Social movements interact with their environments in diverse ways. Movement actors want to change laws, influence policy makers, or otherwise effect change in the larger society. They position themselves toward other movements and political actors in coalition, competition, or conflict. They act in and are a part of a wider social and political environment that influences and structures the movement’s opportunities and choices. Out of all these interactions research until now has mainly focused on the relationships between movements and other political actors on the one hand and on coalitions and conflicts on the other. Studies that focus on political opportunity structures have investigated how society’s institutional structure, the openness or closedness of its channels of influence, and the availability and position of potential elite supporters influence mobilization processes and social movement outcomes (Eisinger 1973; Kriesi 1995; McAdam 1996; Tarrow 1991). Coalition building processes and generally the interaction among movements have been extensively researched within the framing paradigm (Gamson, Fireman and Rytina 1982; Gerhards and Rucht 1992; Johnston 1995; Snow and Benford 1988; 1992; Snow et al. 1986).
But social movement activism is seldom restricted to the conventional channels of the public political realm or formal strategic interactions with other institutionalized political actors. On the contrary, as Offe (1985) noted almost 20 years ago, new social movements operate primarily in a space located in between the public and private spheres – a space that is political, but non-institutional. Researchers have paid surprisingly little attention to what goes on in this shadow-land between politics and subculture – the cultural infrastructure that makes up a movement’s »scene.« What exactly is a scene and how can we distinguish it from other similar social structures? What is the relationship between scenes and social movements? Are scenes best understood as political opportunity structures that facilitate mobilization and movement longevity, or as expressions of institutionalization, depoliticization, and movement decline? Using the example of the German autonomous movement, we will look at the interaction between social movements and the »scenes« in which they are often embedded.

1. The autonomous movement

The German autonomous movement developed out of remnant strands of the post ‘68 New Left. Activists from the Frankfurter »Spontis« who rejected the parliamentary path of leading figures like Joschka Fischer and Daniel Cohn Bendit, and radicals in the anti-nuclear movement who didn’t want to reduce their political agenda to ecological issues were the first to call themselves »Autonome«. Influenced by writings of the Italian »autonomia operaia« they developed their oppositional politics around a militant anti-authoritarian subjectivism and opposition to the dogmatism of both the old and new left. In contrast to the Italian idea of mass autonomy as a form of working-class organization, the idea of autonomy in the German autonomous movement resembles rather the civic concept of individual autonomy and self-determination. As a consequence their vision of social change is often centered around local projects and the idea that oppressed groups must mobilize around their own interests in solidarity with other such groups, rather than mobilizing »for« other groups. Their frame of reference is not the working class or »the people« but a »politics in the first person«.

The Autonomen became visible as a movement for the first time in the mid to late 1970s in the developing anti-nuclear movement. They initially regarded themselves and were seen as the militant wing of the anti-nuclear movement. The importance of militancy, however, reaches far beyond the question of the use of violence as a tactic. In autonomous politics, militancy always also signifies a radical oppositional standpoint, a refusal to be co-opted, and a refusal to let one’s decisions and behavior be dictated by the laws and norms of the dominant society.

With the rise of the squatter’s movement in 1980 in many larger European cities, the Autonomen became part of a growing alternative milieu that at one time in Berlin comprised up to 100,000 people. It was, and still is, characterized by a local infrastruc-
ture of bars, collectives, alternative venues, squats, living projects, and alternative media groups. This infrastructure plays a central role in the self-conception and self-construction of the Autonomen. The strength of the welfare system at that time and the enormous growth of the educational sector facilitated the formation of a distinct autonomous attitude and lifestyle. In the 1980s the construction of a potent collective identity (Melucci 1995; 1996) can be observed which contains the following core elements: a radical oppositional subjectivism and emphasis on self-determination, the devaluation of paid work, Punk and hardcore music, a distinctive clothing style, collective forms of living, and participatory democratic decision-making. This enumeration is reflective of the overall tendencies of the movement, but it is by no means complete, nor could it be. Regional differences, different political settings and contexts, and biographical coincidences led to a variety of slightly different collective identities within the autonomous movement, containing different combinations and sets of elements in different parts of Germany and Western Europe.

2. Scenes

What are scenes and how are they different from other similar social structures? A Scene first of all is necessarily both geographic and social. In common usage, when one talks about »the scene«, one is referring either to an actual physical space or to a group of people, or both, as in the phrase »let’s distribute this just within the scene.« A scene is a network of people who identify as part of a group and share a certain belief system or set of convictions. But it is also necessarily centered around a certain location or set of locations that are understood to be where members of the scene hang out and are welcome. One would say a certain part of town is »where the scene is,« or this or that bar or club or house, etc., is »part of the scene.« Consequently the scene can be understood as both the group itself and the infrastructure that sustains it.

A scene also has a shared culture of one kind or another. Its members share a certain life-style, adhering to their own set of social norms, traditions, linguistic patterns and dress codes, and communicating through a distinctive set of signs and symbols. Scenes are not necessarily connected to social movements, but the case to be examined here is one in which a social movement and a scene are tightly and even symbiotically connected. What we are interested in here are »movement scenes«, that differ in relevant aspects from scenes in general.

Scenes as distinct social structures have until now been largely ignored by social scientists. The only systematic research that has been done on scenes is a study by Hitzler, Bucher, and Niederbacher which analyzed twelve different life-style groups in Germany (Hitzler, Bucher and Niederbacher 2001). While it may not be readily understood by social scientists, however, the term »scene« is immediately recognizable to social movement activists such as those in the women’s movement, the gay and lesbian
movement or the Autonomen, who readily use the term to describe the social and political environment of their movements. At times they even use the terms movement and scene interchangeably. In their book on the Dutch squatters and autonomous movements, one group of activists describe scenes in the following way: »Scenes develop when people meet again and again at certain special places. Drinks are abundant and the last round is called later and later in the night. … The scene resembles the coffee house of the 18th century, the salon of the 19th century, the lodge, the artist’s groups and circles, the local churches, in short, all those (in)formal institutions that unite the remembrance of the event with a life style that cultivates the promise of its return« (Agentur Bilwet 1991: 61).

In explaining the existence of life-style groups and the fact that movement activists frequently have more in common culturally than their political convictions, social scientists have generally made use of concepts like subculture, counterculture, or milieu. In the following section we will present a set of characteristics that can be said to constitute a scene. We will then distinguish scenes from subcultures, countercultures, and milieus, and discuss why these other frameworks are inadequate for understanding the function of scenes for social movements. Lastly, through an examination of the Autonomen scene in Berlin and Hamburg, we will outline a framework for exploring the interaction between movements and scenes.

3. The structure of scenes

The 12 German life-style groups analyzed in Hitzler, Bucher, and Niederbacher’s study (2001) included such groups as »skaters« Turkish street gangs, »ravers,« »free-climbers,« and young antifascists. In the end, they categorized seven of their 12 groups as scenes in a analytically narrower sense depending on whether they fulfill the following criteria: The participants share a common and acquired knowledge. They identify with the scene. They act value-oriented. Engagement in the scene is important for the participants lives. And they have meeting points, events and internal media (Hitzler, Bucher and Niederbacher 2001: 200) On the basis of their work, twelve characteristics can be identified that differentiate scenes from other social structures:

1. Scenes are communities of the like-minded. To be part of a scene it is not enough to share the scene’s signs and symbols; one must also share its convictions and invest some active engagement. A scene is more than just a fashion trend or a group with similar aesthetic preferences.

2. Scenes are thematically focused. They are social networks in which a more or less clear common thematic framework can be identified to which its members refer.

3. Scenes are communicative, interactive, and part-time. Those who are part of a scene share common convictions and act together, which allows them to have similar experiences. At the same time engagement in a scene does not structure the totality of a
person’s everyday life. Certain spheres – particularly one’s work-life – are usually left aside.

4. Scenes structure social space by lending distinction to their members. A scene is neither independent from nor a mere reflection of its members’ status in society, but it »marks« social space by defining membership criteria and distancing itself from other social groups.

5. Scenes have their own culture. In addition to convictions, those who are part of a scene also share distinct codes, styles, patterns of behavior, and sets of knowledge that differ from those of the surrounding society.

6. Scenes are fragile and voluntary associative structures. In principle every member can leave a scene at any time. In contrast to social structures based on socio-economic background or »ascriptive« categories such as race or gender, scenes have no »objective« membership criteria that would be difficult to leave behind should one want to leave. Nevertheless scenes can exercise substantial social pressure on a person to join or leave, making membership more than simply an individual decision.

7. Scenes form around recognized meeting places. A scene necessarily includes physical places – bars, clubs, parks, street corners, parts of town, etc. – where being part of a scene can be physically experienced and where the cultural signifiers of membership can be enacted. Knowing where such spaces are located is often itself a badge of membership.

8. Scenes are not just accumulations of individuals, but networks of groups. To be part of a scene it is therefore often enough to be part of a group or circle of friends that is itself part of that scene.

9. Scenes are pre-organized spaces of experience, in which there is a hierarchy of engagement. Most members limit themselves to actively participating in the scene’s events, but these events are usually organized by a relatively small group of members who volunteer additional time for that purpose.

10. Scenes are structured around core organizational elites, but the transition between core and periphery is fluid, as is the transition between membership and non-membership. The boundaries of a scene cannot be exactly determined.

11. Scenes are internally-constituted dynamic entities that are constantly moving and changing their form. Because of that it is very difficult, if not impossible to discern the membership criteria from the outside. A scene is ultimately constituted by those who regard themselves as being part of it through a process of mutual recognition. One is a member of a scene if and only if one identifies and is accepted as such by other members. Codes and practices that designate membership can change over time.

12. Scenes cannot be reduced to other social structures or institutions. They do not just mirror a group’s structural location or its member’s social status, nor are they a particular form of subculture. The development of scenes can be interpreted as a result
of the processes of social fragmentation and individualization characteristic of postmodern society.

These characteristics give us a basic working definition of what a scene is. Now let us briefly clarify how a scene differs from other similar social structures, such as subcultures, countercultures, and milieus.

3.1. Scenes vs. Milieus

Milieus are relatively stable and general social structures. Authors differ in the degree of freedom they concede the individuals to choose their own milieus. But in contrast to scenes, being part of a milieu is never solely an individual’s unrestricted decision. Milieu limits are not fixed and they can be crossed, but an individual’s movement between different milieus is limited by the availability of cultural, social and economic capital which in itself depends on the person’s social position in society. Useful research on the relevance of milieus in current societies does not conflate milieus with pure lifestyle groups¹ and usually builds on Bourdieu’s theory of the different capital-forms (Bourdieu 1982).

A few authors have argued that the emergence of new social milieus is directly linked to the development of new social movements. Inglehart’s study on changing value preferences has made his link (Inglehart 1979) and Geiling and Vester even went so far as to propose that the new social movements would be the social and political forms of expression of the new social milieus (Geiling and Vester 1991: 249), that the new social movements would only be the visible tip of the iceberg of much more fundamental social change below the surface. Empirically this hypothesis stood on shaky ground as movement sympathy and above all movement participation was only incompletely reflected in the underlying data. More detailed studies of social movement participation in addition proved, that actual participation in social movements is usually not limited to the members of the new post-materialist milieus. Rather than one being a reflection of the other, it seems likely that both the post-materialist milieus and the new social movements are related but independent expressions of the political-economic shifts of post-industrial society (Offe 1985, Hirsch 1983, Kitschelt 1985). But even if a linear relationship between movement and milieu membership has turned out to be too simplistic, many studies insist and have shown that milieu-like structures nevertheless do influence the dynamics of social movements (cf. Fantasia 1988; Purdue et al. 1997; Roth 1985; 1994a; b). We contend that some of these milieu-like structures would be better conceptualized as scenes.

¹ An example of such a reduced notion is Schulze’s conceptualization of milieus. Following Beck’s individualization thesis he understands milieus as groups of persons that can be distinguished by their group-specific from of existence and by their increased internal communication (Schulze 1995: 174)
3.2. Scenes vs. Subcultures and Countercultures

Attempts to use the concept of subculture to explain the dynamics of social movements have thus far proven inadequate, either because they have ended up proceeding as if all movements are subcultures (and failing to distinguish between subcultures and countercultures) (e.g. Schwendter 1982) or because they have over-extended the concept of subculture so that it covers not only subcultures, but movements and milieus as well (e.g. Zwick 1990). A couple of studies, however, have treated them as separate and have pointed to the fact that social movements and subcultures interact and are sometimes closely intertwined. Jasper and Epstein both emphasized the subcultural elements of the US-American anti-nuclear movement (Epstein 1991; Jasper 1997), and Hollstein and Schwendter have each analyzed the emergence of subcultures linked to the social movement sector in Germany (Hollstein 1979; Schwendter 1981). Lastly, in their illuminating work on music and social movements, Eyerman and Jamison have shown how important musical forms of expression (which are often a defining feature of scenes) have been for the new social movements since the 1960s (Eyerman and Jamison 1998).

But the term subculture itself remains unclear and problematic. Early studies of youth gangs from the Chicago School (Thrasher 1968, Whyte 1949) tended to equate subcultures with deviant behavior. Subcultures were seen as reactive and deficient in relation to the hegemonic culture. Only with the works of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) have subcultures been studied as cultural formations in their own right (Clarke and Jefferson 1974; Cohen 1972; Hebdige 1979, c.f. Turner 1996). Hebdige adds the element of conscious class-based resistance to his use of the concept, defining subcultures as »sign-communities«, in which resistance to the hegemonic norms is expressed, but only on the symbolic level. They do not express their resistance directly, »[r]ather it is expressed obliquely, in style« (Hebdige 1979: 17). He sees the reasons for the development of subcultures in the deep-rooted social changes after the Second World War that led to a fragmentation and polarization of the working-class community, »producing a series of marginal discourses within the broad confines of class experience« (Hebdige 1979: 74). The idea of subcultures being rooted in class is also picked up in the work of Clarke and his colleagues, who differentiate between subcultures of the working class and countercultures of the middle class, with the former characterized by tight gang-like structures and the latter being less rigid,

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2 Schwendter defines social movements as »Subkulturen, die sich dadurch bestimmen, dass sie Normen, Werte, Bedürfnisse, Interessen, Verkehrsformen, Institutionen, Werkzeuge etc. der Gesamtgesellschaft in einem grundsätzlichen Ausmaße negieren. Wenn diese Unterscheidung als bestimmte Negation auftritt, die Subkulturen als freiwillig und progressiv erscheinen, können wir von alternativer Bewegung sprechen« (Schwendter 1982: 248). Zwick in contrast loses all ability to differentiate between movement, subculture and milieu when he claims that, »eine markante und eigenständige politische Subkultur in Form eines links-ökologischen Protestmilieus« (Zwick 1990: 198) has developed in Germany.
more diffuse and more individualistic (Clarke 1979:110). While we contend that the form resistance takes (subcultural or countercultural) is fully determined by class location, we agree that there is always some element of resistance that is at least implicit in the formation of both subcultures and countercultures.

Before adding the concept of counterculture to the mix, however, let us clarify our stance with respect to the relationship between subcultures and the dominant culture. We see subcultures from a normatively neutral standpoint and reject the notion of subcultures necessarily implying deviant behavior. Subcultures may or may not engage in behaviors seen by the larger culture as deviant. Football fans, for example, or people who play Dungeons and Dragons might qualify as subcultures, if their internal codes are sufficiently distinct from those of the larger culture and if they meet the other criteria listed above, without their behavior having to qualify as »deviant«. Thus, the prefix »sub« merely indicates that the subculture is a subset of the larger dominant culture – that it is contained within the larger culture, emerges from it, and is in some way distinguishable from it, but without any necessary implication of pathology.

In the literature on new social movements, a slightly different distinction has been drawn between subcultures and countercultures that makes no reference to class. Rucht (1990: 163) distinguishes between »instrumental« movements (those interested in effectively achieving concrete aims) and »expressive« movements (those whose primary interest is to create and sustain an alternative collective identity) and lists »subcultural retreat« and »countercultural challenge« as strategic options used by expressive movements. Koopmans builds on this distinction and adds a third type of movement, splitting expressive movements into »subcultural« and »countercultural« depending on the type of alternative identity they embrace. As Koopmans defines them: »Subcultures are distinct from the dominant culture, but they are not necessarily antagonistic to it. Countercultures, however, are not just different; they are a negation of the dominant culture« (Koopmans 1995: 18). Another way to put this is that subcultures offer their adherents a culture that represents an alternative to the dominant culture, but one that is tolerant of the dominant culture and is primarily interested in establishing a basis for peaceful coexistence. When a political movement develops out of a subculture, it is generally for the purpose of gaining recognition and legal rights for its members. In contrast, countercultures actively oppose the dominant culture and arise out of a fundamental rejection of one or more of its basic principles – a counterculture is understood by its members to represent a challenge to the larger society and its hegemonic cultural codes. Movements that emerge out of countercultures or that have a countercultural core may or may not also have more revolutionary goals in a political sense; the counterculture itself first of all poses a cultural threat to the dominant culture and often a political one as well.

This is a useful analytical distinction. We would only caution against confusing movements with the subcultures and countercultures that often form important parts of
their constituencies. In categorizing movements as instrumental, subcultural, or countercultural, Koopmans is referring to a movement’s »logic of action«, i.e. its reason for being and the logic guiding the movement’s strategic decision-making; a movement is subcultural or countercultural when it forms around a sub- or countercultural collective identity in order to express and act in the interest of the members of that identity group. But a movement itself is not co-terminus with a subculture or counterculture. Not everyone in the gay and lesbian subculture, for example, will be involved in the gay and lesbian rights movement, even though the movement might draw many of its members from the subculture, and even though it might have a subcultural logic. A counterculture, on the other hand, is almost by definition part of a movement, though not everyone who’s active in the movement will necessarily be part of the counterculture on which it draws.

3.3. The relationship between social movements, milieus, sub- and countercultures, and scenes

To clarify the relationship between social movements, milieus, sub- and countercultures, and scenes, it might be helpful to use some concrete examples. We start with milieus, which are more objectively determined and in Bourdieu’s terms are based on relationships to various forms of capital. Membership in a milieu is not chosen for its own sake. People don’t decide to study at the university, for example, because they want to be a part of the student milieu but becoming part of a scene is often an end in itself. A milieu is not a status group the way a scene is. Examples of milieus include basic social categories like »workers,« »young people,« »students,« and »homeless people«. These categories can and often do overlap. Some students are also workers, some young people are students or are homeless, etc.

Subcultures, countercultures, scenes and movements all exist within these various milieus but are usually not limited to one of them. Punk and skateboarder subcultures, for example, may be comprised of people who are young and students or people who are young and homeless, etc. And the members of the gay and lesbian subculture may be young or old and they may also be workers or students or both.

Countercultures are, in the Weberian sense, ideal-types of antagonistic subcultures. A »pure« counterculture would be one that shares no values with the surrounding society. In reality such a counterculture will not exist. An empirically useful concept of countercultures would therefore be to see countercultures as a sub-set or specific form of subcultures.

As we have said, the term scene refers to both a network of places where a particular subcultural, countercultural, or movement identity is lived out and expressed, and a network of people who identify with a subculture, counterculture or movement and feel at home in these places. Scenes usually accommodate one or more subcultures
and they may contain a countercultural core. Subcultures are usually larger than their corresponding scenes, because some members of the subculture will not be active in the scene.

Social movements can be based in milieus (e.g. student, workers, homeless, racial equality, women’s rights movements), others are based in subcultures (e.g. gay/lesbian, hunters, religious movements), still others in countercultures (e.g. the German Autonomen, the Italian »disobidienti«). The goals of subcultural movements tend to be campaign-oriented or single-issue movements that reflect the material interests of their constituent base. So-called »new social movements« such as the environmental and peace movements generally have constituencies that span a number of milieus and subcultures and are concerned with issues that extend beyond the material concerns of their members. Movements that are based in countercultures will almost necessarily be multi-issue, because a counterculture’s critique of the dominant culture is usually fundamental enough that addressing it would require change in a variety of policy areas. Countercultural movements may also contain adherents from a range of milieus and subcultures, but they generally have a much smaller following than either single-issue NSMs or single-constituency movements.

As we see, subcultures, countercultures, milieus, scenes and social movements can not be neatly separated but overlap in various ways. They can only be distinguished analytically as the different terms refer to different levels of commonalities. Milieu define groups on the level of social structure. Subculture and counterculture define groups through shared cultural elements. Participants of a social movement share a common goal and/or project. And those who participate in a scene act together and share common places. Figure 1 gives an overview of these different levels.

**Figure 1: Milieu, Subculture, Counterculture, Scene, and Social Movement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Group</th>
<th>Level of Commonality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milieu</td>
<td>Social Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subculture</td>
<td>Life-Style, Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterculture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Locale, Life-Style, Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Movement</td>
<td>Goal, Project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The autonomous movement has a countercultural core and cuts across a number of milieus and subcultures, including youth, students, punks, anti-fascists, gays and lesbians, the alternative subculture, social workers, the homeless, and the unemployed, among others. In this case the scene is larger than the movement – it forms the social pool from which the movement draws its members. The scene bleeds out beyond the boundaries of the movement – there are few movement activists who are not also part of
the scene, but a sizeable number of participants in the scene who are not active in the movement. A counterculture forms the core of the autonomous movement and thereby the core of the scene in which the movement is contained. The counterculture consists of those activists who are the most convinced believers in the countercultural worldview, the most conscious practitioners of the countercultural life-style, the most engaged defenders of and contributors to the scene’s infrastructure, and the most consistent participants in the movement’s activities. Where scene’s require only part-time participation and affect only a limited sphere of one’s day-to-day existence, members of a counterculture are often much more fully subsumed in its community and a greater proportion of their life-sphere is transformed by its normative principles.

4. Social movements and scenes

In brief, we conceptualize scenes as action-oriented social structures which are less rigid than milieus, less volatile and less culture-oriented than subcultures, and less demanding and all-encompassing than countercultures. Scenes are social places where subcultures, countercultures and social movements meet and influence each other. By action-oriented we mean that active involvement rather than merely passive consumption or a shared social background is necessary to be part of a scene. Scenes are enacted and reproduced by their participants.

The exact constellation of social movements and scenes differs from movement to movement. Many movements cannot be said to really have a corresponding scene or the relationship between them may be barely noticeable. But the longer a movement persists and the broader the scope if its demands becomes, the more likely it is that movement and scene will co-develop and interrelate. This dual structure has been noted in Epstein’s study on non-violent direct action groups in the US-American anti-nuclear movement (Epstein 1991). Fantasia’s notion of »cultures of solidarity« refers to a similar social structure, where the formation of a fully conscious working class community is far more a result of workers’ concrete shared experiences in struggle than it is a function of their structural relationship to the means of production (Fantasia 1988). And for the women’s movement Taylor and Whittier have described lesbian communities as »a type of social movement abeyance structure that absorbs highly committed feminists whose radical politics have grown increasingly marginal since the mass women’s movement has receded« (Taylor and Whittier 1992: 122).

The shortcomings of theses studies are that even though they have noted the relationship between movements and social structures we call scenes, they have not systematically analyzed the dependencies and interactions between them. Either these structures have been treated as given social backgrounds or they have been seen as results of social movement activity. In the remainder of our paper we will use the example of the autonomous movement in Germany to present a dense description of the scenes in
Hamburg and Berlin, and show how these scenes and the autonomous movement have interacted and affected each other. This analysis is based in part on micro-discourse analysis of movement newspapers and textual analyses of other movement publications, and in part based on our own experiences as activists and participant observers in the two cities over the last 10 years.

### 4.1. The radical left/autonomous scene in Hamburg

Hamburg is Germany’s second largest city with a population of about 1.8 million people. Despite its destruction during the Second World War its densely populated core still contains large tracts of old multi-story buildings. Urban flight during the 1960s and ’70s and the poor conditions in many of these houses made spacious and relatively cheap inner city housing in Hamburg accessible to the less privileged strata of the population – especially immigrants and students. The availability of cheap housing that allows young people with a low income to live together in shared apartments (so called Wohngemeinschaften) is the first and central infrastructural building block for the development of what then might become an alternative and/or autonomous scene. In the 1980s the inner city quarter, »Schanzenviertel«, offered these conditions and for the next two decades, it became the center of the autonomous scene in Hamburg.

The visible epicenter of this scene is the »Rote Flora«, a squatted community center located on the main shopping street in the Schanzenviertel. After its occupation 1989, the Rote Flora became a very popular venue for concerts and other musical events. The building offers space for many political groups to meet and for local musicians to practice. It also houses a movement archive, offers cheap food several days a week and during the 1990s was the usual location for larger political meetings. It also publishes the local autonomous movement newspaper. In its immediate vicinity there is also an alternative bookshop, an autonomous infoshop, an anarchist center, an alternative radio-station, a number of bars that have been founded by people closely related to the autonomous movement, and a couple of alternative projects. There are other neighborhoods in Hamburg where people who identify with the autonomous-radical left scene live. But the concentration is nowhere near as dense as it is in the Schanzenviertel.

The geographic concentration of these infrastructural elements has important consequences for the autonomous movement in Hamburg: First, it positively affects the movement’s ability to react quickly to political challenges. Short term mobilizations can be done very effectively by distributing flyers through the network of bars and shops that are sympathetic to the movement. In addition a relatively small number of political posters posted to the walls in these parts of town reaches a sizeable number of likely supporters. But geographic concentration not only offers the movement the possibility to reach a large number of potential supporters quickly, it also gives people who are
curious about getting involved in the movement quick and easy access to information about movement activities.\footnote{E.g. in the early 1990s during the first surge of racist attacks on immigrants in Germany, people spontaneously gathered at the Rote Flora as soon as they heard about these attacks in the media, to see whether a demonstration or any other activity would be planned in reaction to them. Conversely if something happens in the city that is likely to provoke a reaction from the autonomous movement, the streets and places around the Rote Flora are the first to be kept under surveillance by the police in order to closely monitor the movement’s response.}

Second, the concentration and diversity of the infrastructure promotes the development of informal social structures – of a community based on close social ties and a shared culture. Activists and sympathizers not only meet at political events but also in the evenings at parties, concerts or in bars. At these social events, information about political campaigns and first-hand accounts of protest actions are exchanged, as is gossip about personal relationships. Verbal communication therefore becomes an important part of the movement’s information infrastructure, with all of the advantages and disadvantages that come with it. On the one hand, word of mouth communication can transfer a lot of information quickly, but at the same time, people who do not regularly frequent the right bars, parties and events are easily cut off from the scene’s information flows. One has to physically participate in the scene or at least maintain close contact with those who do in order to stay abreast of the movement’s activities.

Third, the entanglement of politics and culture in a geographically bounded area has had positive effects for both sides. Concerts at the Rote Flora and neighboring bars attract an audience that extends far beyond the activist core. At these places a relatively large group of people comes into contact with the autonomous movement at an informal level and a symbiotic relationship develops, whereby the cultural appeal of the scene locations rubs off on the movement and heightens its attractiveness, and the image of »dangerousness« that surrounds the Autonomen in turn gives the subcultural venues added street credibility.

Fourth, geographic concentration gives the activists a sense of confidence and security. While autonomous views are marginal in German society as a whole, in the neighborhoods where the autonomous/radical left scene is concentrated, structures of local counter-hegemony can develop which are reflected in the activists’ notion of these sectors as »our« territory.

4.2. The radical left/autonomous scene in Berlin

Berlin is Germany’s largest city, with a population of 3.3 million. It also hosts the largest concentration of radical leftists in the country and consequently also has the largest and most active and robust leftist scene. There are four main points of access by which a person can get linked into the information channels of the scene and keep abreast of
leftist politics in Berlin: 1) the streets; 2) scene publications; 3) Indymedia; and 4) scene locales. We’ll go through these each briefly.

In Berlin, as in most German university towns and larger cities, if you want to know what’s »really« going on, you don’t read the newspapers, you read the streets. Literally. Someone who arrives in Berlin for the first time, even if they don’t know a single person, can find entry into the political scene simply by reading the posters and graffiti that cover the walls, overpasses, and telephone poles all over town. Posters especially convey all kinds of political information, announcing protest actions, meetings, informational events, the formation of new groups, and social events like street festivals, parties, and concerts. This information is also available in movement newspapers like the Interim or a monthly calendar called Stressfaktor. The Interim is a participatory bi-weekly newsletter, and while it has a strong focus on Berlin, it is available and read nationwide. It has been the most important national discussion forum for the autonomous movement since its founding in 1988. The Stressfaktor (or »stressi« as it is called) is a monthly events calendar specifically targeted at the radical leftist scene in Berlin that is available on-line and is also distributed gratis in hard copy at 60 different scene locations in the city. It includes a calendar of leftist events and actions, a list of standing dates and the addresses of relevant locations in the city, and a »Vokü-Fahrplan,« which lists all of the locations where one can get a cheap, usually vegetarian meal in a leftist environment. The Vokü (people’s kitchen) is itself an important institutional component of the scene, in terms of both social and informational integration into the movement.

Another point of access for information about the autonomous movement and leftist politics in general in Berlin, and in Germany and beyond, is the Berlin Indymedia website (http://germany.indymedia.org/). Indymedia stands for »independent media center« (IMC). The IMC was formed in Seattle in preparation for the protests against the WTO meeting there in 1999 and since then, 138 IMC collectives have been formed around the world, 86 outside of the US. Each is autonomous and is run by a collective of media activists who must agree with the IMC general concept and structure.4 Intended as a grassroots corrective to the mainstream bias of commercial media, Indymedia’s participatory, interactive concept of activist-reporting and posting gives activists, would-be activists, and other interested parties a chance to read first-hand accounts of protests events from the perspective of the activists themselves, as well as position papers, announcements, and calls to action. The sites are also structured for anyone to read and participate in running debates and commentary in response to each article. There is a filter that screens out postings with overtly racist, sexist, and fascist content, but oth-

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4 The IMC mission statement heading the Berlin site reads (translated): »Indymedia is an international network of media initiatives and activists for independent and non-commercial news coverage from below – on location and worldwide. It sees itself as part of the worldwide resistance against capitalist globalization.«
erwise everything gets posted, even if it might end up being sorted into the »postings not offering any new content« section at the end of the scroll after each article. In essence, Indymedia’s interactive structure not only allows for the dissemination of information, but pulls the reader into the fray, makes it easy to get involved and in a sense, itself serves as a »virtual scene«.

Whatever your point of departure, however, if you are going to be involved politically, all roads eventually lead to the scene itself. With information gathered from the streets, Interim, Stressfaktor, or Indymedia, you might go to an action or festival where you would meet people who would then take you with them to a scene location for a political meeting or perhaps just for a drink or a cheap meal or to buy music or pick up flyers or buy a book. Or with your initial information from one of the other three access points, you might go directly to an indoor event located in one of the scene locales. Once there, you soon realize that not only are you tapped into a social network in a safe space with like-minded people and similar tastes, but you also have stable access in these places to all kinds of current political information via the posters, flyers, brochures, pamphlets, and movement periodicals that are regularly laid out there. In other words, one could stay informed without hanging out at scene locations, but it is more difficult, and it is very difficult to stay involved without having any contact with the scene.

To give just a few indications of the vitality and scope of the Berlin scene, we have summarized some of the information offered monthly in the Stressfaktor. Table 1 presents a range of summary statistics taken from four randomly selected issues dating from August 2000 to May 2003. Beginning with the institution of »vökü,« on any given day of the week in any of these four months, there were an average of ten different scene locations where one could go for cheap food (usually 2-3 Euro for a full meal) and leftist conversation. Another indicator of robustness might be the total number of entries in the »addresses and standing appointments« section, which increased over the period in question from 84 to 137, of which 11-12 were »info-shops« where the most up-to-date leftist news and substantive information on various issues, as well as things like t-shirts, videos, records, patches, buttons, and other political paraphernalia are available. Interestingly, many activists see the last few years as a period of movement decline in Berlin, whereas – at least in terms of this indicator – the scene seems to be growing. If scenes grow as movements decline, that would support the hypothesis that scenes serve as abeyance structures or culture carriers in the sense mentioned above with respect to the Hamburg scene.

Another way one might measure the vitality of the scene and its counter-public sphere is to look at the number of events of different kinds are being offered over the course of the month. The reader will notice immediately that the number of events drops precipitously in both August issues. August is known as the »summer hole«, when most
students and many families and workers go on holiday. Consequently, the only political
events of note that regularly take place in the month of August are »summer camps«
around various issues, like the »border« camps, anarchist camps, and the anti-nuclear
movement’s annual summer camp in Wendland. Dropping the two August issues, then,
and looking just at the May 2001 and June 2003 issues, we see the number of informa-
tional/discussion events on substantive political topics was 28 and 26, respectively, or
nearly one every day of the month. Films – most often (though not always) on political
topics and followed by open discussion – seem to be the most popular form of enter-
tainment, with 51 showings offered in May ’01 and 74 in June ’03. Next, cultural and
social events like live concerts (33 and 28), dance parties (12 and 25), and »solidarity
parties« i.e. benefits to raise money for movement causes (6 and 13) were also frequent
kinds of offerings. And finally, in the category of political activities, there were 19 dif-
f erent demonstrations/actions announced in May of 2001 and 8 in June 2003. Because a
lot of these activities vary by season and with the university calendars, one would need
to do a month-by-month comparison from one year to the next over a period of a decade
or more in order to get a real sense of the dynamics of the scene and how it has grown
or contracted at various times. But even with this very cursory analysis and limited data
set, one can see the outlines of a very diverse and active scene.

Table 1: Summary Statistics of the Scene in Berlin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene Characteristics</th>
<th>Aug 00</th>
<th>Jun 01</th>
<th>Aug 01</th>
<th>Mai 03</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations/Actions (including camps)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info/Discussion/Book reading Events (thematic)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Group Meetings (separately announced)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vokü (people's kitchens):</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Addresses/Regular Dates</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info-Shops</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainings/How-to Events</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Films (including in combination w/discussion)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerts/Parties</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other Events</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As in Hamburg, the scene in Berlin is geographically concentrated, though it spans
a much greater territory. Scene establishments can be found in almost any part of town,
but they are most visible and concentrated in the districts of Kreuzberg, Prenzelauer
Berg, Mitte, and Friedrichshain. That the latter three districts are in what was formerly
East Berlin is no coincidence. Kruezeberg has been the heart of the scene for several de-
cades, but when the wall came down, the Autonomen and others took advantage of the
situation and squatted a large number of houses in East Berlin. The projects that were
founded in these squats, though they were for the most part eventually forced to sign leases, nevertheless successfully established a strong radical leftist presence in a much wider area. As in Hamburg, there is a territorial possessiveness that develops in the parts of town where the scene is most entrenched. One sees this reflected in action campaigns to »defend leftist structures« against eviction by landlords or rent increases. For several years now there has been a council called the »Pi-rat« made up of representatives from a range of leftist groups, that organizes around the defense of leftist structures and opposition to urban development projects that could endanger them. Identification with particular parts of town is also manifested in the physical defense of the territory itself against incursions by opposing groups, such as the Autonomen’s traditional defense of Kreuzberg as a »nazi-free zone.«

4.3. Scenes and collective identities

As we have seen, the autonomous.radical leftist scenes in Hamburg and Berlin are physical infrastructures that can be used by social movement activists to facilitate communication and mobilization in a movement. But scenes can not be reduced to this resource function, as they differ significantly from other structures such as formal institutions that offer similar resources. A scene is more than a resource base. Scenes are significant on a second level in that they are also places for the construction and realization of collective identities. This identity function of scenes has been essential throughout the history of the Autonomen and can be traced through many movement discourses. An analysis of these discourses, of which we can only present an overview here, reveals this identity function of the scene for the autonomous movement (for a detailed analysis see Haunss 2004).

The Autonomen – in contrast to their public image as black-bloc.street-fighters – are a very self-reflective, discursive movement in which almost every issue of their political agenda has been repeatedly subjected to critical internal scrutiny and debate. Out of the immense number of contributions to discussions (more than 1300 discussion texts have been published alone in the main movement newspaper »Interim« during the last 14 years), three issues stick out that generated by far the most contributions and have been present over the entire period. These were debates about (1) organizational structure and process, (2) the meaning of militancy and the form it should take, and (3) gender relations. In each of these discourses the relationship between movement and scene plays an important role.

The organizational debates revolve mainly around the question of whether or not the Autonomen should follow a more formal and institutionalized organizational model. In general the Autonomen reject any form of institutionalization because of its inherent hierarchical tendencies. Autonomous movement organizations therefore are usually organized in the form of a plenum in which in principle everybody has the right to
speak, to take part in the discussions, and to have a say in the decision-making. Instead of majority rule the consensus principle is the usual mode of decision making.

Especially when deliberating on more complex or controversial questions, this structure can result in a lengthy and often unclear decision-making process that lacks transparency from the outside and is very time-consuming for those involved. In effect this limits access to the movement organizations to those people who are willing and able to accommodate this form of decision-making and fit it into the rest of their lives – in other words, people who share the lifestyle of the autonomous/radical left scene.

This limitation has repeatedly been problematized from within the movement, and some efforts have been made to modify the organizational structure in order to open the movement up to people with lifestyles that differ from that of the scene. Nevertheless these efforts have ultimately failed. This failure is due to a special feature of autonomous politics – the commitment to »politics in the first person« – that deeply structures the relationship between scene and movement. Politics in the first person means that authentic individual experiences are seen as the starting point of autonomous politics. In contrast to other political movements for which other people’s suffering is sometimes the starting point of political engagement, the Autonomen claim to speak only for themselves. They insist on a radical principle of self-representation. This leads to a rejection of the separation between political and private life and results in the requirement of a radical life-style that expresses and corresponds to one’s radical politics.\(^5\) As the movement remains focused mainly on political struggles, the scene becomes the place where this radical lifestyle can be realized. In order to establish a more formal organizational model the activists would have to have severed the close link between life-style and politics. But such an approach never gained relevant support in the autonomous movement. In short, the movement goal of openness and accessibility stood in direct contradiction to another movement goal of developing a truly emancipatory organizational form and mode of interpersonal interaction, and the movement was not willing to sacrifice its emancipatory stance for the sake of broader appeal.

The relationship between movement and scene has also been reflected in the debates about militancy and legitimate forms of political action that have been a constant companion of the autonomous movement. These debates have focused on two central questions: 1. which forms of violence should be accepted and 2. whether a part of the movement should organize in the form of a militant avant-garde organization or not. The details of these debates go beyond the scope of this article. What is interesting for

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\(^5\) For many this commitment is based on a belief that only by constantly attempting to live according to their political principles and put their vision of a non-oppressive society into practice in the here and now will it ever be possible to develop such a society and to overcome the van guardist dilemma whereby one wins the revolution, only to realize that old set of tyrants or form of oppression has simply been replaced with a new one.
our purposes here is that in these debates, a conflict between two collective action frames becomes visible, in which movement and scene are positioned very differently in relation to each other. These frames can be labeled as a movement militancy frame on one hand and a revolution frame on the other.

From the perspective of the revolution frame, militant forms of action are seen as the most radical forms of action that require the highest degree of determination. Only those forms are expected to have the potential to lead to fundamental social changes. An avant-garde function of militant organizations is more or less openly stated. Within this frame local movement activity is interpreted as part of a wider framework of worldwide revolutionary movements. The population in Germany and in other countries of the global north is seen as largely corrupt, except for certain sectors of the (sub-)proletariat. Therefore there is no perceived necessity to explain or legitimize political violence. Militancy, in this perspective, serves mainly as an intra-movement boundary-marker. The scene is seldom mentioned and plays an insignificant role in this collective action frame. Migrant youth gangs and »international revolutionary movements« are the more common referents.

In contrast to the revolution frame, for proponents of the movement militancy frame the scene is the central point of reference. In this collective action frame political violence directed against property is endorsed, but not violence against persons. The Autonomen are seen as an integral part of the social movement sector, in which they form a radical faction that, in contrast to the »reformist forces«, doesn’t let the state dictate and limit its forms of action. Militancy within this frame is seen as proof of a particularly determined form of action and as something that distinguishes the Autonomen from other more reformist movements. Nevertheless they acknowledge the necessity of mediating between themselves and other social movements in order to find acceptance for their militant strategy.

Scenes are the central point of reference for activists who share this collective action frame. An analysis of movement discourses about militant politics shows that many of the texts published around this issue are addressed to the scene as much as to the movement. From an analytical perspective it becomes clear that the scene connects the relatively abstract debates about legitimate forms of political action with the possibility of a militant lifestyle. In most cases, purchasing and reading movement newspapers that publish claims of responsibility for attacks and instructions for building firebombs or time fuses is more of a statement of an autonomous collective identity than it is born of the necessities of political action. Another way of expressing this militant lifestyle is the street-fighter style of dress developed and adopted by many Autonomen.

For those who argue from within the movement militancy frame, militancy, as part of the autonomous collective identity, serves as a boundary-marker against other movements and scenes. The use of or the willingness to use militant forms of political
action demarcates the boundary between the Autonomen and other movements, and the militant lifestyle differentiates the autonomous scene from e.g. the alternative or eco-scene.

Possibly the closest relationship between movement and scene is visible in the autonomous movement discourse about gender relations. As is also true of the debates over organizational structure and militancy, debates around gender relations have been a constant feature of the autonomous movement from the beginning. These debates revolved around four main points: the necessity of separate women’s organizations; problems of sexual violence, sexuality, and desire; and more general debates about patriarchy. As a consequence of the autonomous principle of politics in the first person, these issues were only debated in a very personal and concrete manner. Although patriarchy was usually described as a social structure, the discussions focused mainly on individual behavior and interventions were limited to SMOs and institutions located within the scene. One example of such an intervention was the campaign against a writer and comedian who was accused of ridiculing in a sexist manner the work of an organization that fights sexual harassment. Wherever he tried to perform in alternative/scene venues, boycotts were organized and performances were successfully broken up. The organizers of his performances often accepted the autonomous boycotts and canceled the shows. Once the performances were shifted to more mainstream venues, however, the autonomous strategy became less successful. The movement proved to be neither willing nor able to mediate its claims in an environment that did not already share the scene’s basic values. In general, therefore, it can be said that it was the scene rather than society at large that was the main focus of activity for the Autonomen when it came to the issue of gender relations.

Debates about sexism and gender relations have almost never been carried beyond the subcultural boundaries of the autonomous/radical leftist scene and have therefore had no impact on external perceptions of the autonomous movement. This contrasts sharply with the internal importance of these discussions and struggles which is clearly visible in the conflicts around sexual violence and harassment. These revolved mainly around the question of who should have the right to define what counts as sexual violence and what should be considered acceptable and legitimate sanctions for offenders. With respect to the latter question, the penalty usually proposed for men accused of rape was expulsion from the scene. That this action was regarded as the severest possible sanction is a telling indicator of the importance of the scene for activists.

Those involved in these debates, whether they advocated these sanctions or not, agreed with the underlying understanding that the scene would encompass all aspects of the activists’ lives, and expulsion from the scene would therefore be a severe punishment, tantamount to expulsion from political engagement. One could say, that here the activists’ understanding of the scene resembles more our definition of a counterculture.
with its all-encompassing life-style choices, than our definition of scenes, where membership is only a part-time activity. Empirically, the activists’ understanding of the scene stands in contrast to the fact that the median duration of movement engagement is somewhere between two and three years, and thus expulsion from the scene could be seen objectively as a relatively weak sanction. All this points to the incredible strength of movement identities that are anchored in an autonomous countercultural lifestyle and realized in the scene.

4.4. The function of the scene for social movements

We have seen that in all of the major movement discourses in the autonomous movement, the relationship between scene and movement has played an important role. Starting from the general discussion of the structure and function of scenes we can now analyze the specific function the scene has played for the Autonomen and from there formulate some tentative hypotheses about the relationship between movements and scenes in general.

1. Movement scenes play a central role in processes of collective identity. They provide a place where lifestyles and collective action frames can be linked. And this linkage is essential for movements that address not only a single issue but aim at broader social change. Movements with such a scope often develop commitment frames that are central building blocks in processes of collective identity and in which different spheres of the activists’ lives – political convictions, forms of action, moral values and lifestyles – are integrated (see Haunss 2004: 243 ff.). One such commitment frame of the autonomous movement is the anti-patriarchy frame which connects feminist politics with the demand to abolish patriarchal structures in the activists’ private lives. The maxim not only to strive for revolutionary political change in the society but realize these revolutionary chances already in the activists’ daily lives is another. If social movements manage to radiate with their processes of collective identities into the lifestyles and practices of one or more scenes, or if the movement manages to connect with a scene, a this can provide a environment of constant regeneration, capable of stabilizing and rejuvenating the movement from one wave of protest to the next. Alongside factors like the openness of political institutions, the stability of political alignments, the availability of influential allies, and divisions within the elite (Tarrow 1994: 87 ff.) – aspects of the political opportunity structure that influence the trajectory of social movements – the linkage between movements and scenes is another factor that must be taken into account.

The Autonomen have constantly maintained a very close link between movement and scene. In this way they have profited from the youth-culture attractiveness of the scene and maintained a relatively constant level of mobilization, despite the so-called »crisis of the autonomous movement« that has been proclaimed by movement activists.
since the late 1980s. The movement discourses of the 1990s regularly and explicitly problematized the relationship between movement and scene as too intimate and exclusive, but nevertheless, a constant exchange of personnel, ideas and styles between movement and scene has de facto broadened the reach of the autonomous collective identity beyond the limits of the movement.

2. **A movement scene is the place where subcultures, lifestyles and social movements meet and influence each other.** This doesn’t necessarily mean that there is a one-to-one correspondence between scenes and movements. On the contrary, there are usually a range of connections between multiple movements and multiple scenes. The autonomous scene overlaps significantly with the punk, hardcore, dub, and techno subcultures, and subcultural lifestyle issues have repeatedly been debated within the autonomous movement. Particularly intense were the disputes about veganism and techno music, both of which revolved implicitly around the question of the compatibility and acceptability of competing lifestyles within the movement.

In these and other conflicts, impulses coming from the subculture often functioned as pace-setters for the movement, usually in the general direction of a pluralization of lifestyles, but sometimes, as in the case of veganism, also in direction of radicalization and the constriction of lifestyle choices.

3. **Movement scenes form a mobilization potential for social movements.** Because scenes offer a lifestyle and at the same time, as part-time communities, request only a relatively low level of commitment, they attract in principle a much larger group of people than the movement does. Just as membership in the countercultural core of a scene requires that one submits to a more all-encompassing life-style transformation, engagement in the movement also requires a higher level of commitment and engagement and often also the willingness to engage in high risk activities. In the autonomous movement – but also in other movements like the women’s movement or the gay rights movement – certain parts of the scene’s infrastructure have developed out of and in support of movement activities. Their subcultural attractiveness stems in part from this political history, which provides these venues with an additional flair of authenticity and sometimes danger. Subcultural activities like concerts, parties, etc. in turn have opened up these spaces to a much wider audience and have brought a large number of people into contact with the movement, who would otherwise not have had anything to do with the Autonomen.

This overlapping of scene, movement and subculture blurs the distinctions between the three. In a relatively large transitional zone it becomes quite difficult to distinguish whether people actually belong to the movement, the scene, or the subculture or some combination. As discussed above, someone who is active in the movement can probably safely be presumed to be connected to the scene in some way, but s/he may or may not be a member of the sub- or counterculture. Scenes offer a »soft« way of joining
a movement, where subcultural identification with the movement is the first step, but the decision to make a more demanding commitment to the movement can be left open for a relatively long time.

4. Movement scenes are social movement abeyance structures. Scenes offer not only a soft way in the movement; they also offer a soft way out. Taylor and Whittier have described this possibility for activists to »hibernate« in the scene during times of low mobilization, characterizing the structures of a scene as »social movement abeyance structures« (Taylor 1989; Taylor and Whittier 1992). As they point out, these structures provide highly committed radical activists the chance to leave their decision for further activism undecided for a certain time, if the movement as a whole takes a more reformist course. Moreover scenes also offer one the ability to retreat permanently from movement activities without having to sever all ties to it. In the scene former activists can stay more or less sympathetic to the movement without actively engaging in movement activities. As they do not break completely with the movement, they may still be available for later mobilization under certain circumstances.

5. The relationship between scenes and movements is not only a complementary one. The two also differ in central aspects: Scenes are experience oriented while movements reach out and are project oriented. In the autonomous movement these different logics have repeatedly led to conflict, particularly around the question of organizational form. The core conflict in the autonomous organizational debates was whether the movement should focus its mobilization efforts only within the scene or reach out more to social groups outside of it. Such an outreach strategy would have negated the premier orientation of autonomous politics around authentic experience in favor of a more project-oriented approach. That this position was never able to gain hegemony in the autonomous movement is due mainly to the intimate connection between scene and movement in that movement. In other movements, e.g. the German gay rights movement, these contradictory logics of scene and movement resulted in a growing estrangement between the two, and finally to the loss of the movements’ lifestyle-orientations (Haunss 2004: 256 ff.).

6. Movement scenes are glocal structures. As interactive networks, scenes are bound to places where this interaction can physically take place. These places can change, but in the case of social movement scenes they often show a remarkable consistency over time. This consistency is partly due to the fact that activists from different movements and/or sub- or countercultures are often the same people who frequent and run the scene’s venues, bars, and places. But scenes are not only local; due to overlapping social networks, movement communication systems, and other diffusion processes, scenes can display a remarkable similarity from one place to the next, to the point where it is meaningful to speak, for example, about a larger German or even European autonomous movement scene. Although local differences exist, the autonomous scenes
in Hamburg, Berlin, and to a lesser degree also in Amsterdam or Copenhagen have very similar structures, allowing activists from distant places to instantly feel »at home« in the scene of another city. This structural similarity also allows the members of the larger scene to have similar experiences in different places, which can foster solidarity among distant participants in the movement.

7. Movement scenes are usually urban structures. In order to exist for a longer period scenes depend on a sufficient number of participants who share the scene’s lifestyle. These conditions are usually only present in larger cities. There are nevertheless occasional rural scenes, like the anti-nuclear scene in the region of the proposed nuclear waste site near the village of Gorleben in Lower-Saxony. But usually rural settings cannot guarantee sufficient numbers of sympathizers to maintain the infra-structure of a scene. What is found in rural settings instead, is sometimes a single bar or venue, that serves as social and political meeting place for people with diverse political backgrounds. In general there is a tendency for scenes to become more differentiated the larger the cities are in which they are located. While for example in a rural or small-town setting it is hardly possible to differentiate between an ecological, alternative, autonomous or antifascist scene, in metropolitan settings these scenes are often even internally differentiated. Apart from some exceptions the metropolitan groups in a scene usually play a leading role in determining the broader scene’s lifestyle.

8. Movement scenes are sexual markets. Until now there has been no systematic study on the role of human relationships in the trajectory of social movement mobilization. Such a study would certainly reveal a dense web of personal and sexual relationships and of sympathies and antipathies associated with them, which would account for some surprising coalitions and political differences. (Former) activists know very well about this sexual component of political action. Todd Gitlin for example, in his book on the 1960s movements in the US, characterizes the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) as »made of triangles, consummated or not, constantly forming, collapsing, reforming, overlapping. The sexual intensity matched the political and intellectual; or was it the other way around?« (Gitlin 1987: 108, cited in Jasper 1997: 217). And in the literary testimonies of the Autonomen (Lecorte 1992; Wildenhain 1991) personal relationships stand in the foreground as well.

A possible conflict, that necessarily follows the dynamics of sexual relationships in scenes and movements has been described by Jasper as follows: »The flip side of the sexual draw of protest is that these ›dyads‹ often go their own way, withdrawing from extensive public participation into the private pleasures of each other’s company. Indeed, this is a notorious problem in protest movements, especially those that demand total commitment« (Jasper 1997: 217 f.). By making it easier to leave the movement without severing all ties, the existence of scenes also facilitates this private retreat of couples.
5. Conclusion: the importance of scenes for social movements

Many authors have emphasized the importance of collective identities in social movements (for a review see Haunss 2002, Polletta and Jasper 2001). In processes of collective identity, movement actors define what they have in common concerning the orientations of their action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which such action is to take place. (Melucci 1996: 70). In order to function as stabilizing factors these collective identities have to be more than just cognitive processes. They have to be grounded in collective experiences and therefore are dependent on places in which these experiences can be had. The development of commitment frames in which lifestyles and collective action frames are integrated has played a central role in the processes of collective identity in the autonomous movement. Movement scenes are important in this process, because they offer a place for the integration of lifeworld and politics.

The people who form the network of a scene share a set of lifestyles, orientations, and convictions. Movements can tap into these networks, transform them, and connect them to the political project of the movement. In the case of the autonomous movement in Germany this integration was very successful, so that movement and scene have often become indistinguishable. The transition between movement and scene has become fluid. Entrance to and exit from the movement is generally mediated through the scene. Certain elements had to come together to make this possible. One important prerequisite for this quasi-symbiotic relationship is certainly the fact that the phase of engagement in the autonomous movements is usually restricted to the period of adolescence in the wider sense. This allows the movement to hold on to concepts of lifestyle and engagement that require a high level of personal flexibility and willingness to take risks. This youthfulness at the same time facilitates the fast and easy integration of current subcultural trends into both movement and scene which in turns increases the appeal of the movement. Lastly, the structure of political opportunities and the urban environment allowed for the geographic concentration that made the movement scenes so vibrant, powerful and attractive. Taken together these factors have led to the development of movement scenes that have supported the autonomous movement by serving as mobilization pools, abeyance structures, and countercultural lifeworlds.

It should be noted, however, that the relationship between movement and scene is not always so mutually reenforcing. In the case of the German gay movement, a growing alienation between movement and scene took place throughout the 1980s, which led to a more or less rigid separation between the two, and finally to the dissolution of the movement into a traditional lobbying organization. In this case the separation of lifeworld and politics had the effect of gradually stripping the movement of its ability to construct commitment frames. And with only the cognitive side of the collective identity left, the movement increasingly had difficulties mobilizing significant numbers of activists (see Haunss 2004). The existing literature on the women’s movement suggests
that a comparable process can also be observed there. A growing differentiation between activist lifestyles has led to the development of parallel, redundant, and largely disconnected activist structures and the shift within the women’s-movement scene to a strategy of what Rucht (1990) calls »subcultural retreat«.

We think that further research on the relationship between scenes and movements can help to fill the gap between cultural approaches to the understanding of social movement dynamics and models of political opportunity or mechanisms of contentious politics, as scenes are physical structures where cultural preferences, emotions, and styles are realized, and they are social structures that mediate between movements and their social and political surroundings.

**Literature**


