vicious dogs on elderly women. Yet, the occupation made nuclear energy a significant political issue in the long term not only because of these 15 minutes of fame, but also because people from all over Western Europe visited the encampment in the Wyhl forest and recorded their impressions of it. Through such trips, but also through vicarious visits via alternative press reports, people elsewhere came to understand the links between anti-nuclear activism, the fate of local communities, and democracy matters. As a result, Europeans of many backgrounds took up the anti-nuclear banner.

The occupation was such a powerful recruiting tool because it gave anti-nuclear activism an address and allowed outsiders to briefly join the community. Visitors' reports made this dynamic quite clear. “Nowhere else,” wrote a pair of Berlin activists who visited the site in July 1975, “have we ever received so friendly a welcome as the one we received in Wyhl.” Foremost among many fond memories was time spent “eating hot sausages and drinking good Silvaner.” These gustatory highlights reveal the way that the infrastructure of re-creation brought people together on the site, but they were not the primary reason that the pair of Berliners chose to title an article on their visit “Wyhl is worth the trip.” During their “first hour on the site,” the Berliners' misconceptions about the occupiers' narrow-mindedness and limited political outlook were “erased” by “direct contact with the people who have pitched their tents here.” One brief visit, they concluded, was “more valuable for us than ten of the newspaper articles that we get to read in Berlin.”<sup>29</sup> Such visits were daily occurrences at Wyhl. One occupier recalled that “packed buses” filled with “pupils, tourists, supporters and opponents” pulled up each day during the summer of 1975. The steady stream of curious visitors meant that the occupiers often “had to re-tell the story of Wyhl three or four times in a single day.” The thank you letters and reports sent back to southern Baden and published in the alternative press elsewhere evidenced both the spread of knowledge about Wyhl and the powerful human connections developing between visitors and occupiers.<sup>30</sup>

29 Was Wir Wollen: Wyhl ist eine Reise wert!, 28 July 1975, p. 9.

30 See, for example: Eine Platzbesetzerin: Das Leben auf dem besetzten Platz, p. 147; Was Wir Wollen: Kein KKW in Borken und anderswo, 28 July 1975, p. 9.

Though the occupation began as a provincial protest dedicated to the fight against a single nuclear reactor, trips to the Wyhl forest gave visitors the idea that the battle against the Wyhl reactor was related to their own struggles. In a speech on the occupied site, an anti-reactor activist visiting from Luxembourg exclaimed that, “the struggle in Wyhl is our struggle, your victory will be our victory!”<sup>31</sup> The future co-founder of the West German Green Party, Petra Kelly, herself a frequent visitor to Wyhl, described the occupation as part of a “political and social chain reaction” that included grassroots protests at “LIP, Larzac, Marckolsheim, Wyhl, Brokdorf, and Kaiseraugst.”<sup>32</sup> Kelly’s proposed “chain reaction” and the Freiburg Communists’ declaration that the Wyhl occupiers comprised the vanguard of a “solidary coalition of the millions of oppressed and exploited” meant that for them, Wyhl was part of a powerful social movement that dealt with a range of issues.

By experiencing first-hand the occupation’s diverse cast of protagonists, and by grouping it together with grassroots struggles in other places, activists connected the locally-focused Wyhl occupation with the social totality. This same sort of kaleidoscopic perspective, encompassing multiple unique actions, has been deployed more recently by activists and observers who understand the disparate protests of 2011 as interlinked despite their many differences. As the Wyhl example suggests, and as a look at the protests of 2011 will confirm, imagined connections can strongly influence protests’ protagonists—even if individual protests have disparate goals and are carried out in dissimilar environments by different sorts of activists. Not only does seeing connections provide inspiration and reinforcement, it also furthers the idea that occupations can serve as “laboratories of radical, tangible democracy that can help to imagine and build blueprints for alternative worlds.”<sup>33</sup>

## Occupation and the Egyptian Revolution of 2011

Characterisations of the Arab uprisings of 2011 as “Facebook Revolutions,” suggest that social media and mobile telephones are both the cause and the most essential infrastructure of recent protests. The significance of occupied places as centres of person-to-person interaction, learning, and imagining appears greatly diminished since 1975, when visiting the Wyhl reactor site helped many outside activists to get to know the reactor’s opponents and to understand the aims of their protest. The drastic discrepancies between the interests

- 31 Helga Weber-Zucht: *Wieder ein Ostermarsch—Wyhl*, in: *Infodienst für gewaltfreie Organisatoren* 19 (1975), pp. 3–5.
- 32 Petra Kelly/Roland Vogt: *Ökologie und Frieden: Der Kampf gegen Atomkraftwerke aus der Sicht von Hiroshima*, in: *Forum Europa* 1/2 (1977), p. 18.
- 33 Anna Feigenbaum/Fabian Frenzel/Patrick McCurdy: *Protest Camps*, p. 220.

and aims of Egyptian insurgents and Wisconsin labourites, to name just two examples, suggest that the various movements of 2011 had little in common with one another, let alone the anti-nuclear struggles of the 1970s. Despite the technological advances of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, not to mention the disparate foci of these protests, however, occupation remains an important shared feature. This is not to say that there were causative links between protests that took place decades apart from one another and spanned the globe. Nonetheless, the same aspects of occupation that enabled it to foster local coalition-building at Wyhl and to play an essential part in the anti-reactor protest's incorporation into larger struggles, are evident in the uprisings of 2011 as well. In both cases, the tactic of occupation allowed spatially and thematically focused protests to transcend individual issues and foster the imagining of alternative societies.

Despite occupation's tremendous potential, the link between occupation protests and community-building remains difficult to understand. Criticising the protests of 2011 for their lack of clear demands has become a veritable cottage industry. Even sympathetic observers like Lech Walesa criticised activists "in the Arab world, Europe, and the United States" for knowing "that the status-quo should not be tolerated" but being "a lot less clear and unified about what they want to replace it with."<sup>34</sup> Outright critics of the protests were far less generous. Dan Gainor, to name one example, slammed the Occupy Wall Street protests on FoxNews.com for "[beginning] with no stated goals, no public spokespeople, and the most ridiculous attendees you could imagine."<sup>35</sup>

As the Egyptian case reveals, these critiques tell only half the story. While discontent with the Mubarak regime was longstanding and widespread, dissidents had previously been unable to mobilise large numbers of Egyptians. For activists like the Google executive Wael Ghonim, the brutal murder of Khaled Said by state security became a focal point for protests against a regime that had committed numerous other abuses against Egyptian people during its thirty years in power. Ghonim quickly realised that his Facebook page "We Are All Khaled Said," attracted more interest and drew participation from a broader cross-section of the Egyptian population than his earlier attempts to promote Mohamed ElBaradei's Presidential campaign; even though ElBaradei had campaigned under the broad slogan of "change," and promoted a seven-point program enumerating the specific changes he would implement in order to make Egypt more democratic.

34 Lech Walesa: Protesters Need a Plan, Not Just a Complaint, in: *The Independent*, 15 November 2011.

35 Interestingly, even Dan Gainor was willing to admit that the Occupy Wall Street protesters had identified a real problem. "They are right," he wrote, "that many Americans face true pain and the elite of both political parties seems completely out of touch about it." Dan Gainor: *Occupy Wall Street: More Than Just Another Loony Protest Movement From the Left*, 3 October 2011, available online at: <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2011/10/03/occupy-wall-street-not-just-another-liberal-protest/> (accessed on 23 September 2016).

By focusing on the regime's brutal treatment of a particular young man and the heart-wrenching story of his mother's loss, organisers like Ghonim created common ground where people from different backgrounds could come together. As the Khaled Said case slowly moved through the courts, discussions on the "We Are All Khaled Said" Facebook page developed into broader critiques of police brutality. Slowly, that issue sparked conversations about the regime that engaged discontented Egyptians who felt distant from politics and disfranchised by rigged elections. It was no accident that the first of the string of Cairo protests leading up to President Husni Mubarak's resignation was held on 25 January, which Mubarak had recently made "Police Day." Yet it was not simply newly engaged Egyptians or Facebook-activists like Ghonim who pushed Mubarak out. The protest made room for members of many different groups, including those loath to battle the police.

The Tahrir occupation was particularly powerful because it allowed protesters to build a new society atop what might otherwise be considered a narrow single demand. Activists and visitors to Tahrir Square noted a striking distance between "the republic" and the rest of the city.<sup>36</sup> "I think the safest place for a journalist to be is inside Tahrir Square," wrote Sharif Abdel Kouddous. "It's once you leave Tahrir, you're on the streets of Cairo, that the Mubarak regime still controls, where journalists have come under heavy crackdown."<sup>37</sup> A female protester recalled that the protests made Tahrir Square into a special place because despite the enormous crowds there, she was never sexually harassed. "When you're in Tahrir Square, you always feel more secure, partially because the atmosphere is so festive," she said.<sup>38</sup> Feelings of security also built on the elaborate system of barricades and checkpoints activists built up and used to guard the square. As at Wyhl, such infrastructure was both a means towards an end and an end in and of itself. Building and using it enabled protesters to imagine an alternative world where problems like sexual assault were far less common.

Of course, as the brutal sexual assault of CBS News Correspondent Lara Logan revealed, Tahrir Square was not really free of such problems. It was precisely amidst the jubilation on the night of 11 February—when President Mubarak announced his resignation—that Logan was sexually assaulted by a group of men. That a larger group of women joined by twenty soldiers intervened to rescue Logan may reveal something of the sort of solidarity among protesters that had developed on Tahrir Square. Yet, as ABC News reported in the wake of the assault, Logan's case was not unique. In the preceding

36 This term is taken from Heba Morayef: *Voices From Tahrir*, at: Human Rights Watch, 20 January 2012. <https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/audio/2012/01/20/voices-tahrir-i-bread-freedom-and-dignity> (accessed on 23 September 2016).

37 Sharif Abdel Kouddous, quoted in: Amy Goodman: *Day of Departure: Massive Demonstrations Across Egypt Aim to Oust Mubarak: Sharif Abdel Kouddous Reports Live from Cairo*, in: *Democracy Now!*, 4 February 2011.

38 Heba Morayef: *Voices From Tahrir*.

days, “an Egyptian photographer was shot and killed as he took photos of the crowd, a Swedish journalist was stabbed and many international news agencies quickly pulled their crews from Egypt.”<sup>39</sup> The republic that briefly existed on Tahrir Square was not really a model society, regardless of its organisers’ aspirations. The very fact that violent crimes can and do occur on occupied sites helps us to understand Anna Feigenbaum, Fabian Frenzel, and Patrick McCurdy’s use of Foucault’s concept of “heterotopia” to describe protest camps. Protest camps, they propose, open up realistic alternative worlds precisely because they remain entangled in the real world.<sup>40</sup> Looking at the Tahrir occupation from this perspective helps us to see how the real and mundane services and infrastructure that the protesters themselves organised on the Square fostered their shared sense of purpose, their feelings of safety, and ultimately their sense that another Egypt was possible, even if it had not yet been established.

The importance of what protesters physically did on Tahrir is particularly apparent when it is contrasted to the pitched battles with police that were the focal point of the protests in Cairo from 25 January until 28 January. On 28 January, the “day of rage,” protesters finally overcame lines of police equipped with tear gas, armoured vehicles, and water cannons and marched triumphantly onto the Square.<sup>41</sup> Claiming Tahrir radically changed the protest movement because it allowed the infrastructure of re-creation to take centre stage.<sup>42</sup> Journalists were duly impressed by infrastructural projects, but their descriptions fell short of explaining their contribution to social change beyond Tahrir. “Out of the seemingly formless mass in the square,” one US journalist reported:

some semblance of organization has arisen. Committees take care of logistics—to direct supplies of food and water as well as take care of sanitation; awareness—to counter government claims and spread word of new protests; security—to check for police agents and weapons; and other issues.<sup>43</sup>

- 39 Russell Goldman: CBS News’ Lara Logan out of hospital after assault in Egypt, at: ABC News, 15 February 2011, available online at: <http://abcnews.go.com/US/lara-logan-hospitalized-sexually-attacked-egypt-protesters-celebration/story?id=12925235> (accessed on 23 September 2016).
- 40 Anna Feigenbaum/Fabian Frenzel/Patrick McCurdy: *Protest Camps*, pp. 220–221.
- 41 Robin Wright: *Rock the Casbah: Rage and Rebellion Across the Islamic World*, New York 2011, pp. 21–23.
- 42 This is not to say that clashes with police ended once and for all with the beginning of the occupation; the “camel battle,” which comprised some of the most violent fighting, did not take place until 2 February, for example.
- 43 Anand Gopal: *Fighting for Liberation in Tahrir Square: Protesters in Egypt all Agree on one Thing: Mubarak Must Go*, in: *The Nation*, 28 February 2011.

This description's empty phrasing, which begins in the passive voice and attributes important infrastructural achievements to a "formless mass," echoes journalists' misunderstandings of the 1975 Wyhl protests. More usefully, however, it alludes to the way that a broad cross-section of the Egyptian populace came together to create the necessities of communal life on the square. Though he was detained by security forces for much of the occupation, Wael Ghonim triumphantly described individuals' contributions as an "organic civic movement [that] was unprecedented in Egyptian history."<sup>44</sup> Such feelings of pride in their accomplishments help to explain why protesters felt safer inside the republic than beyond its borders, even though assaults did occur on Tahrir Square. Perhaps more importantly, they show us how activists came to see physical work on the site as the basis for the alternative society they hoped to create throughout Egypt, effectively linking a prefigurative approach to politics with the effort to overthrow the corrupt regime.<sup>45</sup> Even if the republic that protesters briefly established on Tahrir Square fell far short of offering a true alternative to Mubarak's Egypt, it did offer the beginnings of an answer to Lech Walesa's probing question about activists' aims.

Building infrastructure was not the only way in which living on Tahrir helped protesters imagine a new Egypt. As at Wyhl, the nature of the occupation made daily life into a series of protests and acts of solidarity, thus building new bonds between disparate social groups. Whether Muslim or Christian, one protester recalled, prayers always drew a large crowd to the Square.<sup>46</sup> Mainstream media throughout the West made much of the manner in which Copts and Muslims took turns standing watch over each other as the two communities carried out their separate religious ceremonies.<sup>47</sup> Kim Badawi's pictures of "crowds of Egyptians from extremely different socioeconomic backgrounds" huddled around projectors at night-time revealed yet another way that simply continuing everyday life on the square broke down the barriers of a fragmented society and brought people together.<sup>48</sup> An American journalist reported that "a dizzying number of opinions" were being expressed on Tahrir. "Intense debates over Egypt's future take place on the sidewalks,

44 Wael Ghonim: *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is Greater than the People in Power: A Memoir*, Boston 2012, p. 225.

45 Wini Breines uses the distinction between prefigurative politics and instrumental politics in order to describe the significance of New Left protest, which she considers valuable for its prefigurative qualities. I argue here that occupation links together prefigurative and instrumental politics. Wini Breines: *Community and Organization: The New Left and Michels' "Iron Law"*, in: *Social Problems* 27:4 (1980), pp. 419–429.

46 Heba Morayef: *Voices From Tahrir*.

47 Daily Mail Online: *Images of Solidarity as Christians Join Hands to Protect Muslims as they Pray During Cairo Protests*, 3 February 2011, available online at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1353330/Egypt-protests-Christians-join-hands-protect-Muslims-pray-Cairo-protests.html#ixzz1rZXSp4l3> (accessed on 23 September 2016).

48 James Pomerantz: *Kim Badawi: Life in Tahrir Square*, at: *Photo Booth: The View from the New Yorker's Photo Department*, 15 December 2011, available online at: <http://www>.

in tents, on the barricades,” he noted. The sorts of conversations that had previously only been possible around activists’ kitchen tables, could suddenly take place in the open, with an audience of people who might contribute their own opinions at any moment.

Such diversity of opinions has been used to discredit the movement as inchoate. Yet, there was enormous value in the fact that people who may never have spoken with one another beyond Tahrir were talking about Egypt’s future. “I saw a conservative religious man with a beard talking casually about politics with a modern girl,” one Egyptian protester recalled. This odd couple clearly felt “that they were part of the same cause.”<sup>49</sup> Given the scope of the coalition occupying Tahrir Square, which “encompassed secular liberal parties, the Muslim Brotherhood, left-wing groups and perhaps the largest contingent: unaligned first-time activists,” such intense discussion between unlikely conversation partners was widespread.<sup>50</sup> Yet such interactions would have been highly unlikely—if possible at all—on the other side of the barricades. Even if they did not lead to a fully-formed programme, they suggested the formulation of common ideas about Egypt’s future. In the case of Egypt, just as at Wyhl, the movement had already begun to grow beyond specific calls for justice for Khaled Said by the time protesters claimed Tahrir Square. But the occupation itself linked concerns about police brutality and the demand that Husni Mubarak resign to an inclusive and productive—if still incomplete—vision for a new Egypt.

## From Tahrir Square to Zuccotti Park: The Personalisation of the Political and the Universal Potential of Self-Referential Politics

The Egyptian insurgency that initiated the occupation of *Maydān al-Tahrir* seems half a world away from the occupation of the Wisconsin Capitol Building and the Occupy Wall Street encampment—geographically and intellectually. Wisconsin public sector employees’ interest in maintaining their collective bargaining rights was quite different from Egyptians’ anger over the murder of Khaled Said and their longstanding grievances with the Mubarak regime. Nonetheless, activists on both sides of the Atlantic maintained that Midwesterners and Middle Easterners had more in common than might be assumed at first glance. The links they proposed between their far-flung protests were often tenuous,

[newyorker.com/online/blogs/photobooth/2011/12/kim-badawi-life-in-tahrir-square.html#ixzz1rZbkpJ3q](http://newyorker.com/online/blogs/photobooth/2011/12/kim-badawi-life-in-tahrir-square.html#ixzz1rZbkpJ3q) (accessed on 23 September 2016).

49 Heba Morayef: *Voices From Tahrir*.

50 Anand Gopal: *Fighting for Liberation in Tahrir Square: Protesters in Egypt all Agree on one Thing: Mubarak Must Go*.



making the idea that people so distant from one another and with such different particular interests and goals could identify with one another's struggles seem far-fetched. Yet, the quotidian nature of occupation protests meant that the work involved in maintaining a protest camp was clear to occupiers elsewhere. In addition, the occupiers' diversity, though not without its problems in the life and organisation of each occupation, made it easier for observers and visitors to relate to the distant issues each protest addressed.

Amongst the protests of 2011, the occupation of *Maydān al-Tabrīr* was far from unique in its re-creation of daily life within an on-going protest. Feeding the Wisconsin Capitol's occupiers became the celebrated task of an international support network. Pizza orders placed at a Madison pizzeria by callers from across the United States and at least fourteen other countries, including Egypt, quickly became part of the occupation's mythology.<sup>51</sup> Providing food for the Occupy Wall Street protesters had similar pop cultural resonance. The "Zuccotti Park Kitchen" was written up in the "Dining and Wine" section of the *New York Times*; it even had its own Yelp listing, which described it as a hub of "box-to-table communal scavenging."<sup>52</sup> Such lore brought activists' feelings of solidarity out into the open. Maintaining the occupations created clear tasks for supporters around the globe. They also raised important questions about who was included in the society that protesters envisioned: debates over whether or not "homeless moochers" not participating in the protest ought to be able to access Occupy Wall Street's kitchen weighed down the movement, casting doubts on the inclusivity of its social vision.<sup>53</sup>

Nor could an occupation—or the new society it prefigured—be sustained solely by a global network of people calling for pizza. Imagined links and prefigurative political visions were underpinned by hard work. Members of the University of Wisconsin's Teaching Assistants' Association worked to make life safe and orderly inside the Capitol Building. They helped the occupiers get much needed sleep by mandating quiet hours and providing air mattresses. They even organised cleaning crews and set up "a lending library [...] for insomniacs." Perhaps providing a model for the libraries that were developed and painstakingly supervised around the clock by professional librarians in Zuccotti Park

51 Meredith Shiner: From Cairo to Madison, some pizza, in: Politico.com, 20 February 2011, available online at: <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0211/49888.html> (accessed on 23 September 2016).

52 Jeff Gordiner: Want to get Fat on Wall Street? Try Protesting, in: The New York Times, 11 October 2011; On Yelp, the Zuccotti Park Kitchen is listed under the heading of Do-It-Yourself Food. As the lone reviewer put it, "We are the 99% but we give the kitchen in Zuccotti Park a 100% approval rating." <http://www.yelp.com/biz/zuccotti-park-kitchen-manchattan> (accessed on 23 September 2016).

53 See for example: John del Signore: Occupy Wall Street Kitchen Revolts against Homeless Moochers, in: The Gothamist, 27 October 2011, available online at: [http://gothamist.com/2011/10/27/occupy\\_wall\\_street\\_kitchen\\_revolts.php](http://gothamist.com/2011/10/27/occupy_wall_street_kitchen_revolts.php) (accessed on 23 September 2016).

and other sites of the Occupy Movement across the United States.<sup>54</sup> On account of the graduate students' efforts, the occupied Wisconsin Capitol Building gained a reputation as one of the safest places in Madison. A report in *Academe* explained that:

the capitol police, charged by [Governor] Walker [...] to remove the protesters, refused to do so, claiming that the occupation was so peaceful and orderly that forceful intervention was unnecessary and potentially injurious to both protesters and police.<sup>55</sup>

As at Taħrīr, mundane acts intended to stabilise the occupation underlay its radical potential. Establishing autonomous, people-powered versions of basic social infrastructure, from kitchens and cleaning crews to lending libraries and community colleges, played an important part in bringing local people together. These same actions also played an essential role in capturing outsiders' imaginations, despite the rootedness of each individual protest.

New relationships between people from different walks of life had tremendous potential to spread protest movements, even if creating the more diverse community imagined by activists required excluding people like Wall Street's "homeless moochers." Like the 1970s underground press reports on the Wyhl occupation, the blog posts and YouTube videos of the protest tourists of 2011 emphasise protesters' diversity as a source of their power. A University of Illinois graduate student who visited the occupied Wisconsin Capitol Building marvelled at the remarkable feeling of solidarity that was omnipresent in Madison:

Many of the people I saw [...] had signs proclaiming that they were 'private sector workers,' 'small business owners,' 'non-union members,' and 'taxpayers'—the groups [Governor] Walker claims to represent—who were coming out to support their union brothers' and sisters' rights.<sup>56</sup>

Here was the sort of coalition-building and devotion to a common purpose that undergirded other occupations, and brought together people who seemingly had little to do with one another—and who ought perhaps not to have been particularly concerned about the interests of a group to which they did not belong. On the basis of

54 Christian Zabriskie: A Library Occupies the Heart of the Occupy Movement, in: American Libraries, 18 October 2011.

55 Mary Jo Buhle/Paul Buhle: Angry Badgers, in: *Academe Online*, July-August 2001, available online at: <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2011/JA/Feat/Buhle.htm> (accessed on 23 September 2016).

56 Michael Verdeame: Grad Employees Spearhead Wisconsin Occupation, at: *How the University Works*, available online at: <http://howtheuniversityworks.com/wordpress/archives/282> (accessed on 23 September 2016).

the solidarity he observed, the visitor from Urbana-Champaign concluded his report with the declaration that, “Wisconsin is coming to all of America next.”<sup>57</sup> Once again, the spatially rooted, yet ideologically open-ended tactic of occupation was being championed as a means of sparking actions far and wide. The rise of Occupy Wall Street, which was billed by Adbusters as “America’s Tahrir Moment,” revealed that there was at least a kernel of truth behind this hopeful statement.<sup>58</sup>

It is possible, then, to at least consider the idea that a chain reaction—albeit one carefully crafted by the activists themselves—linked protests from *Maydān al-Tahrir* to Wisconsin and Wall Street. Egyptians’ calls to Ian’s Pizza suggest one rhetorically powerful if materially insignificant link between these protests. While some interested journalists have teased out real human connections between these disparate sites of protest by mapping the journeys of individual activists and following correspondence, the imagined connections are far more important.<sup>59</sup> The idea that spatially rooted actions have widespread effects is surprising. Perhaps even more surprising is the extent to which mundane actions and the re-creation of daily life in occupied places have powered protests and captivated onlookers. Though these aspects are frequently overlooked, they comprise an essential part of occupation’s radical potential. Here is where a kaleidoscopic perspective can bring together the disaggregated building blocks of protest. Seeing unique, separate elements as pieces of a single, larger struggle—as activists enabled themselves to do—will help us to better understand the enormous potential ramifications of narrowly-focused protests that create diverse, democratic coalitions.

## Conclusion

Through the lens of the Wyhl occupation, we can see the protests of 2011 as disparate parts of a single kaleidoscopic image. This perspective reveals how protest camps draw power from their rootedness and the shared life practices that develop on occupied sites. If not participatory democracy, widespread participation in constructing infrastructure of re-creation defines these movements and opens them to broad cross-sections of the population, including first time protesters. This relationship evidences the ways in which insurgent politics since the 1970s have succeeded when they have connected

57 Ibid.

58 Adbusters: America’s Tahrir Moment, 6 September 2011, available online at: <https://www.adbusters.org/action/occupywallstreet/does-the-american-left-have-the-guts-to-pull-this-off/> (accessed on 23 September 2016).

59 Adam Clark Estes: How Occupy Influenced Egypt’s Arab Spring (and Vice Versa), in: *The Atlantic Wire*, 16 December 2012, available online at: <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/global/2011/12/how-occupy-influenced-egypts-arab-spring-vice-versa/46334/> (accessed on 23 September 2016).

the immediate, the “self referential,” and the concrete with plural struggles. Instead of searching for all-encompassing issues and monochromatic, universal struggles in an “age of fracture,” we must ask whether an array of unique, “beautiful struggles” can comprise a larger whole when it comes to promoting meaningful social change.<sup>60</sup> Doing so may help us to see that since the second wave women’s movement, activists have not only made the claim that the “personal is political,” but also implicitly realised the power of seeing the political as personal.

In a sense then, it is not what activists are saying, but how they say it that explains targeted, grassroots protests’ translocal effects. In the same way that the labour movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been interpreted by scholars as a movement to build democracy and increase participation—not “simply” a movement for shorter hours, safer working conditions, higher wages, and social insurance—it could be argued that these movements’ common focus on matters of governance and democracy links them together.<sup>61</sup> Seen in this light, protests after 1968 do not represent a break with all that preceded them, but rather an attempt by different means to achieve similar goals. The tactic of occupation is important, therefore, in that it creates the physical space that brings together diverse groupings and focuses them—if only fleetingly—on issues of communal life and social politics.

Coverage of the protests of 2011 focused on their stated goals—or their purported lack thereof—and their ability to attain them. Comparing these protests with the antinuclear actions of the 1970s reveals the extent to which occupation as a form of protest, and the types of relationships and even coalitions that can be created on occupied sites, may be more significant than an occupation protest’s stated ends. Many West German anti-nuclear protesters became active in order to stop individual reactors, but they eventually helped form a political party that has addressed a range of issues and served as junior partner in Germany’s federal government. Perhaps most importantly, then, connecting 1970s anti-nuclear protests with the events of 2011 directs our attention to some of the more human dimensions of participation in protest. Though not nearly as glamorous as the overthrow of corrupt regimes, or even the demonisation of the 1 percent, occupiers and their visitors have noted time and again the role of the most mundane tasks on

60 Daniel Rodgers: *Age of Fracture*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2011. Jean-Paul Sartre called local farmers’ fight to preserve the Larzac Plateau from the expansion of a nearby military base, a single-issue movement whose tactics included the occupation of government-owned land, the “most beautiful struggle of our twentieth century.” Quoted in: Alexander Alland with Sonia Alland: *Crisis and Commitment: the Life History of a French Social Movement*, Amsterdam 2001, p. 23.

61 As noted in the introduction, this is the central argument of Geoff Eley’s *Forging Democracy*. On the relationship between the various types of demands made by labor movement activists, see also Craig Calhoun: *New Social Movements of the Early Nineteenth Century*, in: *Social Science History* 17:3 (1993), p. 391.

the occupied site in the creation of solidarity and coalition-building—both locally and between disparate sites of resistance. Though it is easily overlooked in many forms of analysis, this most corporeal aspect of these protests is directly linked to their unique potential to bring diverse groups of people together in conversation and to transform private, daily life into public protest.

This, of course, is not to say that on the occupied site some Smithian invisible hand transforms individual interests into common interests, or that all sorts of people are welcome amidst the protesters. Instead, the point is that getting people involved in social affairs and struggling to build communities remains the key to creating a participatory political culture, in which citizens link their particular concerns with plural struggles. This is no easy project. Successful occupations foster community-building, but they themselves are not so easily conjured into existence. Organising a successful occupation—even a fleeting one—requires years of tireless work that broadens seemingly narrow issues in order to recruit disparate people to the struggle, and also to manage participation, especially at the action's outset. Though they often have lasting effects on their protagonists, the end of an occupation, and the intense communal life that it represents, can lead to burn out and disillusionment. Lengthening brief occupations into longer term protest movements that can slowly create significant change is a serious challenge for contemporary activists.

The long afterlife of German anti-nuclear struggles suggests that the potential for collaboration and the creation of alternative worlds remains once activists leave the occupied site; the results of the protests of 2011 remind us that the sorts of transformations envisioned by protesters do not immediately follow occupations as a matter of course. Figuring out how to make the alternative worlds imagined by protesters more permanent will be essential for connecting occupations to substantive political changes. It was the search for sustainable forms of participatory movement building that the labour movement well understood in what authors like Tony Judt and Geoff Eley consider its halcyon days. By creating not just political parties and labour unions, but also a dense network of clubs, cafes, football teams and reading circles, working class people created a functioning society that brought politics into everyday life and made activism sustainable.<sup>62</sup> Occupation's ability to connect politics with individual lives makes it an exciting model for political action in a society where older forms of activism have lost their lustre. Seeing the convergences it creates as meticulously crafted centres of new politics rather than ill-advised marriages of convenience, will allow us to study and to learn from the experimentation in democratic forms that occurs on occupied sites and thus to organise a new politics in the longer term.<sup>63</sup>

62 Vernon Lidtke: *The Alternative Culture: Socialist Labor in Imperial Germany*, Oxford 1985.

63 Lawrence Goodwyn: *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America*, Oxford 1978, xxix, xxv.

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