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Project outline:

Vivre dans une roulotte: Mobile practises and everyday life of alternative trailer inhabitants in Germany and France.

Usually we hear about self-organized, alternative trailer sites when they are occupied or evicted, especially when they become focal points of larger themes in urban politics or urban social movements.[1] In these cases, public debate is often dominated by questions of space for alternative or experimental housing, conflicting with official building plans or other interests of utilization. Behind the struggles for the creation or the further existence of alternative parking sites, the inhabitants and their everyday life, their motivations and mobile practices mostly remain in the background. That's why the imaginations which motivate people to lead a mobile live in trailers and the kind of everyday live they perform will be focused on. Special interest addresses the labour relations of the inhabitants. Furthermore, a comparison of the situation in Germany and France is planned in order to overcome the limits of a national focus on an international phenomenon without disregarding its country-specific characteristics.

The quantitative compilation of housing in trailers is quite difficult because of its permanent flow. Kropp (1997, chap. 1) estimates about 60 sites in Germany with a total number of in between 5.000 and 10.000 dwellers. Augenstein (2007: 20-22) counts at least 160 parks in Germany that are known beyond their respective regions. Further (temporary) sites are only known locally. Another source lists 107 trailer settlements in 2011 (Wagendorf 2012). Each number of inhabitants differs in between five an 150 (Außerhalb 2002). Schönfeld and Pralle (2002: 7) assume 20 % of the dwellers in Germany being on travel without a permanent pitch.

After a first inspection, the situation in France seems even more vague. Conclusions are impeded by a higher grade of informal interconnectedness than in Germany. Nevertheless, there exists a scene (see Hitzler and Niederbacher 2010) of people who have chosen this form of housing and living in France as well (Willemin 2004; Halem 2011). The academic void in regard of the quantitative importance of this phenomena is aimed to be closed by a baseline study of the situation in Germany and France.

Local affairs and urban management mostly regard alternative halting sites as solidifications in townscape. In contrast, I would like to look at them as nodes in a social web, providing contacts and infrastructure for a specific way of a mobile life. One of the main research questions concerns the imaginations that protagonists have of alternative life in trailers since these imaginations also

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[1] For example in Hamburg 2002 or Berlin 2007. See Hamburger Behörde für Inneres und Sport 2002; Brichetti 2010.

guide the decisions for living this life. In a second step, I plan to confront the protagonists' imaginations with their concrete experiences and practises of everyday life. Besides a description of the daily routines at changing places, this perspective wants to carve out reasons for the beginning and the cessation of this way of life in the context of the respective biographies. For an examination of these self choosen periods on the road, it is adequate that there are no predetermining connections for a mobile life, for example in the family or a rooted milieu. Hence the decision to live a life in the alternative trailer scene must be seen as a largely individual one.

Imaginations of and motivations for a life in a trailer

Previous researches mention several threads, which are pointed out as ancestors of alternative trailer life. Besides the linkage to shanty towns, which were erected since the beginning of advanced industrialization by proletarianized parts of the population at the edges of large cities, travelling people are also mentioned. Of course the complexity of this term encourages identifying references. But wild settlement and travelling people do not link to a group-related continuity. The terms serve as historical points of reference for a current anti-bourgeois way of life. Besides the historical (and thereby, in parts, highly glorified) points of identification, the contemporary context is very important as well. Large significance lies in the performed actions and political concepts of the new social movements in the late 1970s and early 1980s (see Hirsch and Roth 1986: 211-236, Kraushaar 1978, Hofmann-Axtelm et.al. 1979). Their borderline strategies led to new, anti-bourgeois forms of housing and living (Evers 1987). Another important factor can be found in the influence of North American counter-culture on European youth culture since the late 1950s (see Maase 1992 and 1996). Especially Kerouacs „On the road" (1957) can be seen as an early roman à clef for the re-articulation of an anti-bourgeois way of life based on mobility. This seems to bee a broader phenomenon as, for example,large parts of today's carpenter journeymen show a proximity to the alternative milieu (see Lemke 2002: 204ff).

Who chooses a life in a trailer?

Only a few vague informations exist about the social structure of alternative trailer park inhabitants. Außerhalb (2002) describes them as follows:

„The ideal type of an alternative trailer park inhabitant would be around two thirds of male sex, would have one third of final secondary-school examination and would mainly come around with lower waged jobs; it's age would increase with each year by one (1990 it was about 20), but only to be replaced by a new specimen after around two years."

A large collection of data is not planed in the present research design. In regard to the great

fluctuations of the scene, this could only provide temporary results. In addition, there are manifest tendencies of closure within the scene. This seems to make a larger quantitative inquiry impracticable. Instead, the circumstances of trailer life will be collected in a more random but at the same time deeper way through qualitative interviews.

Everyday life and work

Life in a trailer breaks up with the bourgeois family model and offers room for collectivity (through association with others) and for a strong individualism (inside the respective trailers). On the one hand, low costs for housing result in an increased sovereignty of time because fewer waged labour is necessary (Außerhalb 2002). On the other hand more time is needed for the overcoming of routinised tasks of reproductive work. In theory, a bigger time-budget should enable the choice of a wage-labour, which is enjoyed (Wagendörfer Tübingen, undated).

Nevertheless, this is not a concept without constraints and afflictions. Buchmann (1997: 152) points out that a mobile life in a trailer calls for not only a capable (and occasionally expensive) vehicle but also for skills which can be sold on the road. This is when first limitations of a free travelling life appear and restrictions connected to gender, education or labour-market (to mention but a few) start to show up. Without cheap housing, wages would often not be high enough to cover the respective needs of life. So trailer-life offers the possibility to sell labour at an unrivalled price. Jobs are often conveyed via existing trailer park structures (Außerhalb 2002). Waged activities are mainly found on a broad range of arts and culture. Besides the performing arts, they also cover the crafts. Especially in the segments of event technology and stage and exhibition construction, replacements of formally regulated employments by precarious jobs can be found. There are indications that these kinds of jobs serve as a basis for many alternative trailer inhabitants (see Mauch 2011). To gain solid information on this situation, labour conditions will be a key aspect of the present research design. In Germany, these conditions find their legal basis in licences for self-employed itinerant trade. In fact, the juridical line to fictitious self-employment is a difficult one to draw. In France, by contrast, precarious workers in cultural segment benefit from the status "intermittent du spectacle", which guarantees some social security for transitional periods of joblessness (Menger 2005). Differing from the situation in Germany, French employees are more often unionised and therefore able to organize relevant industrial actions (CIP 2011; Corsani and Lazzarato 2008). A focus on labour relations (kind of work, social security, labour time) could help to find out more about the relationships between the routines of everyday life and the primal imaginations of a life on the road. By doing this, the importance of social connections besides labour are also being taken into account. In general and as a working hypotheses, I would like to find out more about the tensions between the dream of an alternative and mobile life on the one

side, and the every day life in postfordist precarity, on the other (see Bourdieu 1997 for France, Schultheis and Schulz 2005 for Germany). Consequently, and following on the insights gained during my research, I also aim to carve out the biographical tipping points for starting and quitting a mobile life in a trailer. In difference to Außerhalbs (2002) description of typical alternative trailer inhabitants, I will assume a less linear course of biography. Especially a trailer life based on mobile labour should be, in the long term, understood as a more solid life design than post adolescent experiments. For different reasons, periods of mobility and of spatial connectedness replace each other in the course of time.

Theoretical approach

Following Rodenstein (1991: 62-66), alternative housing can be understood as a mirror image of the society surrounding it. It develops in borderline to hegemonic images of housing and living. Esser and Hirsch presented a theoretical framework in connection to the regulation school, which is capable to treat spatial and urban themes in an informed social theoretical way. They use the terms Fordism and Post-Fordism, which have also gained importance for social and cultural studies (Harasser and Timm 2009: 96). Esser and Hirsch focus on the spatial aspects of the shift between the two concepts. This approach can be seen as a basis for a historically informed sociology of urbanity and space (see Häußermann and Siebel 2004; Häußermann et al. 2008: 135-181). Additionally, Schönberger (2003 and 2007) examines the change from Fordism to Post-Fordism from the perspective of the environment of life with a special focus on biography and labour. Following this approach, I conceive the formation of trailer life, as performed by an alternative scene, as a counter model to the dominant and restrictive ideas of life which were hegemonic in the decade of Fordism. But alternative trailer sites still exist under postfordist conditions. This means they are confronted with new frameworks and structural conditions. Therefore, a leading theme of the present research design will be the aspects of everyday life of a housing concept, which was developed in opposition to housing, working and living in the time of Fordism. But how does this fit to a Post-Fordist society which is characterized by flexibility, mobility deregulation and shifted employment biographies? In Post-Fordism, the hegemonic templates are no longer locally rooted work and housing but the experiences of multi-local households (Weiske et. al. 2008). What does this mean to an alternative housing concept, it's aspects of persistence and change? Therefore, a special focus will be set on the changing relations between hegemonic and alternative practises, especially in connection with mobility/locality and flexibility/continuity. This will also concern self-images and strategies of demarcation.

Methodological approach

A first approach will be the analysis of programmatic texts and the communication via websites and online portals. For the German-speaking area, I will, amongst others, refer to the the journal "Vogelfrei" ("outlawed"), which was published in between 1991 and 1997 out of the alternative trailer movement.[2] In Germany, written sources and ephemera can be found in various archives of the social movements (an overview is provided by Hüttner 2003). In France, leaflets will be researched at the National Library in Paris. Moreover, the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam holds abundant material on the social movements in France as well. Apart from these documents, the analysis of municipal records could provide interesting insights in the relationship between alternative travellers and local administrations. However, the focus will be set on narrative and biographical interviews (Flick 1999: 115-130 and 2007: 227-247; Schütze 1983). Their aim is to uncover the reasons and motivations which lead to a mobile life in a trailer as well as it's routines of everyday life. For this, the physical aspects of the mobile accommodations and dwellings will also be documented and integrated into the research. This wants to draw attention to the practices of housing (Tränkle 1972; Lipp et. al. 1992) and localisation, to the feeling of home (Binder 2008, 2010) and to the coping with daily routines, whose continuity is guaranteed by the adaptability to different environments. The interviewed subjects shouldn't be too young and should have already experienced and lived through some travelling years. I have contacts to the scene in Germany. This offers links to France as well. In addition there also exists a nationwide association for the interests of "Habitants de Logements Éphémères ou Mobiles" (Halem).

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2   All of its 21 issues are stored completely at International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.

Schedule (assumed for 18 months)

Phase of research	Duration (in months)
1. Inspection of German and French literature about alternative trailer life, its origins, juridical frames and labour conditions of mobile workers.	2
2. Inspection of programmatic documents from the alternative trailer scene in Germany and France.	2
3. Inventory and characterization of the alternative trailer scene in Germany and France.	1
4. Choosing of alternative trailer sites frequented by mobile inhabitants. Preparation, contacting and interviewing of about 10 travellers in Germany and in France.	3
5. Transcription and analysis	4
6. Systematization and summing up	3
7. Concluding record	3

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